EXPLORING HUMAN COMMUNICATION: A SURVEY COURSE (COMM 115)



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1: INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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

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1.1: Communication - History and Forms

Learning Objectives

1. Define communication.
2. Discuss the history of communication from ancient to modern times.
3. List the five forms of communication.
4. Distinguish among the five forms of communication.
5. Review the various career options for students who study communication.

Before we dive into the history of communication, it is important that we have a shared understanding of what we mean by the word *communication*. For our purposes in this book, we will define communication as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts. This definition builds on other definitions of communication that have been rephrased and refined over many years. In fact, since the systematic study of communication began in colleges and universities a little over one hundred years ago, there have been more than 126 published definitions of communication (Dance & Larson, 1976). In order to get a context for how communication has been conceptualized and studied, let's look at a history of the field.

From Aristotle to today: A Brief History of Communication

While there are rich areas of study in animal communication and interspecies communication, our focus in this book is on human communication. Even though all animals communicate, as human beings we have a special capacity to use symbols to communicate about things outside our immediate temporal and spatial reality (Dance & Larson, 1976). For example, we have the capacity to use abstract symbols, like the word *education*, to discuss a concept that encapsulates many aspects of teaching and learning. We can also reflect on the past and imagine our future. The ability to think outside our immediate reality is what allows us to create elaborate belief systems, art, philosophy, and academic theories. It's true that you can teach a gorilla to sign words like *food* and *baby*, but its ability to use symbols doesn't extend to the same level of abstraction as ours. However, humans haven't always had the sophisticated communication systems that we do today.

Some scholars speculate that humans' first words were onomatopoetic. You may remember from your English classes that *onomatopoeia* refers to words that sound like that to which they refer—words like *boing*, *drip*, *gurgle*, *swoosh*, and *whack*. Just think about how a prehistoric human could have communicated a lot using these words and hand gestures. He or she could use *gurgle* to alert others to the presence of water or *swoosh* and *whack* to recount what happened on a hunt. In any case, this primitive ability to communicate provided an evolutionary advantage. Those humans who could talk were able to cooperate, share information, make better tools, impress mates, or warn others of danger, which led them to have more offspring who were also more predisposed to communicate (Poe, 2011). This eventually led to the development of a "Talking Culture" during the "Talking Era." During this 150,000 year period of human existence, ranging from 180,000 BCE to 3500 BCE, talking was the only medium of communication, aside from gestures, that humans had (Poe, 2011).

The beginning of the "Manuscript Era," around 3500 BCE, marked the turn from oral to written culture. This evolution in communication corresponded with a shift to a more settled, agrarian way of life (Poe, 2011). As hunter-gatherers settled into small villages and began to plan ahead for how to plant, store, protect, and trade or sell their food, they needed accounting systems to keep track of their materials and record transactions. While such transactions were initially tracked with actual objects that symbolized an amount—for example, five pebbles represented five measures of grain—symbols, likely carved into clay, later served as the primary method of record keeping. In this case, five dots might equal five measures of grain.

During this period, villages also developed class systems as more successful farmers turned businessmen prospered and took leadership positions. Religion also became more complex, and a new class of spiritual leaders emerged. Soon, armies were needed to protect the stockpiled resources from others who might want to steal it. The emergence of elite classes and the rise of armies required records and bookkeeping, which furthered the spread of written symbols. As clergy, the ruling elite, and philosophers began to take up writing, the systems became more complex. The turn to writing didn't threaten the influential place of oral communication, however. During the near 5,000-year period of the "Manuscript Era," literacy, or the ability to read and write, didn't spread far beyond the most privileged in society. In fact, it wasn't until the 1800s that widespread literacy existed in the world.

The end of the “Manuscript Era” marked a shift toward a rapid increase in communication technologies. The “Print Era” extended from 1450 to 1850 and was marked by the invention of the printing press and the ability to mass-produce written texts. This 400-year period gave way to the “Audiovisual Era,” which only lasted 140 years, from 1850 to 1990, and was marked by the invention of radio, telegraph, telephone, and television. Our current period, the “Internet Era,” has only lasted from 1990 until the present. This period has featured the most rapid dispersion of a new method of communication, as the spread of the Internet and the expansion of digital and personal media signaled the beginning of the digital age.

The evolution of communication media, from speaking to digital technology, has also influenced the field of communication studies. To better understand how this field of study developed, we must return to the “Manuscript Era,” which saw the production of the earliest writings about communication. In fact, the oldest essay and book ever found were written about communication (McCroskey, 1984). Although this essay and book predate Aristotle, he is a logical person to start with when tracing the development of the communication scholarship. His writings on communication, although not the oldest, are the most complete and systematic. Ancient Greek philosophers and scholars such as Aristotle theorized about the art of rhetoric, which refers to speaking well and persuasively. Today, we hear the word *rhetoric* used in negative ways. A politician, for example, may write off his or her opponent’s statements as “just rhetoric.” This leads us to believe that *rhetoric* refers to misleading, false, or unethical communication, which is not at all in keeping with the usage of the word by ancient or contemporary communication experts. While rhetoric does refer primarily to persuasive communication messages, much of the writing and teaching about rhetoric conveys the importance of being an ethical *rhetor*, or communicator. So when a communicator, such as a politician, speaks in misleading, vague, or dishonest ways, he or she isn’t using rhetoric; he or she is being an unethical speaker.

The study of rhetoric focused on public communication, primarily oratory used in discussions or debates regarding laws and policy, speeches delivered in courts, and speeches intended to praise or blame another person. The connections among rhetoric, policy making, and legal proceedings show that communication and citizenship have been connected since the study of communication began. Throughout this book, we will continue to make connections between communication, ethics, and civic engagement.

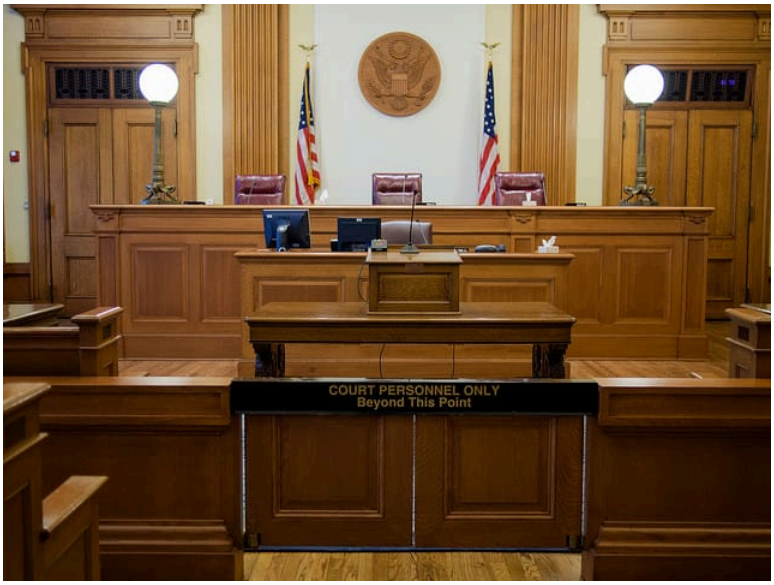


Figure 1.1.1 Much of the public speaking in ancient Greece took place in courtrooms or in political contexts. Karen Neoh – Courtroom – CC BY 2.0.

Ancient Greek rhetoricians like Aristotle were followed by Roman orators like Cicero. Cicero contributed to the field of rhetoric by expanding theories regarding the five canons of rhetoric, which include invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory. *Invention* refers to the use of evidence and arguments to think about things in new ways and is the most studied of the five canons. *Arrangement* refers to the organization of speech, *style* refers to the use of language, and *delivery* refers to the vocal and physical characteristics of a speaker. *Memory* is the least studied of the five canons and refers to the techniques employed by speakers of that era to retain and then repeat large amounts of information. The Age of Enlightenment in the 1700s marked a societal turn toward scientific discovery and the acquisition of knowledge, which led to an explosion of philosophical and scientific writings on many aspects of human existence. This focus on academic development continued into the 1900s and the establishment of distinct communication studies departments.

Communication studies as a distinct academic discipline with departments at universities and colleges has only existed for

a little over one hundred years (Keith, 2008). Although rhetoric has long been a key part of higher education, and colleges and universities have long recognized the importance of speaking, communication departments did not exist. In the early 1900s, professors with training and expertise in communication were often housed in rhetoric or English departments and were sometimes called “professors of speech.” During this time, tension began to build between professors of English who studied rhetoric as the written word and professors of speech who studied rhetoric as the spoken word. In 1914, a group of ten speech teachers who were members of the National Council of Teachers of English broke off from the organization and started the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, which eventually evolved into today’s National Communication Association. There was also a distinction of focus and interest among professors of speech. While some focused on the quality of ideas, arguments, and organization, others focused on coaching the performance and delivery aspects of public speaking (Keith, 2008). Instruction in the latter stressed the importance of “oratory” or “elocution,” and this interest in reading and speaking aloud is sustained today in theatre and performance studies and also in oral interpretation classes, which are still taught in many communication departments.

The formalization of speech departments led to an expanded view of the role of communication. Even though Aristotle and other ancient rhetoricians and philosophers had theorized the connection between rhetoric and citizenship, the role of the communicator became the focus instead of solely focusing on the message. James A. Winans, one of the first modern speech teachers and an advocate for teaching communication in higher education, said there were “two motives for learning to speak. Increasing one’s chance to succeed and increasing one’s power to serve” (Keith, 2008). Later, as social psychology began to expand in academic institutions, speech communication scholars saw places for connection to further expand definitions of communication to include social and psychological contexts.

Today, you can find elements of all these various aspects of communication being studied in communication departments. If we use President Obama as a case study, we can see the breadth of the communication field. Within one department, you may have fairly traditional rhetoricians who study the speeches of President Obama in comparison with other presidential rhetoric. Others may study debates between presidential candidates, dissecting the rhetorical strategies used, for example, by Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. Expanding from messages to channels of communication, scholars may study how different media outlets cover presidential politics. At an interpersonal level, scholars may study what sorts of conflicts emerge within families that have liberal and conservative individuals. At a cultural level, communication scholars could study how the election of an African American president creates a narrative of postracial politics. Our tour from Aristotle to Obama was quick, but hopefully instructive. Now let’s turn to a discussion of the five major forms of communication.

Forms of Communication

Forms of communication vary in terms of participants, channels used, and contexts. The five main forms of communication are intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication. If you find one of these forms particularly interesting, you may be able to take additional courses that focus specifically on it. You may even be able to devise a course of study around one of these forms as a communication major. In the following we will discuss the similarities and differences among each form of communication, including its definition, level of intentionality, goals, and contexts.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking. Like other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication is triggered by some internal or external stimulus. We may, for example, communicate with our self about what we want to eat due to the internal stimulus of hunger, or we may react intrapersonally to an event we witness. Unlike other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication takes place only inside our heads. The other forms of communication must be perceived by someone else to count as communication. So what is the point of intrapersonal communication if no one else even sees it?



Figure 1.1.2 Intrapersonal communication is communication with ourselves that takes place in our heads. Sarah – Pondering – CC BY 2.0.

Intrapersonal communication serves several social functions. Internal vocalization, or talking to ourselves, can help us achieve or maintain social adjustment (Dance & Larson, 1976). For example, a person may use self-talk to calm himself down in a stressful situation, or a shy person may remind herself to smile during a social event. Intrapersonal communication also helps build and maintain our self-concept. We form an understanding of who we are based on how other people communicate with us and how we process that communication intrapersonally. The shy person in the earlier example probably internalized shyness as a part of her self-concept because other people associated her communication behaviors with shyness and may have even labeled her "shy" before she had a firm grasp on what that meant. We will discuss self-concept much more in the chapter titled "Communication and Perception", which focuses on perception. We also use intrapersonal communication or "self-talk" to let off steam, process emotions, think through something, or rehearse what we plan to say or do in the future. As with the other forms of communication, competent intrapersonal communication helps facilitate social interaction and can enhance our well-being. Conversely, the breakdown in the ability of a person to intrapersonally communicate is associated with mental illness (Dance & Larson, 1976).

Sometimes we intrapersonally communicate for the fun of it. I'm sure we have all had the experience of laughing aloud because we thought of something funny. We also communicate intrapersonally to pass time. I bet there is a lot of intrapersonal communication going on in waiting rooms all over the world right now. In both of these cases, intrapersonal communication is usually unplanned and doesn't include a clearly defined goal (Dance & Larson, 1976). We can, however, engage in more intentional intrapersonal communication. In fact, deliberate self-reflection can help us become more competent communicators as we become more mindful of our own behaviors. For example, your internal voice may praise or scold you based on a thought or action.

Of the forms of communication, intrapersonal communication has received the least amount of formal study. It is rare to find courses devoted to the topic, and it is generally separated from the remaining four types of communication. The main distinction is that intrapersonal communication is not created with the intention that another person will perceive it. In all the other levels, the fact that the communicator anticipates consumption of their message is very important.

Interpersonal Communication

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

Interpersonal communication can be planned or unplanned, but since it is interactive, it is usually more structured and influenced by social expectations than intrapersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is also more goal oriented than intrapersonal communication and fulfills instrumental and relational needs. In terms of instrumental needs, the goal may

be as minor as greeting someone to fulfill a morning ritual or as major as conveying your desire to be in a committed relationship with someone. Interpersonal communication meets relational needs by communicating the uniqueness of a specific relationship. Since this form of communication deals so directly with our personal relationships and is the most common form of communication, instances of miscommunication and communication conflict most frequently occur here (Dance & Larson, 1976). Couples, bosses and employees, and family members all have to engage in complex interpersonal communication, and it doesn't always go well. In order to be a competent interpersonal communicator, you need conflict management skills and listening skills, among others, to maintain positive relationships.

Group Communication

Group communication is communication among three or more people interacting to achieve a shared goal. You have likely worked in groups in high school and college, and if you're like most students, you didn't enjoy it. Even though it can be frustrating, group work in an academic setting provides useful experience and preparation for group work in professional settings. Organizations have been moving toward more team-based work models, and whether we like it or not, groups are an integral part of people's lives. Therefore the study of group communication is valuable in many contexts.



Figure 1.1.3 Since many businesses and organizations are embracing team models, learning about group communication can help these groups be more effective. RSNY – Team – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Group communication is more intentional and formal than interpersonal communication. Unlike interpersonal relationships, which are voluntary, individuals in a group are often assigned to their position within a group. Additionally, group communication is often task focused, meaning that members of the group work together for an explicit purpose or goal that affects each member of the group. Goal-oriented communication in interpersonal interactions usually relates to one person; for example, I may ask my friend to help me move this weekend. Goal-oriented communication at the group level usually focuses on a task assigned to the whole group; for example, a group of people may be tasked to figure out a plan for moving a business from one office to another.

You know from previous experience working in groups that having more communicators usually leads to more complicated interactions. Some of the challenges of group communication relate to task-oriented interactions, such as deciding who will complete each part of a larger project. But many challenges stem from interpersonal conflict or misunderstandings among group members. Since group members also communicate with and relate to each other interpersonally and may have preexisting relationships or develop them during the course of group interaction, elements of interpersonal communication occur within group communication too. The chapter titled "Small Group Communication" of this book, which deals with group communication, will help you learn how to be a more effective group communicator by learning about group theories and processes as well as the various roles that contribute to and detract from the functioning of a group.

Public Communication

Public communication is a sender-focused form of communication in which one person is typically responsible for conveying

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

Public communication, at least in Western societies, is also more sender focused than interpersonal or group communication. It is precisely this formality and focus on the sender that makes many new and experienced public speakers anxious at the thought of facing an audience. One way to begin to manage anxiety toward public speaking is to begin to see connections between public speaking and other forms of communication with which we are more familiar and comfortable. Despite being formal, public speaking is very similar to the conversations that we have in our daily interactions. For example, although public speakers don't necessarily develop individual relationships with audience members, they still have the benefit of being face-to-face with them so they can receive verbal and nonverbal feedback. Later in this chapter, you will learn some strategies for managing speaking anxiety, since presentations are undoubtedly a requirement in the course for which you are reading this book. Then, in the chapters titled "Informative and Persuasive Speaking", "Public Speaking in Various Contexts", "Preparing a Speech", and "Delivering a Speech", you will learn how to choose an appropriate topic, research and organize your speech, effectively deliver your speech, and evaluate your speeches in order to improve.

Mass Communication

Public communication becomes mass communication when it is transmitted to many people through print or electronic media. Print media such as newspapers and magazines continue to be an important channel for mass communication, although they have suffered much in the past decade due in part to the rise of electronic media. Television, websites, blogs, and social media are mass communication channels that you probably engage with regularly. Radio, podcasts, and books are other examples of mass media. The technology required to send mass communication messages distinguishes it from the other forms of communication. A certain amount of intentionality goes into transmitting a mass communication message since it usually requires one or more extra steps to convey the message. This may involve pressing "Enter" to send a Facebook message or involve an entire crew of camera people, sound engineers, and production assistants to produce a television show. Even though the messages must be intentionally transmitted through technology, the intentionality and goals of the person actually creating the message, such as the writer, television host, or talk show guest, vary greatly. The president's State of the Union address is a mass communication message that is very formal, goal oriented, and intentional, but a president's verbal gaffe during a news interview is not.

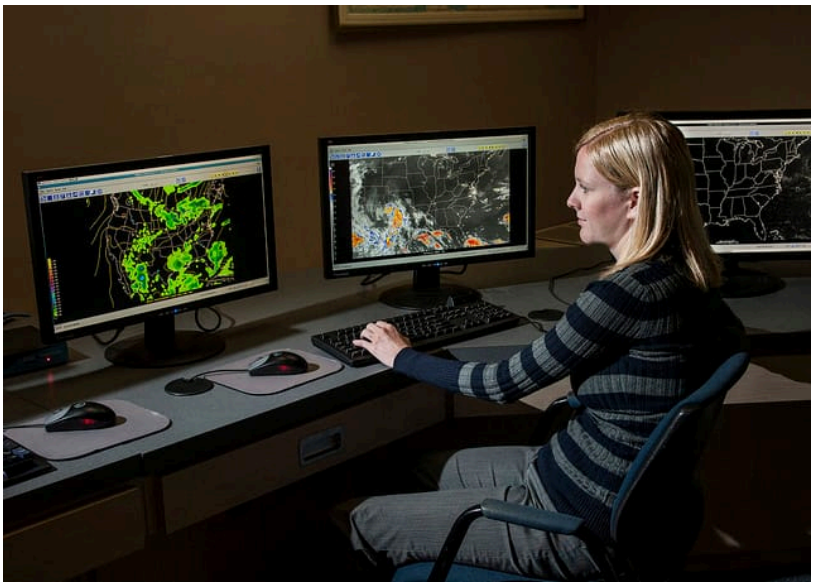


Figure 1.1.4 Technological advances such as the printing press, television, and the more recent digital revolution have made mass communication a prominent feature of our daily lives. Savannah River Site – Atmospheric Technology – CC BY 2.0.

Mass communication differs from other forms of communication in terms of the personal connection between participants. Even though creating the illusion of a personal connection is often a goal of those who create mass communication messages, the relational aspect of interpersonal and group communication isn't inherent within this form of communication. Unlike interpersonal, group, and public communication, there is no immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback loop in mass communication. Of course you could write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or send an e-mail to a television or radio

broadcaster in response to a story, but the immediate feedback available in face-to-face interactions is not present. With new media technologies like Twitter, blogs, and Facebook, feedback is becoming more immediate. Individuals can now tweet directly "at" (@) someone and use hashtags (#) to direct feedback to mass communication sources. Many radio and television hosts and news organizations specifically invite feedback from viewers/listeners via social media and may even share the feedback on the air.

The technology to mass-produce and distribute communication messages brings with it the power for one voice or a series of voices to reach and affect many people. This power makes mass communication different from the other levels of communication. While there is potential for unethical communication at all the other levels, the potential consequences of unethical mass communication are important to consider. Communication scholars who focus on mass communication and media often take a critical approach in order to examine how media shapes our culture and who is included and excluded in various mediated messages. We will discuss some aspects of media and its impact on communication in the chapter titled "New Media and Communication".

"Getting Real": What Can You Do with a Degree in Communication Studies?

You're hopefully already beginning to see that communication studies is a diverse and vibrant field of study. The multiple subfields and concentrations within the field allow for exciting opportunities for study in academic contexts but can create confusion and uncertainty when a person considers what they might do for their career after studying communication. It's important to remember that not every college or university will have courses or concentrations in all the areas discussed next. Look at the communication courses offered at your school to get an idea of where the communication department on your campus fits into the overall field of study. Some departments are more general, offering students a range of courses to provide a well-rounded understanding of communication. Many departments offer concentrations or specializations within the major such as public relations, rhetoric, interpersonal communication, electronic media production, corporate communication. If you are at a community college and plan on transferring to another school, your choice of school may be determined by the course offerings in the department and expertise of the school's communication faculty. It would be unfortunate for a student interested in public relations to end up in a department that focuses more on rhetoric or broadcasting, so doing your research ahead of time is key.

Since communication studies is a broad field, many students strategically choose a concentration and/or a minor that will give them an advantage in the job market. Specialization can definitely be an advantage, but don't forget about the general skills you gain as a communication major. This book, for example, should help you build communication competence and skills in interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, group communication, and public speaking, among others. You can also use your school's career services office to help you learn how to "sell" yourself as a communication major and how to translate what you've learned in your classes into useful information to include on your resume or in a job interview.

The main career areas that communication majors go into are business, public relations / advertising, media, nonprofit, government/law, and education.[1] Within each of these areas there are multiple career paths, potential employers, and useful strategies for success. For more detailed information, visit What Can I Do With This Major? – Communication Studies

- **Business.** Sales, customer service, management, real estate, human resources, training and development.
- **Public relations / advertising.** Public relations, advertising/marketing, public opinion research, development, event coordination.
- **Media.** Editing, copywriting, publishing, producing, directing, media sales, broadcasting.
- **Nonprofit.** Administration, grant writing, fund-raising, public relations, volunteer coordination.
- **Government/law.** City or town management, community affairs, lobbying, conflict negotiation / mediation.
- **Education.** High school speech teacher, forensics/debate coach, administration and student support services, graduate school to further communication study.

1. Which of the areas listed above are you most interested in studying in school or pursuing as a career? Why?
2. What aspect(s) of communication studies does/do the department at your school specialize in? What concentrations/courses are offered?
3. Whether or not you are or plan to become a communication major, how do you think you could use what you have learned and will learn in this class to "sell" yourself on the job market?

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Communication is a broad field that draws from many academic disciplines. This interdisciplinary perspective provides useful training and experience for students that can translate into many career fields.
- Communication is the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving symbolic cues that are influenced by multiple contexts.
- Ancient Greeks like Aristotle and Plato started a rich tradition of the study of rhetoric in the Western world more than two thousand years ago. Communication did not become a distinct field of study with academic departments until the 1900s, but it is now a thriving discipline with many subfields of study.
- There are five forms of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication.
  - Intrapersonal communication is communication with oneself and occurs only inside our heads.
  - Interpersonal communication is communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another and typically occurs in dyads, which means in pairs.
  - Group communication occurs when three or more people communicate to achieve a shared goal.
  - Public communication is sender focused and typically occurs when one person conveys information to an audience.
  - Mass communication occurs when messages are sent to large audiences using print or electronic media.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: Review the section on the history of communication. Have you learned any of this history or heard of any of these historical figures in previous classes? If so, how was this history relevant to what you were studying in that class?
2. Come up with your own definition of communication. How does it differ from the definition in the book? Why did you choose to define communication the way you did?
3. Over the course of a day, keep track of the forms of communication that you use. Make a pie chart of how much time you think you spend, on an average day, engaging in each form of communication (intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass).

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1.2: The Communication Process

Learning Objectives

1. Identify and define the components of the transmission model of communication.
2. Identify and define the components of the interaction model of communication.
3. Identify and define the components of the transaction model of communication.
4. Compare and contrast the three models of communication.
5. Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter.

Communication is a complex process, and it is difficult to determine where or with whom a communication encounter starts and ends. Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter. Some models explain communication in more detail than others, but even the most complex model still doesn't recreate what we experience in even a moment of a communication encounter. Models still serve a valuable purpose for students of communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts. When you become aware of how communication functions, you can think more deliberately through your communication encounters, which can help you better prepare for future communication and learn from your previous communication. The three models of communication we will discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

Although these models of communication differ, they contain some common elements. The first two models we will discuss, the transmission model and the interaction model, include the following parts: participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the participants are the senders and/or receivers of messages in a communication encounter. The message is the verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. For example, when you say "Hello!" to your friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by your friend.

The internal cognitive process that allows participants to send, receive, and understand messages is the encoding and decoding process. Encoding is the process of turning thoughts into communication. As we will learn later, the level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages varies. Decoding is the process of turning communication into thoughts. For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: "I'm hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?" As your roommate receives the message, he decodes your communication and turns it back into thoughts in order to make meaning out of it. Of course, we don't just communicate verbally—we have various options, or channels for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a channel, or a sensory route on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels. If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get his attention by waving your hands before you can ask him about dinner.

Transmission Model of Communication

The transmission model of communication describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver (Ellis & McClintock, 1990). This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. The scholars who designed this model extended on a linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries before that included a speaker, message, and hearer. They were also influenced by the advent and spread of new communication technologies of the time such as telegraphy and radio, and you can probably see these technical influences within the model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive his or her message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

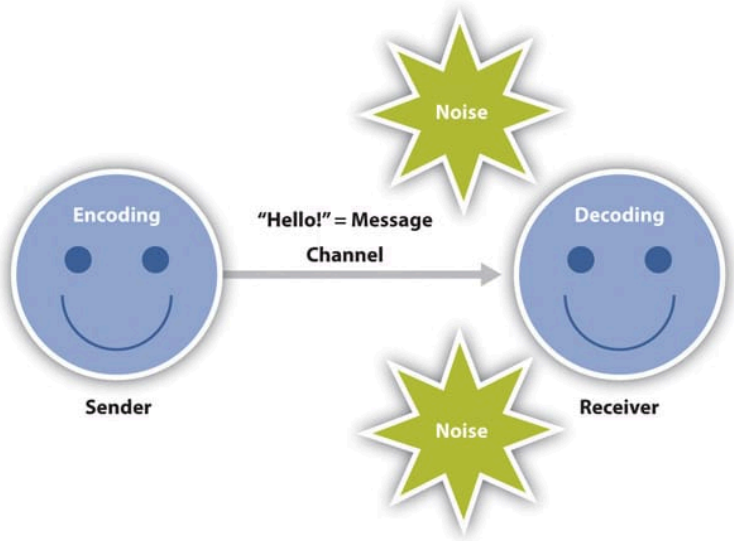


Figure 1.2.1 The Transmission Model of Communication

Since this model is sender and message focused, responsibility is put on the sender to help ensure the message is successfully conveyed. This model emphasizes clarity and effectiveness, but it also acknowledges that there are barriers to effective communication. Noise is anything that interferes with a message being sent between participants in a communication encounter. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, noise may interfere with a message being accurately received and decoded. The transmission model of communication accounts for environmental and semantic noise. Environmental noise is any physical noise present in a communication encounter. Other people talking in a crowded diner could interfere with your ability to transmit a message and have it successfully decoded. While environmental noise interferes with the transmission of the message, semantic noise refers to noise that occurs in the encoding and decoding process when participants do not understand a symbol. To use a technical example, FM antennae can't decode AM radio signals and vice versa. Likewise, most French speakers can't decode Swedish and vice versa. Semantic noise can also interfere in communication between people speaking the same language because many words have multiple or unfamiliar meanings.

Although the transmission model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication that we will discuss more later. This model is not quite rich enough to capture dynamic face-to-face interactions, but there are instances in which communication is one-way and linear, especially computer-mediated communication (CMC). As the following "Getting Plugged In" box explains, CMC is integrated into many aspects of our lives now and has opened up new ways of communicating and brought some new challenges. Think of text messaging for example. The transmission model of communication is well suited for describing the act of text messaging since the sender isn't sure that the meaning was effectively conveyed or that the message was received at all. Noise can also interfere with the transmission of a text. If you use an abbreviation the receiver doesn't know or the phone autocorrects to something completely different than you meant, then semantic noise has interfered with the message transmission. I enjoy bargain hunting at thrift stores, so I just recently sent a text to a friend asking if she wanted to go thrifting over the weekend. After she replied with "What?!?" I reviewed my text and saw that my "smart" phone had autocorrected *thrifting* to *thrusting*! You have likely experienced similar problems with text messaging, and a quick Google search for examples of text messages made funny or embarrassing by the autocorrect feature proves that many others do, too.

"Getting Plugged In": Computer-Mediated Communication

When the first computers were created around World War II and the first e-mails exchanged in the early 1960s, we took the first steps toward a future filled with computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). Those early steps turned into huge strides in the late 1980s and early 1990s when personal computers started becoming regular features in offices, classrooms, and homes. I remember getting our first home computer, a Tandy from Radio Shack, in the early 1990s and then getting our first Internet connection at home in about 1995. I set up my first e-mail account in 1996 and remember how novel and exciting it was to send and receive e-mails. I wasn't imagining a time when I would get dozens of e-mails a day, much less be able to check them on my cell phone! Many of you reading this book probably can't remember

a time without CMC. If that's the case, then you're what some scholars have called "digital natives." When you take a moment to think about how, over the past twenty years, CMC has changed the way we teach and learn, communicate at work, stay in touch with friends, initiate romantic relationships, search for jobs, manage our money, get our news, and participate in our democracy, it really is amazing to think that all that used to take place without computers. But the increasing use of CMC has also raised some questions and concerns, even among those of you who are digital natives. Almost half of the students in my latest communication research class wanted to do their final research projects on something related to social media. Many of them were interested in studying the effects of CMC on our personal lives and relationships. This desire to study and question CMC may stem from an anxiety that people have about the seeming loss or devaluing of face-to-face (FtF) communication. Aside from concerns about the digital cocoons that many of us find ourselves in, CMC has also raised concerns about privacy, cyberbullying, and lack of civility in online interactions. We will continue to explore many of these issues in the "Getting Plugged In" feature box included in each chapter, but the following questions will help you begin to see the influence that CMC has in your daily communication.

1. In a typical day, what types of CMC do you use?
2. What are some ways that CMC reduces stress in your life? What are some ways that CMC increases stress in your life? Overall, do you think CMC adds to or reduces your stress more?
3. Do you think we, as a society, have less value for FtF communication than we used to? Why or why not?

Interaction Model of Communication

The interaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts (Schramm, 1997). Rather than illustrating communication as a linear, one-way process, the interaction model incorporates feedback, which makes communication a more interactive, two-way process. Feedback includes messages sent in response to other messages. For example, your instructor may respond to a point you raise during class discussion or you may point to the sofa when your roommate asks you where the remote control is. The inclusion of a feedback loop also leads to a more complex understanding of the roles of participants in a communication encounter. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, we alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

The interaction model is also less message focused and more interaction focused. While the transmission model focused on how a message was transmitted and whether or not it was received, the interaction model is more concerned with the communication process itself. In fact, this model acknowledges that there are so many messages being sent at one time that many of them may not even be received. Some messages are also unintentionally sent. Therefore, communication isn't judged effective or ineffective in this model based on whether or not a single message was successfully transmitted and received.

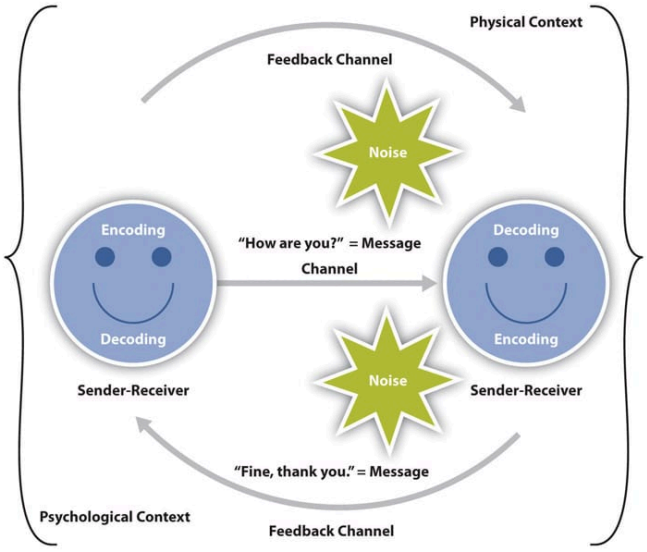


Figure 1.2 The Interaction Model of Communication

The interaction model takes physical and psychological context into account. Physical context includes the environmental factors in a communication encounter. The size, layout, temperature, and lighting of a space influence our communication. Imagine the different physical contexts in which job interviews take place and how that may affect your communication. I have had job interviews on a sofa in a comfortable office, sitting around a large conference table, and even once in an auditorium where I was positioned on the stage facing about twenty potential colleagues seated in the audience. I've also been walked around campus to interview with various people in temperatures below zero degrees. Although I was a little chilly when I got to each separate interview, it wasn't too difficult to warm up and go on with the interview. During a job interview in Puerto Rico, however, walking around outside wearing a suit in near 90 degree temperatures created a sweating situation that wasn't pleasant to try to communicate through. Whether it's the size of the room, the temperature, or other environmental factors, it's important to consider the role that physical context plays in our communication.

Psychological context includes the mental and emotional factors in a communication encounter. Stress, anxiety, and emotions are just some examples of psychological influences that can affect our communication. I recently found out some troubling news a few hours before a big public presentation. It was challenging to try to communicate because the psychological noise triggered by the stressful news kept intruding into my other thoughts. Seemingly positive psychological states, like experiencing the emotion of love, can also affect communication. During the initial stages of a romantic relationship individuals may be so "love struck" that they don't see incompatible personality traits or don't negatively evaluate behaviors they might otherwise find off-putting. Feedback and context help make the interaction model a more useful illustration of the communication process, but the transaction model views communication as a powerful tool that shapes our realities beyond individual communication encounters.

Transaction Model of Communication

As the study of communication progressed, models expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don't send messages like computers, and we don't neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can't consciously decide to stop communicating, because communication is more than sending and receiving messages. The transaction model differs from the transmission and interaction models in significant ways, including the conceptualization of communication, the role of sender and receiver, and the role of context (Barnlund, 1970).

To review, each model incorporates a different understanding of what communication is and what communication does. The transmission model views communication as a thing, like an information packet, that is sent from one place to another. From this view, communication is defined as sending and receiving messages. The interaction model views communication as an interaction in which a message is sent and then followed by a reaction (feedback), which is then followed by another reaction, and so on. From this view, communication is defined as producing conversations and interactions within physical and psychological contexts. The transaction model views communication as integrated into our social realities in such a way that it helps us not only understand them but also create and change them.

The transaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. In this model, we don't just communicate to exchange messages; we communicate to create relationships, form intercultural alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage with others in dialogue to create communities. In short, we don't communicate about our realities; communication helps to construct our realities.

The roles of sender and receiver in the transaction model of communication differ significantly from the other models. Instead of labeling participants as senders and receivers, the people in a communication encounter are referred to as *communicators*. Unlike the interaction model, which suggests that participants alternate positions as sender and receiver, the transaction model suggests that we are simultaneously senders and receivers. For example, on a first date, as you send verbal messages about your interests and background, your date reacts nonverbally. You don't wait until you are done sending your verbal message to start receiving and decoding the nonverbal messages of your date. Instead, you are simultaneously sending your verbal message and receiving your date's nonverbal messages. This is an important addition to the model because it allows us to understand how we are able to adapt our communication—for example, a verbal message—in the middle of sending it based on the communication we are simultaneously receiving from our communication partner.



Figure 1.3 The Transaction Model of Communication

The transaction model also includes a more complex understanding of context. The interaction model portrays context as physical and psychological influences that enhance or impede communication. While these contexts are important, they focus on message transmission and reception. Since the transaction model of communication views communication as a force that shapes our realities before and after specific interactions occur, it must account for contextual influences outside of a single interaction. To do this, the transaction model considers how social, relational, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

Social context refers to the stated rules or unstated norms that guide communication. As we are socialized into our various communities, we learn rules and implicitly pick up on norms for communicating. Some common rules that influence social contexts include don't lie to people, don't interrupt people, don't pass people in line, greet people when they greet you, thank people when they pay you a compliment, and so on. Parents and teachers often explicitly convey these rules to their children or students. Rules may be stated over and over, and there may be punishment for not following them.

Norms are social conventions that we pick up on through observation, practice, and trial and error. We may not even know we are breaking a social norm until we notice people looking at us strangely or someone corrects or teases us. For example, as a new employee you may over- or underdress for the company's holiday party because you don't know the norm for formality. Although there probably isn't a stated rule about how to dress at the holiday party, you will notice your error without someone having to point it out, and you will likely not deviate from the norm again in order to save yourself any potential embarrassment. Even though breaking social norms doesn't result in the formal punishment that might be a consequence of breaking a social rule, the social awkwardness we feel when we violate social norms is usually enough to teach us that these norms are powerful even though they aren't made explicit like rules. Norms even have the power to override social rules in some situations. To go back to the examples of common social rules mentioned before, we may break the rule about not lying if the lie is meant to save someone from feeling hurt. We often interrupt close friends when we're having an exciting conversation, but we wouldn't be as likely to interrupt a professor while they are lecturing. Since norms and rules vary among people and cultures, relational and cultural contexts are also included in the transaction model in order to help us understand the multiple contexts that influence our communication.

Relational context includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person. We communicate differently with someone we just met versus someone we've known for a long time. Initial interactions with people tend to be more highly scripted and governed by established norms and rules, but when we have an established relational context, we may be able to bend or break social norms and rules more easily. For example, you would likely follow social norms of politeness and attentiveness and might spend the whole day cleaning the house for the first time you invite your new neighbors to visit. Once the neighbors are in your house, you may also make them the center of your attention during their visit. If you end up becoming friends with your neighbors and establishing a relational context, you might not think as much about having everything cleaned and prepared or even giving them your whole attention during later visits. Since communication norms and rules also vary based on the type of relationship people have, relationship type is also included in relational context. For example, there are certain communication rules and norms that apply to a supervisor-supervisee relationship that don't apply to a brother-sister relationship and vice versa. Just as social norms and relational history influence how we communicate, so does culture.

Cultural context includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class,

and ability. We will learn more about these identities in the chapter titled “Communication and Perception”, but for now it is important for us to understand that whether we are aware of it or not, we all have multiple cultural identities that influence our communication. Some people, especially those with identities that have been historically marginalized, are regularly aware of how their cultural identities influence their communication and influence how others communicate with them. Conversely, people with identities that are dominant or in the majority may rarely, if ever, think about the role their cultural identities play in their communication.

When cultural context comes to the forefront of a communication encounter, it can be difficult to manage. Since intercultural communication creates uncertainty, it can deter people from communicating across cultures or lead people to view intercultural communication as negative. But if you avoid communicating across cultural identities, you will likely not get more comfortable or competent as a communicator. Difference, as we will learn in the chapter titled “Culture and Communication”, isn’t a bad thing. In fact, intercultural communication has the potential to enrich various aspects of our lives. In order to communicate well within various cultural contexts, it is important to keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about others’ cultural identities. While you may be able to identify some aspects of the cultural context within a communication encounter, there may also be cultural influences that you can’t see. A competent communicator shouldn’t assume to know all the cultural contexts a person brings to an encounter, since not all cultural identities are visible. As with the other contexts, it requires skill to adapt to shifting contexts, and the best way to develop these skills is through practice and reflection.

Key Takeaways

- Communication models are not complex enough to truly capture all that takes place in a communication encounter, but they can help us examine the various steps in the process in order to better understand our communication and the communication of others.
- The transmission model of communication describes communication as a one-way, linear process in which a sender encodes a message and transmits it through a channel to a receiver who decodes it. The transmission of the message many be disrupted by environmental or semantic noise. This model is usually too simple to capture FtF interactions but can be usefully applied to computer-mediated communication.
- The interaction model of communication describes communication as a two-way process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts. This model captures the interactive aspects of communication but still doesn’t account for how communication constructs our realities and is influenced by social and cultural contexts.
- The transaction model of communication describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts. This model includes participants who are simultaneously senders and receivers and accounts for how communication constructs our realities, relationships, and communities.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: How might knowing the various components of the communication process help you in your academic life, your professional life, and your civic life?
2. What communication situations does the transmission model best represent? The interaction model? The transaction model?
3. Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter you had. Sketch out the communication encounter and make sure to label each part of the model (communicators; message; channel; feedback; and physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts).

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1.3: Communication Principles

Learning Objectives

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

Taking this course will change how you view communication. Most people admit that communication is important, but it's often in the back of our minds or viewed as something that "just happens." Putting communication at the front of your mind and becoming more aware of how you communicate can be informative and have many positive effects. When I first started studying communication as an undergraduate, I began seeing the concepts we learned in class in my everyday life. When I worked in groups, I was able to apply what I had learned about group communication to improve my performance and overall experience. I also noticed interpersonal concepts and theories as I communicated within various relationships. Whether I was analyzing mediated messages or considering the ethical implications of a decision before I made it, studying communication allowed me to see more of what was going on around me, which allowed me to more actively and competently participate in various communication contexts. In this section, as we learn the principles of communication, I encourage you to take note of aspects of communication that you haven't thought about before and begin to apply the principles of communication to various parts of your life.

Communication Is Integrated into All Parts of Our Lives

This book is meant to help people see the value of communication in the real world and in our real lives. When I say *real*, I don't mean to imply that there is some part of our world or lives that is not real. Since communication is such a practical field of study, I use the word *real* to emphasize that what you're reading in this book isn't just about theories and vocabulary or passing a test and giving a good speech. I also don't mean to imply that there is a divide between the classroom and the real world. The "real world" is whatever we are experiencing at any given moment. In order to explore how communication is integrated into all parts of our lives, I have divided up our lives into four spheres: academic, professional, personal, and civic. The boundaries and borders between these spheres are not solid, and there is much overlap. After all, much of what goes on in a classroom is present in a professional environment, and the classroom has long been seen as a place to prepare students to become active and responsible citizens in their civic lives. The philosophy behind this approach is called integrative learning, which encourages students to reflect on how the content they are learning connects to other classes they have taken or are taking, their professional goals, and their civic responsibilities.

Academic

It's probably not difficult to get you, as students in a communication class, to see the relevance of communication to your academic lives. At least during this semester, studying communication is important to earn a good grade in the class, right? Beyond the relevance to your grade in this class, I challenge you to try to make explicit connections between this course and courses you have taken before and are currently taking. Then, when you leave this class, I want you to connect the content in future classes back to what you learned here. If you can begin to see these connections now, you can build on the foundational communication skills you learn in here to become a more competent communicator, which will undoubtedly also benefit you as a student.



Figure 1.3.1 Communication skills can help you succeed in academic settings and set you up for success post-graduation. Benjamin Darfler – Graduation – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Aside from wanting to earn a good grade in this class, you may also be genuinely interested in becoming a better communicator. If that's the case, you are in luck because research shows that even people who have poor communication skills can improve a wide range of verbal, nonverbal, and interpersonal communication skills by taking introductory communication courses (Zabava & Wolvin, 1993). Communication skills are also tied to academic success. Poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person's first year of college. Also, students who take a communication course report more confidence in their communication abilities, and these students have higher grade point averages and are less likely to drop out of school. Much of what we do in a classroom—whether it is the interpersonal interactions with our classmates and professor, individual or group presentations, or listening—is discussed in this textbook and can be used to build or add to a foundation of good communication skills and knowledge that can carry through to other contexts.

Professional

The National Association of Colleges and Employers has found that employers most desire good communication skills in the college graduates they may hire (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010). Desired communication skills vary from career to career, but again, this textbook provides a foundation onto which you can build communication skills specific to your major or field of study. Research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving (DiSalvo, 1980). Interpersonal communication skills are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010). Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Employers appreciate good listening skills and the ability to communicate concisely because efficiency and clarity are often directly tied to productivity and success in terms of profit or task/project completion. Despite the well-documented need for communication skills in the professional world, many students still resist taking communication classes. Perhaps people think they already have good communication skills or can improve their skills on their own. While either of these may be true for some, studying communication can only help. In such a competitive job market, being able to document that you have received communication instruction and training from communication professionals (the faculty in your communication department) can give you the edge needed to stand out from other applicants or employees.

Personal

While many students know from personal experience and from the prevalence of communication counseling on television talk shows and in self-help books that communication forms, maintains, and ends our interpersonal relationships, they do not know the extent to which that occurs. I am certain that when we get to the interpersonal communication chapters in this textbook that you will be intrigued and maybe even excited by the relevance and practicality of the concepts and theories discussed there. My students often remark that they already know from experience much of what's discussed in the interpersonal unit of the course.

While we do learn from experience, until we learn specific vocabulary and develop foundational knowledge of communication concepts and theories, we do not have the tools needed to make sense of these experiences. Just having a vocabulary to name the communication phenomena in our lives increases our ability to consciously alter our communication to achieve our goals, avoid miscommunication, and analyze and learn from our inevitable mistakes. Once we get further into the book, I am sure the personal implications of communication will become very clear.

Civic

The connection between communication and our civic lives is a little more abstract and difficult for students to understand. Many younger people don't yet have a conception of a "civic" part of their lives because the academic, professional, and personal parts of their lives have so much more daily relevance. Civic engagement refers to working to make a difference in our communities by improving the quality of life of community members; raising awareness about social, cultural, or political issues; or participating in a wide variety of political and nonpolitical processes (Ehrlich, 2000). The civic part of our lives is developed through engagement with the decision making that goes on in our society at the small-group, local, state, regional, national, or international level. Such involvement ranges from serving on a neighborhood advisory board to sending an e-mail to a US senator. Discussions and decisions that affect our communities happen around us all the time, but it takes time and effort to become a part of that process. Doing so, however, allows us to become a part of groups or causes that are meaningful to us, which enables us to work for the common good. This type of civic engagement is crucial to the functioning of a democratic society.



Figure 1.3.2 Voting is one way to stay civically engaged, but you can also participate in decision making in nonpolitical contexts. Stephen Venkman-Not here much. Your Vote Counts – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Communication scholars have been aware of the connections between communication and a person's civic engagement or citizenship for thousands of years. Aristotle, who wrote the first and most influential comprehensive book on communication 2,400 years ago, taught that it is through our voice, our ability to communicate, that we engage with the world around us, participate in our society, and become a "virtuous citizen." It is a well-established and unfortunate fact that younger people, between the ages of eighteen and thirty, are some of the least politically active and engaged members of our democracy. Civic engagement includes but goes beyond political engagement, which includes things like choosing a political party or advocating for a presidential candidate. Although younger people have tended not to be as politically engaged as other age groups, the current generation of sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, known as the millennial generation, is known to be very engaged in volunteerism and community service. In addition, some research has indicated that college students are eager for civic engagement but are not finding the resources they need on their campuses (Jaschik, 2012). The American Association of Colleges and Universities has launched several initiatives and compiled many resources for students and faculty regarding civic engagement. I encourage you to explore their website at the following link and try to identify some ways in which you can productively integrate what you are learning in this class into a civic context: http://www.aacu.org/resources/civicengagement(opens in new window).

Communication Meets Needs

You hopefully now see that communication is far more than the transmission of information. The exchange of messages and information is important for many reasons, but it is not enough to meet the various needs we have as human beings. While the content of our communication may help us achieve certain physical and instrumental needs, it also feeds into our identities and relationships in ways that far exceed the content of what we say.

Physical Needs

Physical needs include needs that keep our bodies and minds functioning. Communication, which we most often associate with our brain, mouth, eyes, and ears, actually has many more connections to and effects on our physical body and well-being. At the most basic level, communication can alert others that our physical needs are not being met. Even babies cry when they are hungry or sick to alert their caregiver of these physical needs. Asking a friend if you can stay at their house because you got evicted or kicked out of your own place will help you meet your physical need for shelter. There are also strong ties between the social function of communication and our physical and psychological health. Human beings are social creatures, which makes communication important for our survival. In fact, prolonged isolation has been shown to severely damage a human (Williams & Zadro, 2001). Aside from surviving, communication skills can also help us thrive. People with good interpersonal communication skills are better able to adapt to stress and have less depression and anxiety (Hargie, 2011). Communication can also be therapeutic, which can lessen or prevent physical problems. A research study found that spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not communicate about the death with their friends were more likely to have health problems such as weight change and headaches than those who did talk with friends (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Satisfying physical needs is essential for our physical functioning and survival. But, in order to socially function and thrive, we must also meet instrumental, relational, and identity needs.

Instrumental Needs

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



Figure 1.3.3 Communicating for instrumental needs helps us get things done. Think about how much instrumental communication is required to build a house. Sandia Labs – Habitat for Humanity Build-A-Thon – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

To meet instrumental needs, we often use communication strategically. Politicians, parents, bosses, and friends use communication to influence others in order to accomplish goals and meet needs. There is a research area within communication

that examines compliance-gaining communication, or communication aimed at getting people to do something or act in a particular way (Gass & Seiter, 1999). Compliance gaining and communicating for instrumental needs is different from coercion, which forces or manipulates people into doing what you want. In Section 1.3 "Communication Principles", we will discuss communication ethics and learn that open communication, free from constraint and pressure, is an important part of an ethical society. Compliance-gaining communication is different from persuasion, which we will discuss in more detail in the chapter titled "Informative and Persuasive Speaking". While research on persuasion typically focuses on public speaking and how a speaker persuades a group, compliance-gaining research focuses on our daily interpersonal interactions. Researchers have identified many tactics that people typically use in compliance-gaining communication (Gass & Seiter, 1999). As you read through the following list, I am sure many of these tactics will be familiar to you.

Common Tactics Used for Compliance Gaining

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

Relational Needs

Relational needs include needs that help us maintain social bonds and interpersonal relationships. Communicating to fill our instrumental needs helps us function on many levels, but communicating for relational needs helps us achieve the social relating that is an essential part of being human. Communication meets our relational needs by giving us a tool through which to develop, maintain, and end relationships. In order to develop a relationship, we may use nonverbal communication to assess whether someone is interested in talking to us or not, then use verbal communication to strike up a conversation. Then, through the mutual process of self-disclosure, a relationship forms over time. Once formed, we need to maintain a relationship, so we use communication to express our continued liking of someone. We can verbally say things like "You're such a great friend" or engage in behaviors that communicate our investment in the relationship, like organizing a birthday party. Although our relationships vary in terms of closeness and intimacy, all individuals have relational needs and all relationships require maintenance. Finally, communication or the lack of it helps us end relationships. We may communicate our deteriorating commitment to a relationship by avoiding communication with someone, verbally criticizing him or her, or explicitly ending a relationship. From spending time together, to checking in with relational partners by text, social media, or face-to-face, to celebrating accomplishments, to providing support during difficult times, communication forms the building blocks of our relationships. Communicating for relational needs isn't always positive though. Some people's "relational needs" are negative, unethical, or even illegal. Although we may feel the "need" to be passive aggressive or controlling, these communicative patterns are not positive and can hurt our relationships. In the chapters titled "Interpersonal Communication Processes" and "Communication in Relationships", we will explore the "dark side" of communication in more detail.

Identity Needs

Identity needs include our need to present ourselves to others and be thought of in particular and desired ways. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself? Are you funny, smart, loyal, or quirky? Your answer isn't just based on who you think you are, since much of how we think of ourselves is based on our communication with other people. Our identity changes as we progress through life, but communication is the primary means of establishing our identity and fulfilling our identity needs. Communication allows us to present ourselves to others in particular ways. Just as many companies, celebrities, and politicians create a public image, we desire to present different faces in different contexts. The influential scholar Erving Goffman compared self-presentation to a performance and suggested we all perform different roles in different contexts (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, competent communicators can successfully manage how others perceive them by adapting to situations and contexts. A parent may perform the role of stern head of household, supportive shoulder to cry on, or hip and culturally aware friend based on the

situation they are in with their child. A newly hired employee may initially perform the role of motivated and agreeable coworker but later perform more leadership behaviors after being promoted. We will learn more about the different faces we present to the world and how we develop our self-concepts through interactions with others in the chapter titled “Communication and Perception”.

Communication Is a Process

Communication is a process that involves an interchange of verbal and/or nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events (Hargie, 2011). When we refer to communication as a process, we imply that it doesn’t have a distinct beginning and end or follow a predetermined sequence of events. It can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter, since communication doesn’t always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or phenomena difficult. Any time we pull one part of the process out for study or closer examination, we artificially “freeze” the process in order to examine it, which is not something that is possible when communicating in real life. But sometimes scholars want to isolate a particular stage in the process in order to gain insight by studying, for example, feedback or eye contact. Doing that changes the very process itself, and by the time you have examined a particular stage or component of the process, the entire process may have changed. These snapshots are useful for scholarly interrogation of the communication process, and they can also help us evaluate our own communication practices, troubleshoot a problematic encounter we had, or slow things down to account for various contexts before we engage in communication (Dance & Larson, 1976).

We have already learned, in the transaction model of communication, that we communicate using multiple channels and send and receive messages simultaneously. There are also messages and other stimuli around us that we never actually perceive because we can only attend to so much information at one time. The dynamic nature of communication allows us to examine some principles of communication that are related to its processual nature. Next, we will learn that communication messages vary in terms of their level of conscious thought and intention, communication is irreversible, and communication is unrepeatable.

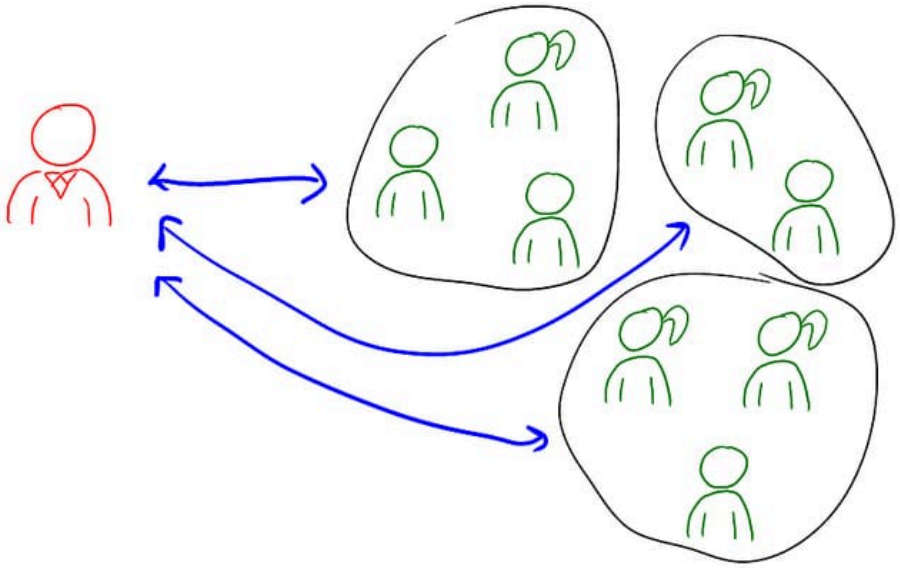


Figure 1.3.4 Since communication is such a dynamic process, it is difficult to determine where communication begins and ends. Mathieu Plourde – Instructor to Groups – CC BY 2.0.

Some scholars have put forth definitions of communication stating that messages must be intended for others to perceive them in order for a message to “count” as communication. This narrow definition only includes messages that are tailored or at least targeted to a particular person or group and excludes any communication that is involuntary (Dance & Larson, 1976). Since intrapersonal communication happens in our heads and isn’t intended for others to perceive, it wouldn’t be considered communication. But imagine the following scenario: You and I are riding on a bus and you are sitting across from me. As I sit thinking about a stressful week ahead, I wrinkle up my forehead, shake my head, and put my head in my hands. Upon seeing this you think, “That guy must be pretty stressed out.” In this scenario, did communication take place? If I really didn’t intend for anyone to see the nonverbal communication that went along with my intrapersonal communication, then this definition would say no. But even though words weren’t exchanged, you still generated meaning from the communication I was unintentionally sending. As a communication scholar, I do not take such a narrow definition of communication. Based on the definition of communication from the beginning of this chapter, the scenario we just discussed would count as communication, but the scenario illustrates the

point that communication messages are sent both intentionally and unintentionally.

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

The dynamic nature of the communication process also means that communication is irreversible. After an initial interaction has gone wrong, characters in sitcoms and romantic comedies often use the line "Can we just start over?" As handy as it would be to be able to turn the clock back and "redo" a failed or embarrassing communication encounter, it is impossible. Miscommunication can occur regardless of the degree of conscious thought and intention put into a message. For example, if David tells a joke that offends his coworker Beth, then he can't just say, "Oh, forget I said that," or "I didn't intend for it to be offensive." The message has been sent and it can't be taken back. I'm sure we have all wished we could take something back that we have said. Conversely, when communication goes well, we often wish we could recreate it. However, in addition to communication being irreversible, it is also unrepeatable.

If you try to recreate a good job interview experience by asking the same questions and telling the same stories about yourself, you can't expect the same results. Even trying to repeat a communication encounter with the same person won't feel the same or lead to the same results. We have already learned the influence that contexts have on communication, and those contexts change frequently. Even if the words and actions stay the same, the physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts will vary and ultimately change the communication encounter. Have you ever tried to recount a funny or interesting experience to a friend who doesn't really seem that impressed? These "I guess you had to be there" moments illustrate the fact that communication is unrepeatable.

Communication Is Guided by Culture and Context

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

Communication Is Learned

Most people are born with the capacity and ability to communicate, but everyone communicates differently. This is because communication is learned rather than innate. As we have already seen, communication patterns are relative to the context and culture in which one is communicating, and many cultures have distinct languages consisting of symbols.

A key principle of communication is that it is symbolic. Communication is symbolic in that the words that make up our language systems do not directly correspond to something in reality. Instead, they stand in for or symbolize something. The fact that communication varies so much among people, contexts, and cultures illustrates the principle that meaning is not inherent in the words we use. For example, let's say you go to France on vacation and see the word *poisson* on the menu. Unless you know how

to read French, you will not know that the symbol is the same as the English symbol *fish*. Those two words don't look the same at all, yet they symbolize the same object. If you went by how the word looks alone, you might think that the French word for fish is more like the English word *poison* and avoid choosing that for your dinner. Putting a picture of a fish on a menu would definitely help a foreign tourist understand what they are ordering, since the picture is an actual representation of the object rather than a symbol for it.

All symbolic communication is learned, negotiated, and dynamic. We know that the letters *b-o-o-k* refer to a bound object with multiple written pages. We also know that the letters *t-r-u-c-k* refer to a vehicle with a bed in the back for hauling things. But if we learned in school that the letters *t-r-u-c-k* referred to a bound object with written pages and *b-o-o-k* referred to a vehicle with a bed in the back, then that would make just as much sense, because the letters don't actually refer to the object and the word itself only has the meaning that we assign to it. We will learn more, in Chapter 8 "Verbal Communication", about how language works, but communication is more than the words we use.

We are all socialized into different languages, but we also speak different "languages" based on the situation we are in. For example, in some cultures it is considered inappropriate to talk about family or health issues in public, but it wouldn't be odd to overhear people in a small town grocery store in the United States talking about their children or their upcoming surgery. There are some communication patterns shared by very large numbers of people and some that are particular to a dyad—best friends, for example, who have their own inside terminology and expressions that wouldn't make sense to anyone else. These examples aren't on the same scale as differing languages, but they still indicate that communication is learned. They also illustrate how rules and norms influence how we communicate.

Rules and Norms

Earlier we learned about the transaction model of communication and the powerful influence that social context and the roles and norms associated with social context have on our communication. Whether verbal or nonverbal, mediated or interpersonal, our communication is guided by rules and norms.

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

Student:
"Hey, how are you?"

Professor:
"Fine, how are you?"

Student:
"Fine."

What is the point of this interaction? It surely isn't to actually inquire as to each other's well-being. We have similar phatic interactions when we make comments on the weather or the fact that it's Monday. We often joke about phatic communion because we see that is pointless, at least on the surface. The student and professor might as well just pass each other in the hall and say the following to each other:

Student:
"Generic greeting question."

Professor:
"Generic greeting response and question."

Student:
"Generic response."

This is an example of communication messages that don't really require a high level of conscious thought or convey much actual content or generate much meaning. So if phatic communion is so "pointless," why do we do it?



Figure 1.3.5 Rules and norms guide much of our communication. Think of all the unspoken norms for behavior in a crowded elevator. Dangerismycat – crowded elevator – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The term *phatic communion* derives from the Greek word *phatos*, which means "spoken," and the word *communion*, which means "connection or bond." As we discussed earlier, communication helps us meet our relational needs. In addition to finding communion through food or religion, we also find communion through our words. But the degree to which and in what circumstances we engage in phatic communion is also influenced by norms and rules. Generally, US Americans find silence in social interactions awkward, which is one sociocultural norm that leads to phatic communion, because we fill the silence with pointless words to meet the social norm. It is also a norm to greet people when you encounter them, especially if you know them. We all know not to unload our physical and mental burdens on the person who asks, "How are you?" or go through our "to do" list with the person who asks, "What's up?" Instead, we conform to social norms through this routine type of verbal exchange.

Phatic communion, like most aspects of communication we will learn about, is culturally relative as well. While most cultures engage in phatic communion, the topics of and occasions for phatic communion vary. Scripts for greetings in the United States are common, but scripts for leaving may be more common in another culture. Asking about someone's well-being may be acceptable phatic communion in one culture, and asking about the health of someone's family may be more common in another.

Communication Has Ethical Implications

Another culturally and situationally relative principle of communication is the fact that communication has ethical implications. Communication ethics deals with the process of negotiating and reflecting on our actions and communication regarding what we believe to be right and wrong. Aristotle said, "In the arena of human life the honors and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities in action" (Pearson et al., 2006). Aristotle focuses on actions, which is an important part of communication ethics. While ethics has been studied as a part of philosophy since the time of Aristotle, only more recently has it become applied. In communication ethics, we are more concerned with the decisions people make about what is right and wrong than the systems, philosophies, or religions that inform those decisions. Much of ethics is gray area. Although we talk about making decisions in terms of what is right and what is wrong, the choice is rarely that simple. Aristotle goes on to say that we should act "to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way." This quote connects to communication competence, which focuses on communicating effectively and appropriately and will be discussed more in Section 1.4 "Communication Competence".

Communication has broad ethical implications. Later in this book we will discuss the importance of ethical listening, how to avoid plagiarism, how to present evidence ethically, and how to apply ethical standards to mass media and social media. These are just a few examples of how communication and ethics will be discussed in this book, but hopefully you can already see that communication ethics is integrated into academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

When dealing with communication ethics, it's difficult to state that something is 100 percent ethical or unethical. I tell my students that we all make choices daily that are more ethical or less ethical, and we may confidently make a decision only to later learn that it wasn't be most ethical option. In such cases, our ethics and goodwill are tested, since in any given situation

multiple options may seem appropriate, but we can only choose one. If, in a situation, we make a decision and we reflect on it and realize we could have made a more ethical choice, does that make us a bad person? While many behaviors can be more easily labeled as ethical or unethical, communication isn't always as clear. Murdering someone is generally thought of as unethical and illegal, but many instances of hurtful speech, or even what some would consider hate speech, have been protected as free speech. This shows the complicated relationship between protected speech, ethical speech, and the law. In some cases, people see it as their ethical duty to communicate information that they feel is in the public's best interest. The people behind WikiLeaks, for example, have released thousands of classified documents related to wars, intelligence gathering, and diplomatic communication. WikiLeaks claims that exposing this information keeps politicians and leaders accountable and keeps the public informed, but government officials claim the release of the information should be considered a criminal act. Both parties consider the other's communication unethical and their own communication ethical. Who is right?

Since many of the choices we make when it comes to ethics are situational, contextual, and personal, various professional fields have developed codes of ethics to help guide members through areas that might otherwise be gray or uncertain. The following "Getting Critical" box includes information about the National Communication Association's Ethical Credo. Doctors take oaths to do no harm to their patients, and journalists follow ethical guidelines that promote objectivity and provide for the protection of sources. Although businesses and corporations have gotten much attention for high-profile cases of unethical behavior, business ethics has become an important part of the curriculum in many business schools, and more companies are adopting ethical guidelines for their employees.

Communication Is Continuous

In addition to being learned, communication is also continuous. We are always communicating. In fact, we cannot *not* communicate. While much of our communication is intentional, a lot of communication is unintentional. Whether or not communication has occurred is not always up to the person doing the communicating. When a student is sitting in our classroom and they yawn, they are probably not sending us a specific message. But if we see the yawn and start to think that they are bored and uninterested in what we are talking about, communication has occurred. In fact, our very existence communicates. What we wear, how we style our hair, our posture, where we are in the environment—all of these things are communicating to those around us. This shows us how communication is always happening, whether we intend to or not.



Figure 1.3.6 Yawn Miikka Luotio – Unsplash License.

Communication Is Unrepeatable

Communication is also unrepeatable. When we say that communication is unrepeatable, what we mean is that we can never reproduce the same exact communication twice. Even if we deliver the same message, other aspects—such as our tone, the environment we are in, or the context in which we are speaking—will be different, so the communication will be different. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, said that no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man. Communication is the same way, because we are always communicating, and the context, our emotional state,

even internal factors like hunger or fatigue are contending with our words. These various aspects of communication are constantly flowing like the river, so even if we wanted to repeat a communication event we could not, just like we could not step in the same river twice. There will always be variation in our communication.

Communication Is Irreversible

Finally, in addition to being continuous and unrepeatable, communication is also irreversible. If you have ever watched *Law and Order* or another similar show you may have heard a judge say, "the jury will disregard." In non-lawyer terms, what the judge is doing is telling the jury to forget about the evidence they just heard because it is inadmissible. We don't know about you, but this has always struck us as odd. Obviously, the jury doesn't just forget what they heard. Now that they know it, there is no way for them to "unknow" it. Once we communicate, we cannot undo it; what was communicated is permanently out in the world. This principle is particularly important when it comes to self-disclosure, or the sharing of personal or private information with another person that includes expression of your observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs in relationships. Once you share information about yourself, you cannot take it back. If you tell a friend that you have romantic feelings for them and they don't reciprocate those feelings, you can't just go back to the way things were before you share that information. The communication is permanent, and in this case it has altered your relationship in an irreversible way. This permanence has taken on even more importance with the growth of communication technology. When we send a text, direct message (DM), or email, not only is the communication irreversible in the sense that we can't take it back, but it is also literally permanent because there are saved copies of it. That communication can be shared over and over again beyond our initial communication; even if we delete the original, it is never completely gone. This isn't meant to scare you, but to help you understand the impact that language can have. To fully understand interpersonal communication and its impact on our lives, we will start by discussing communication models.

"Getting Critical": NCA Credo for Ethical Communication

The "Getting Critical" boxes throughout this book will challenge you to think critically about a variety of communication issues, and many of those issues will involve questions of ethics. Therefore, it is important that we have a shared understanding of ethical standards for communication. I tell my students that I consider them communication scholars while they are in my class, and we always take a class period to learn about ethics using the National Communication Association's (NCA) "Credo for Ethical Communication," since the NCA is the professional organization that represents communication scholars and practitioners in the United States.

We all have to consider and sometimes struggle with questions of right and wrong. Since communication is central to the creation of our relationships and communities, ethical communication should be a priority of every person who wants to make a positive contribution to society. The NCA's "Credo for Ethical Communication" reminds us that communication ethics is relevant across contexts and applies to every channel of communication, including media (National Communication Association, 2012). The credo goes on to say that human worth and dignity are fostered through ethical communication practices such as truthfulness, fairness, integrity, and respect for self and others. The emphasis in the credo and in the study of communication ethics is on practices and actions rather than thoughts and philosophies. Many people claim high ethical standards but do not live up to them in practice. While the credo advocates for, endorses, and promotes certain ideals, it is up to each one of us to put them into practice. The following are some of the principles stated in the credo:

- We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
- We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
- We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.
- We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences of our own communication and expect the same of others.

1. What are some examples of unethical communication that you have witnessed?
2. Read through the whole credo. Of the nine principles listed, which do you think is most important and why? The credo can be accessed at the following link: Credo for Ethical Communication(opens in new window) [natcom.org].

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Increasing your knowledge of communication and improving your communication skills can positively affect your academic, professional, personal, and civic lives.

- In terms of academics, research shows that students who study communication and improve their communication skills are less likely to drop out of school and are more likely to have high grade point averages.
- Professionally, employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.
- Personally, communication skills help us maintain satisfying relationships.
- Communication helps us with civic engagement and allows us to participate in and contribute to our communities.
- Communication meets our physical needs by helping us maintain physical and psychological well-being; our instrumental needs by helping us achieve short- and long-term goals; our relational needs by helping us initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships; and our identity needs by allowing us to present ourselves to others in particular ways.
- Communication is a process that includes messages that vary in terms of conscious thought and intention. Communication is also irreversible and unrepeatable.
- Communication is guided by culture and context.
- We learn to communicate using systems that vary based on culture and language.
- Rules and norms influence the routines and rituals within our communication.
- Communication ethics varies by culture and context and involves the negotiation of and reflection on our actions regarding what we think is right and wrong.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: The concepts of integrative learning and communication ethics are introduced in this section. How do you see communication ethics playing a role in academic, professional, personal, and civic aspects of your life?
2. Identify some physical, instrumental, relational, and identity needs that communication helps you meet in a given day.
3. We learned in this section that communication is irreversible and unrepeatable. Identify a situation in which you wished you could reverse communication. Identify a situation in which you wished you could repeat communication. Even though it's impossible to reverse or repeat communication, what lessons can be learned from these two situations you identified that you can apply to future communication?
4. What types of phatic communion do you engage in? How are they connected to context and/or social rules and norms?

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1.4: Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

1. Define communication competence.
2. Explain each part of the definition of communication competence.
3. Discuss strategies for developing communication competence.
4. Discuss communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety and employ strategies to manage them.

Communication competence has become a focus in higher education over the past couple of decades as educational policy makers and advocates have stressed a "back to basics" mentality (McCroskey, 1984). The ability to communicate effectively is often included as a primary undergraduate learning goal along with other key skills like writing, critical thinking, and problem solving. You likely haven't heard professors or university administrators use the term *communication competence*, but as we learn more about it in this section, I am sure you will see how communication competence can benefit you in many aspects of your life. Since this book focuses on communication in the real world, strategies for developing communication competence are not only limited to this section. A "Getting Competent" feature box is included in each chapter, specifically to help you develop communication competence.

Defining Competence

We have already defined *communication*, and you probably know that to be competent at something means you know what you're doing. When we combine these terms, we get the following definition: communication competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts (Cooley & Roach, 1984). To better understand this definition, let's break apart its components.



Developing communication competence can bring many rewards, but it also requires time and effort. Paul Shanks – Communication – CC BY-NC 2.0.

The first part of the definition we will unpack deals with *knowledge*. The cognitive elements of competence include knowing how to do something and understanding why things are done the way they are (Hargie, 2011). People can develop cognitive competence by observing and evaluating the actions of others. Cognitive competence can also be developed through instruction. Since you are currently taking a communication class, I encourage you to try to observe the communication concepts you are learning in the communication practices of others and yourself. This will help bring the concepts to life and also help you evaluate how communication in the real world matches up with communication concepts. As you build a repertoire of communication knowledge based on your experiential and classroom knowledge, you will also be developing behavioral competence.

The second part of the definition of communication competence that we will unpack is *the ability to use*. Individual factors affect our ability to do anything. Not everyone has the same athletic, musical, or intellectual ability. At the individual level, a person's physiological and psychological characteristics affect competence. In terms of physiology, age, maturity, and ability to communicate affect competence. In terms of psychology, a person's mood, stress level, personality, and level of communication apprehension (level of anxiety regarding communication) affect competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). All these factors will either help or hinder you when you try to apply the knowledge you have learned to actual communication behaviors. For example, you might know strategies for being an effective speaker, but public speaking anxiety that kicks in when you get in front of the audience may prevent you from fully putting that knowledge into practice.

The third part of the definition we will unpack is ability to *adapt* to *various contexts*. What is competent or not varies based on social and cultural context, which makes it impossible to have only one standard for what counts as communication competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). Social variables such as status and power affect competence. In a social situation where one person—say, a supervisor—has more power than another—for example, his or her employee—then the supervisor is typically the one who sets the standard for competence. Cultural variables such as race and nationality also affect competence. A Taiwanese woman who speaks English as her second language may be praised for her competence in the English language in her home country but be viewed as less competent in the United States because of her accent. In summary, although we have a clear definition of communication competence, there are not definitions for how to be competent in any given situation, since competence varies at the individual, social, and cultural level.

Despite the fact that no guidelines for or definitions of competence will be applicable in all situations, the National Communication Association (NCA) has identified many aspects of competence related to communication. The primary focus has been on competencies related to speaking and listening, and the NCA notes that developing communication competence in these areas will help people in academic, professional, and civic contexts (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998). To help colleges and universities develop curriculum and instruction strategies to prepare students, the NCA has defined what students should be able to do in terms of speaking and listening competencies by the time they graduate from college:

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

These are just some of the competencies the NCA identified as important for college graduates. While these are skill focused rather than interpersonally or culturally focused, they provide a concrete way to assess your own speaking competencies and to prepare yourself for professional speaking and listening, which is often skill driven. Since we communicate in many different contexts, such as interpersonal, group, intercultural, and mediated, we will discuss more specific definitions of competence in later sections of the book.

Developing Competence

Knowing the dimensions of competence is an important first step toward developing competence. Everyone reading this book already has some experience with and knowledge about communication. After all, you've spent many years explicitly and implicitly learning to communicate. For example, we are explicitly taught the verbal codes we use to communicate. On the other hand, although there are numerous rules and norms associated with nonverbal communication, we rarely receive explicit instruction on how to do it. Instead, we learn by observing others and through trial and error with our own nonverbal communication. Competence obviously involves verbal and nonverbal elements, but it also applies to many situations and contexts. Communication competence is needed in order to understand communication ethics, to develop cultural awareness, to use computer-mediated communication, and to think critically. Competence involves knowledge, motivation, and skills. It's not enough to know what good communication consists of; you must also have the motivation to reflect on and better your communication and the skills needed to do so.

In regards to competence, we all have areas where we are skilled and areas where we have deficiencies. In most cases, we can consciously decide to work on our deficiencies, which may take considerable effort. There are multiple stages of competence

that I challenge you to assess as you communicate in your daily life: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence (Hargie, 2011). Before you have built up a rich cognitive knowledge base of communication concepts and practiced and reflected on skills in a particular area, you may exhibit unconscious incompetence, which means you are not even aware that you are communicating in an incompetent manner. Once you learn more about communication and have a vocabulary to identify concepts, you may find yourself exhibiting conscious incompetence. This is where you know what you should be doing, and you realize that you're not doing it as well as you could. However, as your skills increase you may advance to conscious competence, meaning that you know you are communicating well in the moment, which will add to your bank of experiences to draw from in future interactions. When you reach the stage of unconscious competence, you just communicate successfully without straining to be competent. Just because you reach the stage of unconscious competence in one area or with one person does not mean you will always stay there. We are faced with new communication encounters regularly, and although we may be able to draw on the communication skills we have learned about and developed, it may take a few instances of conscious incompetence before you can advance to later stages.

In many introductory communication classes that I teach, a student usually says something like "You must be really good at this stuff since you study it and have been teaching it for a while." At the same time students assume that I have a high level of communication competence, they are hard on themselves for being at the stage of conscious incompetence, where they catch themselves communicating poorly in regards to a concept we recently studied. In response to both of these comments, I say, "Just because I know the concepts and definitions doesn't mean I always put them to good use. We're all imperfect and fallible, and if we expect to be perfect communicators after studying this, then we're setting ourselves up for failure. However, when I do mess up, I almost always make a mental note and reflect on it. And now you're starting to do the same thing, which is to notice and reflect on your communication more. And that already puts you ahead of most people!"



Becoming more mindful of your communication and the communication of others can contribute to your communication competence. Free Stock Photos – public domain.

One way to progress toward communication competence is to become a more mindful communicator. A mindful communicator actively and fluidly processes information, is sensitive to communication contexts and multiple perspectives, and is able to adapt to novel communication situations (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Becoming a more mindful communicator has many benefits, including achieving communication goals, detecting deception, avoiding stereotypes, and reducing conflict. Whether or not we achieve our day-to-day communication goals depends on our communication competence. Various communication behaviors can signal that we are communicating mindfully. For example, asking an employee to paraphrase their understanding of the instructions you just gave them shows that you are aware that verbal messages are not always clear, that people do not always listen actively, and that people often do not speak up when they are unsure of instructions for fear of appearing incompetent or embarrassing themselves. Some communication behaviors indicate that we are not communicating mindfully, such as withdrawing from a romantic partner or engaging in passive-aggressive behavior during a period of interpersonal conflict. Most of us know that such behaviors lead to predictable and avoidable conflict cycles, yet we are all guilty of them. Our tendency to assume that people are telling us the truth can also lead to negative results. Therefore, a certain amount of tentativeness and mindful monitoring of a person's nonverbal and verbal communication can help us detect deception. However, this is not the same thing as chronic suspicion, which would not indicate communication competence. This is just the beginning of our conversation about communication competence. Regarding the previous examples, we will learn more about paraphrasing in the

chapter titled “Listening”, conflict management in the chapter titled “Interpersonal Communication Processes”, and deception in the chapter titled “Nonverbal Communication”.

“Getting Competent”: Getting Started on Your Road to Communication Competence

The “Getting Competent” boxes throughout this book are meant to help you become a more confident and skilled communicator. While each box will focus on a specific aspect of communication competence, this box addresses communication competence more generally. A common communication pitfall that is an obstacle on many students’ roads to communication competence is viewing communication as “common sense.”

Many students note that some of what we learn in communication classes is “common sense.” I agree with this observation in some cases but disagree with it in others. As I’ve noted before, this class builds on knowledge that you have already gained, through experience and observation as a person with many years of communication under your belt. For example, a student might say that it is “common sense” that conflict avoidance can lead to built-up tensions that eventually hurt an interpersonal relationship. But many of us avoid confronting what is causing conflict in our relationships even though we know it’s better to talk about our problems than to let them build up. In order to put that “commonsense” knowledge to competent use, we must have a more nuanced understanding of how conflict and interpersonal communication relate and know some conflict management strategies.

Communication is common in that it is something that we spend most of our time doing, but the ability to make sense of and improve our communication takes competence that is learned through deliberate study and personal reflection. So, to get started on your road to competence, I am proposing that you do two things. First, challenge yourself to see the value in the study of communication. Apply the concepts we are learning to your life and find ways to make this class help you achieve your goals. Second, commit to using the knowledge you gain in this class to improve your communication and the communication of those around you. Become a higher self-monitor, which means start to notice your communication more. We all know areas where we could improve our communication, and taking this class will probably expose even more. But you have to be prepared to put in the time to improve; for example, it takes effort to become a better listener or to give better feedback. If you start these things now you will be primed to take on more communication challenges that will be presented throughout this book.

1. What aspects of communication do you think are “common sense?” What aspects of communication do you think require more formal instruction and/or study?
2. What communication concept has appealed to you most so far? How can you see this concept applying to your life?
3. Do a communication self-assessment. What are your strengths as a communicator? What are your weaknesses? What can you do to start improving your communication competence?

Overcoming Anxiety

Whether you will give your first presentation in this class next week or in two months, you may be one of many students in the introduction to communication studies course to face anxiety about communication in general or public speaking in particular.



Figure: Communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety are common but can be managed productively. Ana C. – day 339 but – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Decades of research conducted by communication scholars shows that communication apprehension is common among college students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). Communication apprehension (CA) is fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to actual or imagined communication with another person or persons. CA includes multiple forms of communication, not just public speaking. Of college students, 15 to 20 percent experience high trait CA, meaning they are generally anxious about communication. Furthermore, 70 percent of college students experience some trait CA, which means that addressing communication anxiety in a class like the one you're taking now stands to benefit the majority of students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). Public speaking anxiety is type of CA that produces physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions in people when faced with a real or imagined presentation (Bodie, 2010). Research on public speaking anxiety has focused on three key ways to address this common issue: systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training (Bodie, 2010). Communication departments are typically the only departments that address communication apprehension explicitly, which is important as CA is "related to negative academic consequences such as negative attitudes toward school, lower over-all classroom achievement, lower final course grades, and higher college attrition rates" (Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 2009). Additionally, CA can lead others to make assumptions about your communication competence that may be unfavorable. Even if you are intelligent, prepared, and motivated, CA and public speaking anxiety can detract from your communication and lead others to perceive you in ways you did not intend. CA is a common issue faced by many people, so you are not alone. We will learn more about speaking anxiety in the chapter titled "Delivering a Speech". While you should feel free to read ahead to that chapter, you can also manage your anxiety by following some of the following tips.

Top Ten Ways to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

1. Remember, you are not alone. Public speaking anxiety is common, so don't ignore it—confront it.
2. You can't literally "die of embarrassment." Audiences are forgiving and understanding.
3. It always feels worse than it looks.
4. Take deep breaths. It releases endorphins, which naturally fight the adrenaline that causes anxiety.
5. Look the part. Dress professionally to enhance confidence.
6. Channel your nervousness into positive energy and motivation.
7. Start your outline and research early. Better information = higher confidence.
8. Practice and get feedback from a trusted source. (Don't just practice for your cat.)
9. Visualize success through positive thinking.
10. Prepare, prepare, prepare! Practice is a speaker's best friend.

Key Takeaways

- Communication competence refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts.

- To be a competent communicator, you should have cognitive knowledge about communication based on observation and instruction; understand that individual, social, and cultural contexts affect competence; and be able to adapt to those various contexts.
- Getting integrated: The NCA notes that developing communication competence in speaking and listening will help college students in academic, professional, and civic contexts.
- Levels of communication competence include unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence.
- In order to develop communication competence, you must become a more mindful communicator and a higher self-monitor.
- Communication apprehension (CA) refers to fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to real or imagined communication with another person or persons. Public speaking anxiety is a form of CA that more specifically focuses on anxiety about giving a public presentation. Both are commonly experienced by most people and can be managed using various strategies.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: Evaluate your speaking and listening competencies based on the list generated by the NCA. Out of the skills listed, which ones are you more competent in and less competent in? Which skill will be most useful for you in academic contexts? Professional contexts? Personal contexts? Civic contexts?
2. Think of a person you know who you think possesses a high level of communication competence. What makes you think this? What communication characteristics do they have that you might want to have yourself?
3. What anxieties do you have regarding communication and/or public speaking? Since communication and speaking are a necessary part of life, identify some strategies you can use to manage those anxieties.

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2: BASICS OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

2.1: Introduction to Public Speaking

2.1.1: Where Public Speaking is Used

2.1.2: Why It Matters- Benefits of Public Speaking

2.2: Ethics of Public Speaking

2.2.1: Ethical Speech

2.2.1.1: Social Media and Journalistic Ethics

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2.2.1.3: Ethics, Morals, and Legality

2.2.1.4: Inclusive Language

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2.2.1.6: Cite Sources Responsibly and Plagiarism?

2.2.1.7: Summary - Ethical Speech

2.3: Communication Apprehension and Learning to Speak with Confidence

2.3.1: Reducing Communication Apprehension

2.4: Audience Analysis

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2.4.6: Tailoring your Speech to the Audience

2.5: Choosing and Researching a Topic

2.5.1: Choosing and Narrowing a Topic

2.5.2: Finding the Purpose and Central Idea of Your Speech

2.5.3: Research and Analyzing Evidence

2.5.4: Putting It Together- Choosing and Researching a Topic

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2.1: Introduction to Public Speaking

Public Speaking may sound intimidating however, it is one of the most useful skills anyone can learn. This chapter will give you the basics of public speaking, including why it is important in education, career, and life, and the benefits of this skill. We will also explore the importance of ethical communication. If you have a fear of public speaking, don't worry. This chapter discusses communication apprehension and provides tools and strategies to overcome this. Finally, a thorough exploration into audience analysis is included. Once you have gone through the Basics of Public Speaking, you will have what you need to start speaking with increased confidence.

You may wonder why most college programs require students to complete a public speaking class. Public Speaking is a skill that is key to our success in school, but also in most careers and beyond. We need to look no further than the First Amendment to the United States Constitution to see the importance given to free expression in our country. As the First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."[1]

Notice that the First Amendment explicitly states that both "speech" and "the press" are protected. Public speaking includes all forms of speech, including written, oral, and nonverbal communication. Imagine how many places and situations you engage in every day that would be defined as "public speech."

Here are a few:

- Raising your hand and speaking in your classroom
- Singing or Rapping a song you love while walking down the street
- Writing a poem and posting it on a website for anyone to see

Exercise: How Many Everyday Examples of Public Speech can you name?

We often think about politicians making speeches as the only example of Public Speaking. However, any time we deliver a message to an audience, this is considered public speech. On your own or with a small group, brainstorm as many everyday examples of public speech as you can in 5-10 minutes. Don't forget to include posts to social media, group emails, performances that may not include words (ie: dance), and discussions (whether online or in-person). If you have time, you might also discuss which of these types of speech have limits and which (if any) you or others feel have been diminished or have been made to be afraid to engage in and why.

Answer available at the end of this section.

This module will provide both some of the many benefits of learning public speaking skills and strategies, as well as the uses of these capabilities.

1. First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution [constitution.congress.gov]

Answers

Exercise: How Many Everyday Examples of Public Speech can you name?

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2.1.1: Where Public Speaking is Used

Learning Objectives

- Name three examples of where public speaking is used
- Discuss how the practice of public speaking changed with the advent of television and video

Where Public Speaking is Used

We use public speaking every day, even if you don't think about it this way. When you raise your hand in class and answer a question, you are actually performing public speech. Any time one person communicates ideas, effectively getting a message across to an audience, this is considered a **public speech**. Speech can be written, nonverbal (for example: sign-language), verbal, or a combination of these different types. Public speaking requires the presence of an audience, which is typically considered to be a minimum of ten people, however the skills we need for public speaking will also be useful in interpersonal communication (communication between two individuals) or small group communication (communication among at least three people). This section will discuss some different places and/or technologies where public speaking is used, from basic and historical venues to modern-day virtual spaces.

The Medium Is the Message

In 1964, Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase “the medium is the message.” *Medium*, in this case, is the singular of a word we’re used to seeing in the plural: *media*. What he meant was that we tend to focus on the content of the message (the words being said or the images shown), but we really need to look at the *medium*, or the channel through which the communication is taking place. According to this line of thinking, the television is more important for the way it makes us see the world than for any given program it might carry.

In the introduction to her book *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media*, Iliana Gershon discusses what she calls “media ideologies”—a concept which is essentially a more modern reframing of McLuhan’s idea of the medium and the message:

People’s ideas about the medium shape the ways that medium will deliver a message. No matter what is actually said, the medium becomes part of what is being communicated. Sometimes the medium is in synch with the message, and sometimes it is so out of synch with the message that the message is undercut. . . . That is to say, what people think about the media they use will shape the way they use media.[1]

As Gershon discovered, one of the quickest ways to reveal our often invisible media ideologies is to ask the question, “is it acceptable to break up with someone via text message?”

As you think about the history of media since the 15th century, consider the ways in which media ideologies evolved alongside an ever-growing assortment of options for sending and receiving messages.



Figure 2.1.1 Recreated Gutenberg press at the International Printing Museum, Carson, California. Johannes Gutenberg invented (or perfected) the printing press around 1440. vlasta2 – *PrintMus 038* – CC BY 2.0.

c. 1440–now: The Printing Press

The **printing press** made written materials much easier to copy and reproduce rapidly. This made text readily available to the masses through newspapers, books, and pamphlets, which sparked a rise in literacy rates and forever changed the ways people learned and communicated.

Despite the increasing availability of print media, public oratory remained an important source of news, information, secular and religious teaching, and political persuasion in Europe and America.



Figure 2.1.2 The Fireside Chat, bronze sculpture by George Segal at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Washington, DC. Carol M. Highsmith – *FDR Memorial Fireside Chat* – Public Domain (No Known Copyright).

1900–1944: Radio

This period brought many changes to the political landscape, with new technologies beginning to significantly alter the communication of political messages. On June 14, 1922, **Warren G. Harding** became the first president to be heard on the

radio.[2] The medium of the radio was put to extremely effective use by President **Franklin D. Roosevelt**, whose **Fireside Chats** between 1933 and 1944 allowed the President to speak directly to Americans about topics of national interest, from economic recovery to the rise of fascism in Europe.

Example: FDR's Fireside Chat

In this Fireside Chat from April 14, 1938, Roosevelt spoke to the nation about unemployment and economic recovery. Listen to the first minute or two of the broadcast, and think about the way the medium of the radio allows the President to speak directly to the individual listener. You can listen to the recording of this Fireside Chat on YouTube by clicking on the underlined words. Alternately, click on the underlined words in this sentence to listen to the speech and/or view the transcript April 14, 1938 – FDR – Fireside Chat



Figure 2.1.3 FDR Fireside Chat on U.S. National Archives licensed as Public Domain

What to listen for:

Notice how Roosevelt addresses the listener directly, starting with the first line: "My friends. . . ." He also acknowledges that the listener may be busy in the week leading up to Easter (note the tacit assumption there about the religion of the audience), but insists that "what I want to say to you, the people of the country, is of such immediate need and relates so closely to the lives of human beings and the prevention of human suffering that I have felt that there should be no delay."

How do you think hearing the President's voice on the radio affected American citizens? Hearing the President's voice speaking these words was different than reading the speech in a newspaper. Children who could not yet read the newspaper were able to listen to FDR's Fireside Chats. The president was able to reach both a different audience using the medium of radio and to communicate using nonverbal communication such as tone of voice, vocal rate, and pace.

1945–2000: Television



Figure 2.1.4 In 1960, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon faced off in the first televised presidential debate. United Press International-Kennedy Nixon Debate (1960)-Public Domain

Imagine seeing politicians speaking on television for the first time. It is difficult for those of us who have grown up with easy access to videos to think about a time BEFORE television. After World War II, an improved form of black-and-white TV broadcasting became popular in the United States and Britain, and television sets became commonplace in homes, businesses, and institutions. During the 1950s, television was the primary medium for influencing public opinion.[3] The 1960 debate between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon made it clear that television would transform persuasion politics in the U.S. Chris Matthews describes this debate, the first that had ever been televised:

More than either contestant's words, it was their images, projected on millions of black-and-white Admiral and General Electric televisions, that affected the American judgment. Each time Kennedy spoke, Nixon's eyes darted toward him in an uncomfortable mix of fear and curiosity. . . . When Nixon was on, Kennedy sat, sometimes professorially raking notes, at other moments wearing a sardonic expression as he concentrated on his rival's answers. Sargent Shriver would note that it was his brother-in-law's facial language, more than anything he said, that decided the results of the Great Debate. By raising an eyebrow at Nixon, he had shown he had the confidence to lead the country.[4]

While radio listeners felt that Nixon won the debate, television viewers overwhelmingly thought Kennedy did.[5]

Exercise: Kennedy v. Nixon Debate (1960)

See for yourself...Click on the underlined words to access the Kennedy v. Nixon Debate from 1960. Although you have the opportunity to watch each candidate speak, try listening without looking at the screen for the first 10 minutes. Which candidate sounds more knowledgeable? Who do you trust? Now, watch the next 10 minutes of the debate. Does watching the debate, rather than simply listening to each candidate speak change your opinion of the speakers?

Answer available at the end of this section.

2000–present: The Internet

The Loss of Gatekeeping

One of the most important changes brought about by the growth of the internet is the removal of traditional "gatekeepers" in mass communication. Shoemaker and Vos define **gatekeeping** as the "process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day, and it is the center of the media's role in modern public life. [. . .] This process determines not only which information is selected, but also what the content and nature of the messages, such as news, will be."[6] Prior to the 21st Century, network television news was filtered through a number of gatekeepers, from reporters and fact-checkers to producers and presenters. Because of this process, information shared via traditional mass media had been chosen by established criteria, including: factual accuracy, credibility, and general "newsworthiness." Gatekeeping disappeared, for the most part, with the rise of the Internet as a news source.

In the case of the internet, however, many of the traditional gatekeepers have been removed. Anyone can publish a message to a worldwide audience with just a few clicks. This is not to say, however, that there are *no* gatekeepers on the internet. Some of the most consequential gatekeeping functions are now performed by algorithms (computer logic), such as the logic by which certain information does or doesn't appear in one's social media feeds. The Google search algorithm is likewise extremely influential in determining which information is accessed most widely on the internet.[7]

Trolls

One of the unfortunate media ideologies that has developed in relation to the internet is the phenomenon of **trolling**, or deliberately posting inflammatory, outrageous, offensive, or hurtful messages. As we'll see in the section on communication ethics, this kind of behavior is unethical and unacceptable, and often leads to unexpected negative consequences. It is always wise to treat the internet as what it is: a public forum, requiring the same standards of responsible speech that one would follow in a face-to-face setting.

Social Media

In *The Attention Merchants*, Tim Wu (2016) describes the rise of social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter): "With Facebook and Twitter, everyone could now have a brand, and derive a little of the excitement and attention that went with traditional celebrity—perhaps even find a way to resell a bit of that attention."[8] Social media platforms allow access to audiences both within one's immediate social circle and throughout the world. Not only are the number of messages available to the mass public multiplied by massive numbers on these platforms, but it is also often unclear who or where the messages come from. Additionally, social media platforms use **algorithms.** According to Smith (2018), social media algorithms mean that "nearly all the content people see on social media is chosen not by human editors but rather by computer programs using massive quantities of data about each user to deliver content that he or she might find relevant or engaging."[9] For the time being, the most important thing to keep in mind is that social media—no matter how intimate or niche the forum seems—should always be considered **public speech**. Assume that everything you say or do on social media could become available to a wide audience.

---

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Answers

Exercise: Kennedy v. Nixon Debate (1960)

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2.1.2: Why It Matters- Benefits of Public Speaking


Figure 2.1.2.1 Woman speaking to an audience at a formal gathering

Whether you're speaking to one person or an audience of thousands, whether you're saying a few words off the cuff or delivering a carefully prepared keynote, your work, school and personal life will provide countless opportunities to practice your public speaking skills. If this thought fills you with dread, you've come to the right place.

The best way to become a more confident speaker is to replace fear, uncertainty, and avoidance with knowledge and strategy. That's one of the things we'll tackle in this module. If you find yourself energized and excited at the thought of sharing your thoughts in public, you've also come to the right place. In this module and throughout the course, you'll find tips, systems, and techniques to hone your skills and find your most powerful public voice.

Benefits of Public Speaking

It may be self-evident to you why speaking more confidently, clearly, and effectively would help you in a variety of ways. From speaking up in class or at work to communicating with your children, partner, or friends, making yourself heard and understood has some obvious benefits. You may not realize, however, that the study of public speaking covers far more than just speaking in front of an audience. To succeed in this class, you will learn how to listen actively and provide productive feedback, think about the ethical implications of public communication, build your research skills, practice analyzing and constructing arguments, and to anticipate and incorporate the needs and expectations of your audience for any kind of communication. At the same time, of course, you'll gain skills and confidence to speak publicly in a variety of situations, from persuading an audience with facts and logic to entertaining a crowd with a well-prepared toast.

Educational Benefits

Many of the skills you learn in this class are directly transferable to other classes and academic pursuits. Here are just a few ways that public speaking can help you in your educational journey.

Research Effectively

Whether for a speech, a written essay, or a multimedia presentation, you need to have relevant and trustworthy information. How do you know which facts are accurate? How do you know which experts are credible? In putting together your presentations, you will learn the key skills of researching a topic and gathering the most compelling, relevant, and reliable data to make your argument.

Make Stronger Arguments

Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, was originally framed in terms of persuasive public speech (In ancient Greece and Rome, a *rhetor* was an orator). And in fact, you will likely find that preparing arguments for public speech helps to clarify broader questions of argumentation. After all, what better way to test the power of your argument than to try it out on a live (or virtual) audience?

Organize Your Ideas

As you probably know from experience, it's harder to follow a complex argument in spoken form than an argument in writing. When writing a speech, you may find that you grapple with organizational questions in a different way than you do when writing a paper, which in turn can provide insights about organizing strategies more generally.

Increase Your Confidence and Inspire Others

The more you speak in public, the more confident you'll feel about making your voice heard. Understanding apprehension and leveraging the techniques to reduce and persevere through anxiety will help you to speak up, take on special projects, and seek out opportunities to network and gain visibility in your career. Being able to persuade and inspire clients, stakeholders, team members, and leadership will help you to ensure buy-in for your ideas and build a positive workplace culture.



Figure 2.1.2.2 Speaking to the Board by Universitat Pompeu Fabra on Flickr licensed as CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Life and Career Skills

Year after year, research has shown that employers rank the ability to communicate effectively as one of the most sought-after competences from new employees. Many of the top-rated soft skills necessary to succeed in a shifting work environment and evolving career fields are found in this public speaking course. [1][2] In a survey of college graduates, Zekeri (2004) found that former students rated "skill in oral communication" at the top of a list of crucial academic skills.[3] By honing the skills learned in this course, you can stand out at work and advance your career, and you'll probably discover benefits in your personal life as well.

Be a More Effective Leader and a Better Listener

A good leader, like a good speaker, places their audience at the center of the communication process. The skills you learn in this course will help you to focus on others and consider the thoughts and feelings of your team when making decisions and presenting ideas.

Among the central competencies of this course are the crucial—and challenging—skills of listening actively and sharing feedback productively. Purdy (1997) enumerates a plethora of benefits of conscious listening, including greater success in school and at work, more fulfilling interpersonal relationships, and even health benefits [4] The advantages of active listening extend from our most personal relationships to the realms of mass politics and entertainment, and outward to all aspects of our interconnected society.

Become a Powerful Advocate

Whether negotiating with a family member, persuading a co-worker, or winning over a contentious crowd at a school-board

meeting, the argumentation strategies you learn in this course will help you become a stronger advocate for the values, ideas, and causes you believe in.

Develop Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Skills

Public speaking teaches us to build sound arguments, follow logical reasoning, and evaluate sources. It also helps us to see past our own perspective and adapt, which is necessary when problem-solving in all areas of our lives.

Hone Your Presentation Skills

Rather than adding to the number of boring and inapplicable presentations employees and clients will sit through, you will be able to command attention from the room, use your speaking time effectively, and create visual aids that enhance rather than detract from your presentation. Whether prepared or speaking off the cuff, you will have the storytelling skills to effectively use data points and research to create a comprehensive story.

---

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2.2: Ethics of Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

- Explain why ethics are important in public speaking.
- Identify key principles of ethical communication.



Figure 2.2.1 As with so many things, trust is crucial in public speaking. If you want to get your message across, your audience needs to trust you as the message giver. Trapeze by: Laura LaRose. Located at: Trapeze photograph on Flickr [www.flickr.com]. License: *CC BY: Attribution*

Ethics in Public Speaking is essential for trust between a speaker and the audience. Basic ethics in public speaking involve honesty, truth, and using facts. In order to apply ethics in public speaking, the speaker must be aware and careful to be honest from the start. When choosing a topic, a speaker must consider whether the speech will be informative and unbiased or persuasive and biased in one direction. Both informative and persuasive speeches should be prepared and delivered using ethics to perform valid research, cite trustworthy sources, and show respect to the audience. Intentionally using the standards of public speaking may not prevent mistakes or inaccuracies in every case. Ethical speakers must also admit when they have stated something they later learn is not true. Although practicing ethical speaking is not easy, it is the best way to maintain credibility and the trust between audience and speaker.

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2.2.1: ETHICAL SPEECH

2.2.1.1: Social Media and Journalistic Ethics
2.2.1.2: Ethical Communication
2.2.1.3: Ethics, Morals, and Legality
2.2.1.4: Inclusive Language
2.2.1.5: Hate Speech
2.2.1.6: Cite Sources Responsibly and Plagiarism?
2.2.1.7: Summary - Ethical Speech

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2.2.1.1: Social Media and Journalistic Ethics

2.21 Social Media and Journalistic Ethics

According to Pew Research (2025), at least 91% of Americans own a smart phone. Beyond phone usage, Americans regularly use YouTube, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram, not only to watch funny videos and connect with their peers, but increasingly as a source of news (Pew Research, 2025). The New York Times (2025) Handbook on Ethical Journalism emphasizes the importance of "Accuracy and Corrections" as the foundation of their credibility to readers. However, there are no such journalism ethics applied to posts on social media. In fact, the terms "misinformation" and "sensationalism" are useful descriptors of many videos and posts on social media, not associated with our most ethical journalistic institutions. Add in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) into the mix and it gets very difficult to know what is truthful or real?

Similar to journalistic ethics, the National Communication Association (NCA) developed a "Credo for Ethical Communication" (NCA, 2024) adopted originally in 1999 and revised and reaffirmed in 2024. This credo is central to the public speaking process discussed in this chapter. This chapter will review the NCA Credo for Ethical Communication, discuss the importance of considering audience, and guidelines for selecting a topic. Beyond that, readers will find helpful tools to develop speech outlines, build credibility, and deliver effective messages.

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2.2.1.2: Ethical Communication

2.2.1.2 Ethical Communication

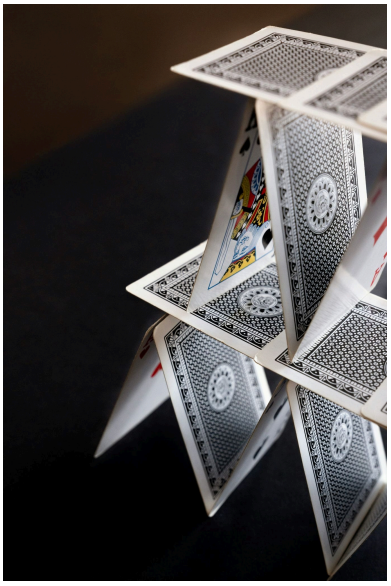


Figure 2.2.1.2.1 House of Cards Photo by Merrilee Schultz on Unsplash

Learning Objectives

- Explain how practicing ethical communication increases the speaker's credibility for the audience.
- Name and discuss at least three expectations for ethical communication specifically named in the National Communication Association (NCA) Credo for Ethical Communication

"To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful. It is as simple as that." - Edward R. Murrow (American Broadcaster 1908-1965)

Ethical Communication is central to building and maintaining relationships, operating as a trusted colleague, and building credibility with those around you. When it comes to public speaking, the speaker's job is to inform, persuade, entertain, or guide the audience in some way, in order to reach a goal. Audience members are very attuned to a speaker's words and nonverbal communication. The audience wants to know - "Can we trust this person to deliver the truth?"

Audience members trust a speaker who demonstrates ethical communication repeatedly. Think about how you build friendships. The first time you meet someone, you don't know whether they are someone you can trust. The same is true when an audience listens to a speaker for the first time. Audiences are good at detecting when someone is trying to swindle them or sell them something. With smart phones in our pockets, we can easily look up facts and statistics. If a speaker tells a lie, there's a pretty good chance they will get caught. And once someone has been caught lying - the audience is unlikely to give that person the benefit of the doubt moving forward.

That is why it is essential to follow the rules of ethical communication when engaging in public speaking. "What are the rules of ethical communication," you might ask. The National Communication Association updated their Credo of Ethical Communication in 2024.

National Communication Association Credo for Ethical Communication (2024)

"Questions of right and wrong arise whenever people communicate. Ethical communication is fundamental to responsible thinking, decision-making, and relationship building, and community development within, and across, contexts, cultures, channels,

and media. Moreover, ethical communication enhances human worth, human life, 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 wellbeing of individuals and the society in which we live. Therefore we, the members of the National Communication Association (NCA), endorse and are committed to practicing the following principles of ethical communication:

We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication. We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and acknowledgement of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision-making fundamental to civil society.

We strive to understand and respect other communicators' intent before evaluating and responding to their messages. We promote access to communication resources and opportunities necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and societies.

We promote a supportive climate of communication that entails caring, mutual understanding and respect for individual communicators' needs and characteristics. We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.

We commit to supporting the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice. We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant decisions, while also respecting privacy and confidentiality. We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences of our own communication and expect the same from others." [1]

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2.2.1.3: Ethics, Morals, and Legality

Learning Objectives

- Define ethics.
- Differentiate between ethics, morality, and legality.

Ethical Behavior

Ethics are a set of standards that govern the conduct of a person, especially a member of a profession. While ethical beliefs are held by individuals, they can also be reflected in the values, practices, and policies that shape the choices made by decision makers on behalf of their organizations. Professions and organizations regularly establish a "Code of Ethics" that serves to guide the behavior of members of the profession or organization. In the medical profession, for instance, doctors take an ethical oath to "do no harm." The American Society of Mechanical Engineers' code states "Engineers shall hold paramount the safety, health, and welfare of the public in the performance of their professional duties."



Figure 2.2.1.3.1 Ethical decisions require reflection. "Dilemmas" by Shema Tschofen on Flickr licensed as CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

We negotiate ethical dilemmas every day, though many can be resolved without a huge effort. When your friend shows up in a hideous hat and asks if you like it, you have to choose between telling the truth and hurting their feelings. Do you go for a response that avoids both lying and insulting your friend's taste, such as "well, it's very colorful"? Or is it more ethical to protect your friend from embarrassing themselves in public?

The most important thing is to be aware of the principles that inform your response, so that you can make the most ethical decision available. In this module, we'll be learning about some of the key ethical principles in public communication.

Ethics is also a branch of philosophy that asks the question, what is the right thing to do?[1] In this module, we're concerned primarily with this philosophical understanding of ethics, because we will be considering the right and wrong—ethical and unethical—use of public communication.

Behaving ethically is not the same as following the law, since certain laws may not be ethical. Consider racist laws in the U.S. before the Civil War, or in apartheid South Africa, for examples of unethical (and immoral) laws.[2] Nor is ethical behavior just based in the expectations of society. There are times when society's norms or expectations will contradict one's own ethical standards.

Example

VIDEO: TED Talk - How Ethics Can Help You Make Better Decisions | Michael Schur

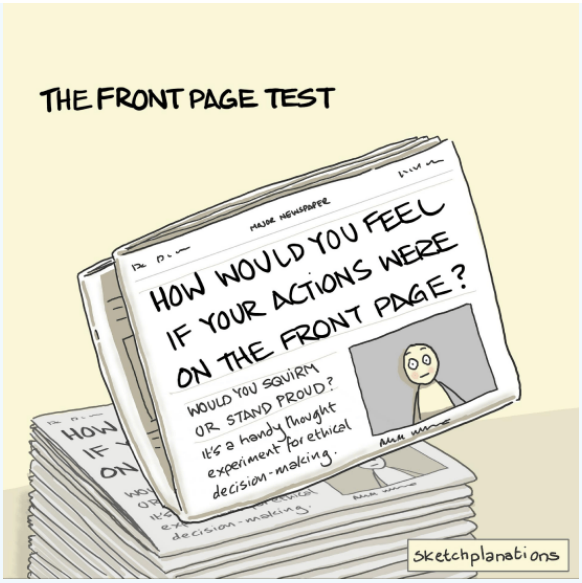


Figure 2.2.1.3.1 Jono Hey – The Front Page Test – CC BY-NC 4.0.

Known as the creator of the television show "The Good Place," which focuses on how people practice (or do not practice) moral and ethical behavior in their lifetimes and how this might affect their afterlives, Michael Shur has done his research on morals and ethics. Click on the underlined words to watch this video where the speaker discusses how he handles an ethical dilemma in his TED Talk. As the speaker states in his talk, "Understanding ethical theories is how we increase our chances at simply being human beings who have to negotiate with other human beings."

Moral Behavior

Morals are concerned with, or come from, an unwritten code of behavior concerning what's right or acceptable in a particular society. Traditionally, morals have been the special province of religion and cultural groups. Moral thinking often feels intuitive or "natural" because it has to do with the way we were raised or educated.

Legal Behavior

Legal behavior follows the dictates of laws, which are written down and interpreted by the courts. In decision-making, determining the legality of a course of action is facilitated by the existence of statutes, regulations, and codes. Unlike ethical considerations, there are established penalties for behaving in a way that conflicts with the law. However, as society evolves, what constitutes legal behavior also changes. For example, until recently, the possession or use of marijuana was illegal throughout the U.S. As a result of the legislation that legalized marijuana in several states, existing laws will need to be reinterpreted, and undoubtedly additional laws will be enacted to govern what was formerly illegal behavior. Whether or not an individual thinks it is ethical to use a potentially harmful substance, the fact is that the law now allows such behavior. Following the law is not the same as behaving ethically; many questions of ethics are not covered by the law and some laws may be unethical (or unjust).

---

1. Note the switch there from the plural "ethics are" to the singular "ethics is." Ethics can be used both as singular and plural. When we're referring to the branch of philosophy, we use the singular. "Ethics **is** the philosophical study of principles relating to right and wrong conduct." (wiktionary). 2.02: Ethics Morals and Legality#return-footnote-180-1
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2.2.1.4: Inclusive Language

Learning Objectives

- Explain how inclusive language is an important part of being an ethical communicator.
- Analyze the inclusivity or exclusivity of language related to disability, race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities in an episode of any streaming television show (including news).

To communicate with someone is to connect with them. We speak publicly because we want to forge points of connection between our ideas and worldview and those of our audience. In order to foster this connection, is it crucial to use language that allows all audience members to see themselves reflected fairly and meaningfully in the content of the speech.

Whenever we speak about a group of people, we need to consider the ethical implications of the categories or criteria we use to construct the group. Put another way, we have an ethical obligation to be mindful, attentive, and informed about the way we conceptualize and speak about categories of identity or affiliation. Speaking ethically involves striving to use inclusive language, which aims to make all listeners feel fairly represented in the language of the speech. At a minimum, inclusive language avoids the use of words that can be considered to exclude particular groups of people, for instance, a principal at a graduation ceremony for kindergarten students, who asks the children sitting between their parents to look first at their Mom and then their Dad, when some children likely have something other than one mother and father. For example, many children grow up in a home with one parent or grandparent(s) or with two Moms or two Dads.

Using inclusive language means taking the time to consider not only the terms we use to represent individuals and groups, but also how we frame statements of "general" or "universal" identity. If a speaker says, "growing up in a Christian culture, we are used to thinking about morality in terms of sin and virtue," they are using a *we* that might exclude an audience member who grew up in a different religious context.

Speakers should take care that they are not using language about identity in unequal ways: for instance, "unsuccessful vice presidential candidates such as Kaine, Ryan, and Sarah Palin…" (unequal because it uses Palin's first name but not Kaine's or Ryan's) or "Contemporary female artists like the photographer Cindy Sherman or the Venezuelan-American painter Luchita Hurtado" (why is Hurtado's background specified but not Sherman's?). If it is important to call attention to a person's background or identity, make sure to do so equally across all the people discussed so that some identities aren't being treated as an unspoken standard or default.

Inclusive Language and Ability

One in four (26%) adults in the United States live with a disability (CDC, 2023)[1]. Despite how commonplace disability is among US citizens, it is not uncommon to hear stigmatizing language used to describe people with disabilties. Early in 2020 (before the onset of Covid-19 in the United States) Fred Trump III went to the White House to ask his Uncle Don to help advocate for people with disabilities, such as his son. According to Fred Trump III (2024), President Trump's response was: "Those people, the shape they're in, all the expenses, maybe those kinds of people should just die."[2]

Tammy Duckworth is a United States Senator representing the state of Illinois. She is also a double-amputee, wheelchair user, a retired Army National Guard Lieutenant Colonel, and a Purple Heart Recipient. Senator Duckworth represents her state with strength, passion, and conviction. Senator Duckworth's disability does not define her, and at the same time, it is a part of her identity and story. Most of us either have a disability or have a close family member that has experienced disability. When we know someone personally, we see and know them as a full human being. Disability is one part of their life, but it doesn't define them. That is why many people advocate for "people-first" language in the disability community.

People-First Language

Many advocates and activists, especially in the disabilities-rights community, have recommended using People-First Language to avoid defining someone according to a characteristic, state, or disability. For instance, one might refer to a "person with mental illness" rather than a "mentally-ill person" or "people experiencing homelessness" rather than "the homeless." For example,

The Independent Living Movement uses people-first language, such as "people with disabilities" instead of "disabled people". This shows that the person is most important, not the disability.[3] Like many linguistic interventions, PFL is part of an ongoing conversation about representation, rather than a prescription. When in doubt, it's usually best to take your cue from the most recent and reputable sources you have available.

Language can be very tricky, and it can take work and practice to find inclusive formulations for many common words and phrases. It's worth the effort, though, because it allows all your audience members to hear themselves represented in your speech.

Exercise: Deaf Culture

People who identify as part of Deaf Culture embrace the positive commonalities that tie the deaf community together. This includes a common language (ASL in the United States). Similar to people with physical disabilities, Deaf advocates emphasize how the larger society creates the idea of "Deafness as Disability" due to challenges like spoken language, without the equivalent use of sign language or transcriptions of speech. Along with the National Association of the Deaf, actress Marlee Matlin fought and won the right for all televisions sold in the United States starting in 1993 to provide closed captioning if desired[4]



Figure 2.2.1 4.1 Actress "Marlee Matlin Signing" by John Mathew Smith licensed as CC BY-SA 2.0

Watch this video from "Deaf News Briefs" and answer the following questions:

1. Did you find it easy to follow the narrative in this video or did you find it difficult, given there was no spoken language provided?
2. Does watching this video help you to relate to members of the disability community who may not be provided with the information or the tools that they need to easily understand or digest videos that assume all viewers have full sight and hearing?

Inclusive Language and Race

Ethical speaking means paying attention to language, especially language around identity and personal characteristics. This is not to say, however, that a speaker should avoid discussing race, gender, religion, or disabilities—public conversations around these topics are more pressing and urgent than ever. In its "Race Reporting Guide," the media advocacy organization Race Forward urges journalists and public communicators to approach key social issues "with a racial lens," which means being "explicit about race" while taking care to "avoid stereotypes." The Race Reporting Guide offers some very useful recommendations for addressing the language around racial identity, including the following principles:

- Use racial and ethnic identification when it is pertinent to a story fairly (across all racial categories, including identifying persons as "white") and appropriately (without relying on stereotypes).

- Familiarize yourself with the key terms and concepts of race and ethnicity, and how categories that describe these can intersect ("White Argentine," "a person of mixed Choctaw and African American descent," Latinos who identify as "some other race").
- Specify, whenever possible, use a person's tribe or ethnic group (Cherokee, O'odham, Mayan, Xhosa), and their region of origin (people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are South Asian; people from Honduras, Panama, El Salvador, and Guatemala are Central American).
- Don't use geographic descriptors interchangeably with religious or other terms to describe specific groups of people. For example, "Muslim" is not synonymous with Arab; African Americans are the largest Muslim population in the United States. [5]

Above all, the guide stresses the importance of paying attention to how people and groups self-identify, observing in particular the way multiple categories intersect and interact. It is important to remember that terms and categories related to race, ethnicity, gender, and other identities change and evolve with time, so the learning process is collective and ongoing.

Often, the context will determine which terms of identity are most appropriate. For example, the same person might be defined as Hispanic in a demographic survey, be grouped as Latino in a political poll, described as Latina by a friend, advocate for LatinX representation in the student senate, belong to the Chicano/a Student Association, and describe herself on her website as Mexican-American.

When discussing any categories of identity with which you are not very familiar, it can be wise to search out recent, relevant, reliable sources on the internet (for more about sources, see the section on "Researching and Supporting Your Speech" in this course) and model your language on these sources.

Inclusive Language and Gender

In English, many words and phrases have historically contained inherent assumptions about sex and gender. When speaking inclusively, one should avoid using gendered terms. For instance:

Examples of Gender-Inclusive Language

instead of:	use:
businessman	businessperson, executive
cleaning woman	cleaner
congressman	congressperson
mailman	letter carrier

The exception, of course, is if you are specifically calling attention to one gender or another.

Inclusive Pronouns

Pronouns are also an important consideration in using inclusive language.

- If a speaker fails to use inclusive pronouns, he risks excluding many members of his audience.

Think about that previous sentence. It's grammatically correct, in that English has traditionally used the masculine pronoun as a generic, third-person singular pronoun. But in reading it, can you imagine this speaker as anything but a male? Instead, we could try:

- If a speaker fails to use inclusive pronouns, he or she risks excluding many members of his or her audience.

This version is a bit more inclusive, but it leaves out those who don't identify as male or female (and it sounds clunky). Grammatically, the best solution may be to use the plural here:

- If speakers fail to use inclusive pronouns, they risk excluding many members of their audience.

With the trend toward more gender-inclusive language, you are probably more likely to hear the plural pronoun *they* used as a

singular pronoun—especially in everyday spoken English. For example:

- If a speaker fails to use inclusive pronouns, they risk excluding many members of their audience.

While the singular *they* offers the advantage of being gender-neutral—and it may soon become the accepted norm, as it was officially accepted by the APA in 2019—for now there are mixed opinions about it, and you may want to avoid it in your academic writing. When in doubt, consult your instructor's preferred style guide.

In the case of individuals who use *they* as a singular pronoun to refer to themselves, it is grammatically correct to use *they* as a singular pronoun (per the Chicago Manual of Style, one of the predominant authorities on grammar and style). (The University of Chicago Press. "Grammar & Usage: Singular 'they.'" *Chicago Manual of Style*, 2017, p. 241.)

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1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey data: 2022*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/annual_data/annual_2022.html
2. Trump III, F. C. (2024, July 24). *My Uncle Donald Trump told me disabled Americans like my son "should just die."* *TIME*. https://time.com/7002003/donald-trump-disabled-americans-all-in-the-family/
3. California Department of Rehabilitation. (n.d.). *Independent living history and philosophy*. State of California. https://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/ILHistoryandPhilosophy
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5. Race Forward. *Race Reporting Guide*. 2015. https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/Race%20Reporting%20Guide%20by%20Race%20Forward_V1.1.pdf

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2.2.1.5: Hate Speech

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of avoiding hate speech to ethical communication.

Hate speech of any kind is never acceptable in public communications. *Hate speech* is defined by the U.N. as "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor." [1]

Although we can all imagine examples of what we would consider hate speech, the term is notoriously difficult to define. Nonetheless, such definitions are extremely important—especially in a world where globally public speech is available to anyone with an internet connection. For social media platforms, for instance, the problem of differentiating hate speech from other forms of expression is a constant, high-stakes ethical and political dilemma. After all, these companies have pledged to quickly remove instances of hate speech from their platforms—but what should they remove? Here's how three major social media companies define hate speech:

- Facebook: "We define hate speech as a direct attack on people based on what we call protected characteristics — race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity, and serious disease or disability."
- Twitter: "You may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others on the basis of these categories."
- YouTube: "Hate speech is not allowed on YouTube. We remove content promoting violence or hatred against individuals or groups based on any of the following attributes: Age, Caste, Disability, Ethnicity, Gender Identity and Expression, Nationality, Race, Immigration Status, Religion, Sex/Gender, Sexual Orientation, Victims of a major violent event and their kin, Veteran Status."

In short, definitions of hate speech vary, but all share a particular focus on attacks against **protected characteristics**, which is a legal term in U.S. law. *Protected characteristics* are attributes protected by U.S. Federal Anti-Discrimination Law, including race, religion, national origin, age (40 and over), sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, pregnancy, familial status, disability status, and veteran status.

Unfortunately, it's all too easy to imagine a list of racial epithets, ethnic slurs, sexist or homophobic language, and denigrating descriptions of people's bodies and abilities; we don't need to include a list of hateful terms here.

One important distinction to note is the difference—in definition, at least—between hate speech and expressions of hostility toward groups that are not protected classes by law, such as members of certain professions or affiliation groups. Blanket pejorative statements like "all politicians are liars" or "Democrats/Republicans are fools" are probably unfair and unethical in a public speaking situation, but negativity is not the same as hate speech. The previous example of social media illustrates why this is an important concept: one might see all kinds of vitriolic screeds on social media against protesters or police, conservatives or liberals, meat-eaters or vegans, "anti-vaxxers" or "treehuggers," or "flat-earthers." Even if the language is malicious and cruel, it probably does not meet the definition of hate speech, and may be allowed on the platform. Where is the line? It's a very tough call. In general, blanket statements condemning an entire group of people—even an affiliation by choice, such as "activists," "gamers," or "preppers"—should be avoided in public speaking. Hate speech, however, is *never* acceptable, and can carry severe consequences. Remember, free speech is not speech without consequences.

1. United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. 2019. https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf2.07: Hate Speech#return-footnote-190-1

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2.2.1.6: Cite Sources Responsibly and Plagiarism?

Learning Objectives

- Differentiate how to responsibly cite your source in writing from how to cite it in a speech.
- Name two benefits of responsibly citing trustworthy sources during a public speech?
- Name at least two potential consequences of plagiarism.

Cite Sources Responsibly

When you deliver a speech, it is essential to tell your audience when you are using the words of another person, providing information you acquired from a newspaper or journal article, or are using a definition from an online or hardcover source. Remember that any time you state a fact or information that is not commonly known, you must cite the source. Citing a source for factual evidence or definitions tells the audience that your source is external, in other words these are not your thoughts or words. When you cite a trustworthy source, using the publication and the year, your audience will be given the information they need to know whether that source is trustworthy.

Here are some additional tips on citing sources when speaking publicly by Sarah Stone Watt, Pepperdine University:

Even if you have handed your professor a written outline of your speech with source citations, you must also offer oral attribution for ideas that are not your own (see Table 2.2.1.6.1) for examples of ways to cite sources while you are speaking). Notice in the table both the publication and year are mentioned. Publication is where the information is published. This might be a newspaper, journal article, government document, or book. Offer citations and oral attributions for all material that you have taken from someone else, including paraphrases or summaries of their ideas. When in doubt, remember to "always provide oral citations for direct quotations, paraphrased material, or especially striking language, letting listeners know who said the words, where, and when."[1] Whether plagiarism is intentional or not, it is unethical, and someone committing plagiarism will often be sanctioned based on their institution's code of conduct.

TABLE 2.2.1.6.1: Verbal Source Citations

Proper Written Source Citation	Proper Oral Attribution
"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life" (Jobs, 2005).[2]	In his 2005 commencement address at Stanford University Steve Jobs said, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."
"Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants" (Pollan, 2009, p.1).	Michael Pollan offers three basics guidelines for healthy eating in his 2009 book, *In Defense of Food*. He advises readers to "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."
"In 2025, there were 77,850 wildfires that burned 5,131,474 acres" across the United States (National Interagency Coordination Center, 2025).	According to the Wildland Fire Summary and Statistics Annual Report in 2025, there were 77,850 wildfires that burned across the United States.

What Is Plagiarism?

The Definition

Generally, plagiarism is using someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as your own. There are different types of plagiarism—unintentional and intentional. There may be cultural differences in the definition of plagiarism. We are using the standard definition of plagiarism in use in academic institutions in the United States.

Sometimes students commit plagiarism intentionally, such as when they cut and paste sections from sources and drop them into the text of their paper. Other times, plagiarism happens by accident. Whether plagiarism occurs intentionally or unintentionally, it carries academic sanctions, which could range from losing points or failing an assignment to failing a class or expulsion from school.

Plagiarism is stealing. And stealing is wrong, whether you steal someone's laptop or their words and ideas.

Ethics

Academic integrity is essential to your student career and is something that will follow you throughout your life. Adopting good research ethics and practices (note taking, citing correctly, etc.) can help you avoid plagiarism and become a better student. When someone publishes their ideas, they become the intellectual property of that person. In academic writing, you may refer to and build upon the ideas of others, but you must give proper credit to them in your paper. By neglecting to give credit to the source of an idea, you are leading the reader of your paper to believe that the idea is your own.

What is unintentional plagiarism?

Plagiarism is often unintentional and there are some easy ways to avoid it. These are some of the most common mistakes people make that result in plagiarism:

- Using the same paper for two different classes
- Quoting a source incorrectly: for example, forgetting quotation marks or not properly introducing the source
- Failing to properly introduce an idea you've drawn from someone else

Most unintentional plagiarism can be prevented by better time management and by managing your sources correctly. If you aren't rushing to finish a paper, you'll be able to avoid plagiarism.

What is intentional plagiarism?

Fabrication. Fabricating a source and quotes.

Mosaic plagiarism. Changing a few words from the original source and not citing it. (Proper paraphrasing requires more than just changing a few words from the original source).

Beefing up the bibliography. Adding references to your works cited page that you didn't actually use.

Using a pre-written paper. Purchasing pre-written papers or getting someone else to write your paper.

Why should I care?

- Respect for others' work
- Respect for your own work
- Being a good citizen of the academic community

How do I benefit from avoiding plagiarism?

Finding your own voice. One of the goals of a college education is contributing to the body of knowledge. You can only do that

by doing your own work.

Learning to Synthesize and Build upon the Knowledge of Others. The process of synthesis in academic writing—interacting with ideas from sources and adding your own ideas and conclusions—is part of becoming a scholar. You are reading and learning from the scholars who have shaped your chosen discipline. By properly citing the words and ideas of experts in your paper, you are bolstering and supporting your own arguments and developing the skills of a scholar.

Developing Time Management Skills. You need to allocate enough time to do proper research. You must find, evaluate, and acquire sources. You must read, digest, and synthesize information. You must keep track of your sources and cite them properly. Time and project management skills will be useful in your career and your life. It is far better to overestimate the time needed to complete an assignment rather than to underestimate it. A good tool to use is University of Minnesota Libraries' Assignment Calculator(opens in new window).

What are the consequences of plagiarism?

Possible consequences include:

- Cheating others
- Cheating yourself
- Failing an assignment and/or a course
- Academic probation
- Expulsion from school
- Notation on your transcript

Bad habits are hard to break, and they have consequences. The specific consequences depend on your school's policies. For a discussion/debate on a noted historian's encounter with plagiarism, see this Slate.com article(opens in new window).

1. Turner, Kathleen J., et al. *Public Speaking*. Pearson, 2017. 2.11: Citing Sources in a Speech#return-footnote-198-1
2. Jobs, S. (2005, June 14). "You've got to find what you love," Jobs says. Retrieved September 30, 2020, from http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html2.11: Citing Sources in a Speech#return-footnote-198-2

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2.2.1.7: Summary - Ethical Speech

Obviously, ethics in public speaking covers a lot of ground! That's because ethics are rarely obvious or self-evident. Instead, they require a lot of thought and a system of principles against which to judge a person's words, behaviors, and actions. Here are some of the key concepts we discussed:

- Ethics are a set of standards that govern the conduct of a person. Ethical behavior should not be confused with moral or legal behavior.
- Within any public speaking scenario, ethical speech is of paramount importance.
- One of the most important parts of ethical communication is to avoid inadvertently excluding parts of the audience. Using inclusive language is a good way to make sure all listeners feel included in our message.
- Hate speech of any kind is never acceptable in public communications.
- An important aspect of ethical communication is to give proper credit for other people's words, ideas, and other intellectual work.

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2.3: Communication Apprehension and Learning to Speak with Confidence

Learning Objectives

- Define Communication Apprehension and at least three physical symptoms
- Describe a few common causes of communication apprehension

Regardless of how well a speech is researched or written, the audience must believe in the speaker in order to engage. One's ability to speak confidently is the foundation to establishing that credibility and gaining initial trust from the audience.

In this section, we'll get an overview of communication apprehension—the anxiety that can accompany speaking situations—and then dive deeper into the causes of this anxiety. Finally, we'll learn some strategies to reduce communication apprehension and speak with greater confidence.

Communication Apprehension (CA)

At one time or another, we've all felt nervous about a communication event. Nerves can show up as a knot in your stomach when you are about to meet someone new, sweaty palms and a dry mouth when asked to share your opinion during a meeting, or most recognizably, a shaking voice and pounding heart when giving a presentation.

Communication apprehension (CA) is a broad term used to describe the anxiety or fear related to real or anticipated communication with others.[1] While some people experience communication apprehension (CA) to a greater extent than others, research shows that almost everyone is affected by it to some degree. So common is the fear associated with public speaking that Jerry Seinfeld famously quipped that the average funeral attendee would rather be in the casket than delivering the eulogy!

How does Communication Apprehension Manifest (Physical Symptoms)

Feeling nervous is psychological, but CA is usually accompanied by physical symptoms often difficult to ignore. These symptoms are due to the adrenaline hormone, which is produced as a response to stressful situations. Adrenaline production is part of the process commonly known as the "fight or flight response," in that its purpose is to prepare the body for action. In other words, it is a naturally occurring performance enhancer.

As adrenaline disperses through our body, air passages dilate and blood vessels contract to provide muscles with more oxygen. Pupils become dilated and glucose rises to increase our metabolism. In an actual fight-or-flight scenario, one may not notice the physical effects that adrenaline has since the body is using the extra energy. When we have a boost of adrenaline without needing to expend the extra energy, however, the physical symptoms are quite noticeable and take awhile to dissipate.

As a result, CA may result in mild to severe physical symptoms, including:

- Shortness of breath or hyperventilation
- Pounding heartbeat
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Vision changes
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Blushing
- Shaky voice
- Speaking quickly

Causes of Communication Apprehension

When someone is afraid of riding a bike, it is not necessarily the riding itself, but instead the fear of falling or veering into traffic that causes anxiety. Similarly, CA does not stem from giving an actual speech, but rather the associations one makes with giving a speech. Although public speaking is one of the most commonly feared situations by the general population, not everyone fears it for the same reason.[1] The main causes of CA can be fear of failure, the audience, high stakes, and being the center of attention.

Fear of Failure

Speakers with a fear of failure often imagine themselves forgetting a part of their speech or performing poorly. This fear manifests in the following ways:

1. They may feel as though they haven't prepared enough.
2. They use self-fulfilling prophecies predicting that they will fail. Such as:
   "I can never get that right."
   "I'm a terrible speaker."
   "This is going to go badly."
3. They've had a negative prior experience giving a speech and believe that it will be repeated.

Audience


Figure 2.3.1 Speakers may feel intimidated by their audience because they see themselves as less qualified, less knowledgeable, or less accomplished than them.

- As Naveen begins his presentation at work in front of high-level executives, he experiences an overwhelming fear of being unable to answer their questions or that their knowledge may contradict his own.

Even without feeling inferior, simply feeling different from your audience can lead to anxiety.

- Alejandra has been unable to find much common ground with her audience, and she is worried that they will turn against her, become uninterested, or judge her poorly.

High Stakes and Uncertainty

Some speakers who feel fine when practicing their speech become very nervous in anticipation of the actual event. For some, the high stakes are situational, such as knowing that a promotion, a big opportunity, or passing a class needed to graduate is on the line. For others, suffering from perfectionism can create overwhelming pressure to perform.

Since giving a speech is a live event, there is a degree of unpredictability. A speaker with very little experience may not know what to expect or how they may respond to the situation. Experienced speakers, though, can also fear uncertainty. Regardless of how much one prepares and practices, there is no way to guarantee that everything will go exactly as planned. Between the audience, technology, environment, and even one's own performance, there are always elements of uncertainty in any speaking situation.



Figure 2.3.2. Audio-Visual connections can be a major source of uncertainty in a presentation. Make sure to check the connections early!

Being the Center of Attention

Not many people enjoy being stared at, while standing at the front of the classroom and attempting to deliver a speech (for which they are being graded). This can be a very intimidating situation. Students who are not used to being in a leadership position or speaking to strangers may feel nervous about an audience looking at them. We all have moments where we doubt ourselves. We may wonder whether we have a stain on our clothes, if our hair looks all right, and this is all before worrying about the words we are going to deliver. Attention from an audience can magnify and multiply our own self-esteem issues.

Not to worry however. In the next section, we will discuss ways to address communication apprehension.

1. Ebrahimi, Omid V., et al. "Psychological Interventions for the Fear of Public Speaking: A Meta-Analysis." *Frontiers*, Frontiers, 19 Feb. 2019, http://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00488/full. 1.08: What Causes Communication Apprehension#return-footnote-146-1

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2.3.1: Reducing Communication Apprehension

Learning Objectives

- List two different strategies to reduce communication apprehension
- Demonstrate one technique to lower heart rate and blood pressure

Understand ways to reduce your own apprehension.

You may never be completely rid of communication anxiety, but it is possible to reduce it. The truth is that a method that works for one person may not work for the next. In order for you to reduce your own apprehension, you must address it at its cause. Therefore, a variety of techniques exist to reduce communication apprehension based on preparation, mindset, and systematic desensitization.

Preparation

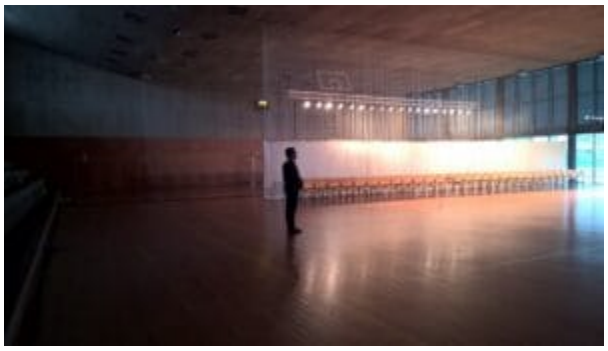


Figure 2.3.1.1 It can be very helpful to visit the room in which you'll speak to get a sense of the layout, acoustics, and A/V setup.

If the source of your anxiety is related to feeling unprepared, feeling different or inferior to your audience, or being the center of attention, there are several steps you can take as you begin to prepare your speech:

- Learn more about your audience by conducting audience analysis.
- Visit and get comfortable with the performance space to learn about the A/V setup, acoustics, and room layout
- Ask questions about expectations, logistics, or anything else you are unsure of.
- Research your speech topic thoroughly to ensure you haven't missed important information and to prepare for questions.
- Prepare physically and mentally by giving yourself plenty of time to arrive the day of your speech and packing everything you need the evening before your speech so you are not rushed or frantic the day of your speech.
- Prepare and practice with your speaking notes before your speech so they are familiar and easy to read.

Positivity

If the source of your anxiety stems from negative self-talk, a fear of failure, or excessive focus on yourself, then refocusing your thoughts and creating a positive routine can help you to relax.

- Focus on your message, not yourself.
- Perform vocal warm-ups and practice physical relaxers such as power poses, stretches, and breathing exercises both before you practice and before you deliver your speech.
- Think about your audience and remember that they want you to do well.
- Remember that the audience doesn't know your speech. They will not know if you make a mistake.
- Use positive self-talk such as "that went really well" or "I know this speech well and will always be able to recover and improvise if I need to."
- Visualize your speech going exactly as you'd like it to and the audience responding positively.
- DON'T imagine your audience naked. This often-repeated piece of advice is a myth.

Practice



Figure 2.3.1.2
Practice is the best way to decrease your anxiety

The most effective way to decrease your CA is to practice. Feeling unprepared or nervous about speaking in front of your audience can easily be addressed by practicing often and in a variety of ways. Remember, you perform the way you practice. Utilize the following tips:

- Avoid simply reading your speech to get familiar with it.
- Stand up, use full volume, practice using your visual aids and speaking notes.
- Practice in chunks before you do full run-throughs to become more familiar with your speech.
- Practice in front of many different types of audiences: single, classmates, family, etc.
- Always time your full run-throughs for consistency and to ensure that you have room to speak quicker or slower the day of your speech.
- Practice without any speaking notes to get as familiar as possible with the structure and content of your speech.
- Identify your own strengths and weaknesses so that you know what to flex, what to expect, and what to build upon.

Above all else, know that a small amount of CA will always remain, and that's not such a bad thing.

Focus on your Breath

According to a meta-analysis of studies looking at the effect of breathing on blood pressure published in the International Journal of Cardiology Cardiovascular Risk and Prevention (Garg et al, 2023), breathing exercises have a significant effect on lowering heart rate and a modest effect in lowering blood pressure.

There are many breathing exercises to choose from that will successfully reduce calm the fight-or-flight response and positively effect your physical reaction. For ALL of these exercises, the first step is to relax your body. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes, allow your shoulders, neck and facial muscles to completely relax. Then try one or more of the following and see what works best for you.

1. **4-7-8 Breathing Method** - STEP ONE: Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds - STEP TWO: Hold that breath for 7 seconds - STEP THREE: Breath out slowly, using your lips and throat to slow release of air for 8 seconds. Repeat.
2. **Box Breathing** - Imagine a box with four equal sides. As you complete each step of this process, imagine tracing the four lines of the box or square. STEP ONE: Breath in for four seconds. STEP TWO: Hold that breath for 4 seconds. STEP THREE: Breathe out for four seconds. STEP FOUR: Pause and hold that breath for four. Repeat.
3. **Alternate Nostril Breathing** - Bring your dominant hand up to your face. Use a thumb or other finger to gently press your right nostril closed. Take a slow, deep inhale through your left nostril. Release the right nostril and close your left nostril. Exhale slowly and completely through your right nostril. Keep your left nostril closed and inhale deeply back up through the right nostril. Now, release your left nostril, **c**lose your right nostril again and exhale completely through your left nostril.

Repeat

Use Imagery to Calm Your Mind and Body

Imagery is another way to calm your mind and body. Whether it is a natural setting, a photograph, video, or computer generated image of nature, people feel decreased cognitive stress when exposed to these environments or images (Koivisto and Grassini, 2024). Nature is a natural way to lower your heart rate. If you are near to a park, forest, waterway or mountains or if you have a view of the sky, this is easy. Find a beautiful piece of nature to look at, whether this is a flower, tree, or lake. Take a deep breath and feel the quiet and peace of that calming space. If you do not have nature like this nearby or if it's not safe to go outside, you can use a video or photograph of nature. Just being in a natural setting or looking at images of the natural world has a calming effect on our bodies and our minds.

Interactive Element

Try for Yourself

Next time you feel stressed, try watching one of these videos and assess how you feel while you are watching and afterwards. Do you feel calmer than when you started?

- Nature Video with calming piano music
- Relaxing Nature Video with birdsong

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise can be done quickly, using just the hands or participants who have more time can progress through their entire body. For each part of the body you choose to use for this exercise, you will first isolate it, stress it or squeeze it as tightly as you can (while relaxing your shoulders, neck, and facial muscles), then release that tension completely. When the tension is released, you may feel a surge of energy going through your body and a sense of calm. Here are the full steps of the relaxation exercise, as outlined in the journal article from Medicine (Pathan, et al, 2023):

Step 1:- Make a fist with the dominant hand without involving the upper arm.

Step 2:- Pushing the elbow of the same arm down against the arm of the chair while keeping the hand relaxed.

Steps 3 & 4:- the non-dominant arm worked separately.

Step 5:- Raising the eyebrows.

Step 6:- Screw up the eyes and wrinkle the nose.

Step 7:- Clenching the teeth and pull back the mouth corner.

Step 8: Pull the chin down, press the head against the support, and tense the neck muscles.

Step 9:- Drawing the shoulders back.

Step 10:- Tightening the abdominal muscles.

Step 11:- Tensing the thigh of the dominant leg by contracting the knee flexors and extensors together.

Step 12:- Pointing the dominant foot down (Plantarflexion).

Step 13:- Pulling the dominant foot up toward the face (Dorsiflexion)

Steps 14, 15, 16:- The nondominant leg was worked separately.

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2.4: AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

2.4.1: Why is Audience Analysis Important?

2.4.2: Why Conduct an Audience Analysis?

2.4.3: Three Types of Audience Analysis

2.4.4: Tools to Conduct an Audience Analysis

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2.4.1: Why is Audience Analysis Important?



Figure 2.4.1.1 Dart Board Image by Pixabay from Pixabay

"Speakers do not give speeches *to* audiences; they jointly create meaning *with* audiences" (Sprague, et al., 2010). The success of your speech rests in large part on how your audience receives and understands it.

Think of a time when you heard a speech that sounded "canned" or that fell flat because the audience didn't "get it." Chances are that this happened because the speaker neglected to consider that public speaking is an audience-centered activity. Worse, lack of consideration for one's audience can result in the embarrassment of alienating listeners by telling a joke they don't appreciate, or using language they find offensive. The best way to reduce the risk of such situations is to conduct an audience analysis as you prepare your speech.

Audience analysis is the process of gathering information about the people in your audience so that you can understand their needs, expectations, beliefs, values, attitudes, and likely opinions. In this section, we will examine some reasons why audience analysis is important and how you should use this information when selecting a speech topic.

One of the consequences of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which protects our right to speak freely, is that we focus so much on what we want to say that we often overlook the question of who our target audience is. Does your audience care what you as a speaker think? Can they see how your speech applies to their lives and interests? The act of public speaking is a shared activity that involves interaction between speaker and audience. In order for your speech to get a fair hearing, you need to create a relationship with your listeners. Scholars Sprague et al. explain, "Speakers do not give speeches to audiences; they jointly create meaning with audiences."[1] The success of your speech rests in large part on how your audience receives and understands it.

Think of a time when you heard a speech that sounded "canned" or that fell flat because the audience didn't "get it." Chances are that this happened because the speaker neglected to consider that public speaking is an audience-centered activity. Worse, lack of consideration for one's audience can result in the embarrassment of alienating listeners by telling a joke they don't appreciate, or using language they find offensive. The best way to reduce the risk of such situations is to conduct an audience analysis as you prepare your speech.

Audience analysis is the process of gathering information about the people in your audience so that you can understand their needs, expectations, beliefs, values, attitudes, and likely opinions. In this chapter, we will first examine some reasons why audience analysis is important. We will then describe three different types of audience analysis and some techniques to use in conducting audience analysis. Finally, we will explain how you can use your audience analysis not only during the creation of your speech but also while you are delivering it.

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2.4.2: Why Conduct an Audience Analysis?

Learning Objectives

1. Explain how audience analysis improves effective messaging
2. Describe what types of demographic information is helpful when analyzing your audience

Improve the Effectiveness of Your Message

Public Speaking assumes there will be a speaker and an audience. The goal of the speaker is to get a message across to an audience. On a more basic level, a message is just an image in the speaker's mind. A successful speech is to take that picture from the speaker's mind and get it into the audience members' minds. This is much easier when the picture or message is simple and easy to describe. Please consider the following sentence: "My golden retriever likes to lie on his back so I will give him belly rubs." In this case, most adult audience members who have seen golden retrievers will get a fairly clear picture in their minds.


Figure 2.4.2.1 Photo by Pauline Pix on Flickr

However, what if the speaker says: "You deserve freedom." These three words bring up many different pictures, depending on the audience member's experiences. For one person who was previously incarcerated, the picture might be literally walking out of a jail cell. Another audience member who loves taking long drives, might see themselves in a car going 65 miles per hour down the road with the wind blowing through their hair. Knowing who is in the audience will help the speaker to choose words and provide descriptions that enable to the audience to get a similar picture in their heads as the speaker.

Adapt Your Speech to Audience Needs

Understanding who makes up your target audience will allow you to carefully plan your message and adapt what you say to the level of understanding and background of the listeners. Two practical benefits of conducting an audience analysis are (1) to prevent you from saying the wrong thing, such as telling a joke which offends, and (2) to help you speak to your audience in a language they understand about things that interest them. Your speech will be more successful if you can create a message that informs and engages your audience.[1]

When preparing a speech for a classroom audience consisting of other students and your professor, you may feel that you know their interests and expectations fairly well. However, we learn public speaking in order to be able to address other audiences where we can do some good. In some cases, your audience might consist of young children who are not ready to accept the fact that a whale is not a fish or that the moon is always round even though it sometimes appears to be a crescent or a half circle. In other cases, your audience might include retirees living on fixed incomes and who therefore might not agree that raising local taxes is a vital "investment in the future."

Even in an audience that appears to be **homogeneous**—composed of people who are very similar to one another—different listeners will understand the same ideas in different ways. Every member of every audience has his or her own frame of reference—the unique set of perspectives, experience, knowledge, and values belonging to every individual. An audience member who has been in a car accident caused by a drunk driver might not appreciate a lighthearted joke about barhopping. Similarly, stressing the importance of graduate school might be discouraging to audience members who don't know whether they can even afford to stay in college to complete an undergraduate degree.

These examples illustrate why audience analysis—the process of learning all you reasonably can about your audience—is so centrally important. Audience analysis includes consideration of demographic information, such as the gender, age range, marital status, race, and ethnicity of the people in your audience. Another, perhaps less obvious, demographic factor is socioeconomic status, which refers to a combination of characteristics including income, wealth, level of education, and occupational prestige. Each of these dimensions gives you some information about which kinds of topics, and which aspects of various topics, will be well received.

Avoid Offensive Remarks

It might seem obvious that speakers should use audience analysis to avoid making offensive remarks, but even very experienced speakers sometimes forget this basic rule. If you were an Anglo-American elected official addressing a Latino audience, would you make a joke about a Mexican American person's name sounding similar to the name of a popular brand of tequila? In fact, a state governor did just that in June 2011. Not suprisingly, news organizations covering the event reported that the joke fell flat.[5] People are members of groups they didn't choose and can't change. We didn't choose our race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, intellectual potential, or appearance. We already know that jokes aimed at people because of their membership in these groups are not just politically incorrect but also ethically wrong.

It is not only insensitive humor that can offend an audience. Speakers also need to be aware of language and nonverbal behaviors that state or imply a negative message about people based on their various membership groups. Examples include language that suggests that all scientists are men, that all relationships are heterosexual, or that all ethnic minorities are unpatriotic. By the same token, we should avoid embedding assumptions about people in our messages. Even the most subtle suggestion may not go unnoticed. For example, if, in your speech, you assume that elderly people are frail and expensively medicated, you may offend people whose elder loved ones do not conform in any way to your assumptions.

Scholars Samovar and McDaniel tell us that ethical language choices require four guidelines:

1. Be accurate; present the facts accurately.
2. Be aware of the emotional impact; make sure that you don't manipulate feelings.
3. Avoid hateful words; refrain from language that disparages or belittles people.
4. Be sensitive to the audience; know how audience members prefer to be identified (e.g., Native American instead of Indian, women instead of girls, African American instead of black, disabled instead of crippled).[6]

If you alienate your audience, they will stop listening. They will refuse to accept your message, no matter how true or important it is. They might even become hostile. If you fail to recognize the complexity of your audience members and if you treat them as stereotypes, they will resent your assumptions and doubt your credibility.

Ethical Speaking is Sincere Speaking

Ethos is the term Aristotle used to refer to what we now call credibility: the perception that the speaker is honest, knowledgeable, and rightly motivated. Your ethos, or credibility, must be established as you build rapport with your listeners. Have you put forth the effort to learn who they are and what you can offer to them in your speech? Do you respect them as individual human beings? Do you respect them enough to serve their needs and interests? Is your topic relevant and appropriate for them? Is your approach honest and sensitive to their preexisting beliefs? Your ability to answer these questions in a constructive way must be based on the best demographic and psychographic information you can use to learn about your listeners.

The audience needs to know they can trust the speaker's motivations, intentions, and knowledge. They must believe that the speaker has no hidden motives, will not manipulate or trick them, and has their best interests at heart.

In order to convey regard and respect for the audience, you must be sincere. You must examine the motives behind your topic choice, the true purpose of your speech, and your willingness to do the work of making sure the content of the speech is true and

represents reality. This can be difficult for students who face time constraints and multiple demands on their efforts. However, the attitude you assume for this task represents, in part, the kind of professional, citizen, parent, and human being you want to be. Even if you've given this issue little thought up to now, you can examine your motives and the integrity of your research and message construction. Ethically, you should.

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2.4.3: Three Types of Audience Analysis

2.4.3: Three Types of Audience Analysis

Learning Objectives

- Analyze demographic information to tailor speech content.
- Interpret psychographic information to connect with an audience.
- Assess situational information to adapt speech delivery.

While audience analysis does not guarantee against errors in judgment, it will help you make good choices in topic, language, style of presentation, and other aspects of your speech. The more you know about your audience, the better you can serve their interests and needs. There are certainly limits to what we can learn through information collection, and we need to acknowledge that before making assumptions, but knowing how to gather and use information through audience analysis is an essential skill for successful speakers. In this section, we're going to look at three types of audience analysis: demographic, psychographic, and situational.

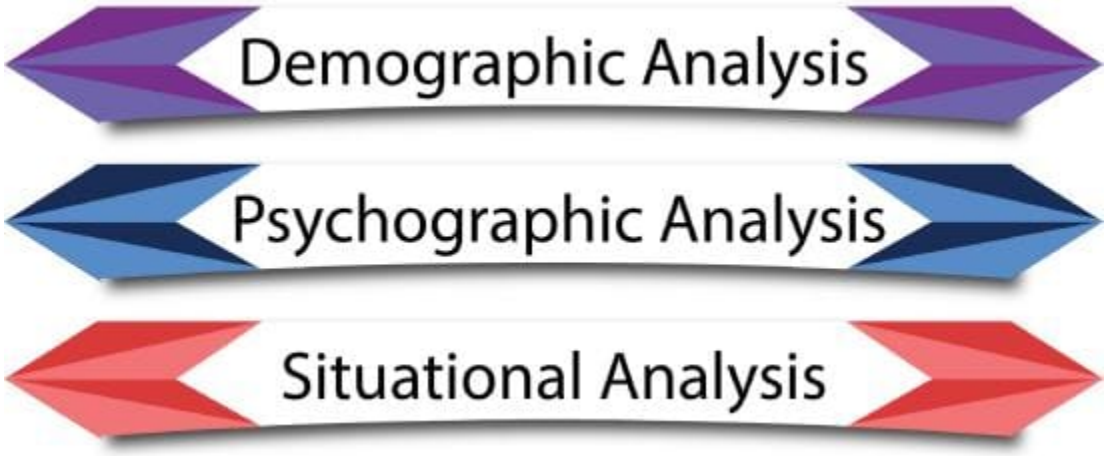


Figure 2.4.3.1 Three Types of Audience Analysis-Demographic Analysis, Psychographic Analysis, Situational Analysis

Demographic Analysis

As indicated earlier, demographic information includes factors such as gender, age range, marital status, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In your public speaking class, you probably already know how many students are male and female, their approximate ages, and so forth. But how can you assess the demographics of an audience ahead of time if you have had no previous contact with them? In many cases, you can ask the person or organization that has invited you to speak; it's likely that they can tell you a lot about the demographics of the people who are expected to come to hear you.

Whatever method you use to gather demographics, exercise respect from the outset. For instance, if you are collecting information about whether audience members have ever been divorced, be aware that not everyone will want to answer your questions. You can't require them to do so, and you may not make assumptions about their reluctance to discuss the topic. You must allow them their privacy.

Age

There are certain things you can learn about an audience based on age. For instance, if your audience members are first-year college students, you can assume that they have grown up in the post-9/11 era and have limited memory of what life was like before the "war on terror." If your audience includes people in their forties and fifties, it is likely they remember a time when

people feared they would contract the AIDS virus from shaking hands with a person who had AIDS or using a public restroom. People who are in their sixties today came of age during the 1960s, the era of the Vietnam War and a time of social confrontation and experimentation. They also have frames of reference that contribute to the way they think, although it may not be easy to predict which side of the issues they support.

Gender

Gender can define human experience. Clearly, most women have had a different cultural experience from that of men within the same culture. Some women have found themselves excluded from certain careers. Some men have found themselves blamed for the limitations imposed on women. In books such as You Just Don't Understand and Talking from 9 to 5, linguist Deborah Tannen has written extensively on differences between men's and women's communication styles. Tannen explains, "This is not to say that all women and all men, or all boys and girls, behave any one way. Many factors influence our styles, including regional and ethnic backgrounds, family experience and individual personality. But gender is a key factor, and understanding its influence can help clarify what happens when we talk."[7]

Marriage tends to impose additional roles on both men and women and divorce even more so, especially if there are children. Even if your audience consists of young adults who have not yet made occupational or marital commitments, they are still aware that gender and the choices they make about issues such as careers and relationships will influence their experience as adults.

Culture

In past generations, Americans often used the metaphor of a "melting pot" to symbolize the assimilation of immigrants from various countries and cultures into a unified, harmonious "American people." Today, we are aware of the limitations in that metaphor, and have largely replaced it with a multiculturalist view that describes the American fabric as a "patchwork" or a "mosaic." We know that people who immigrate do not abandon their cultures of origin in order to conform to a standard American identity. In fact, cultural continuity is now viewed as a healthy source of identity.

We also know that subcultures and cocultures exist within and alongside larger cultural groups. For example, while we are aware that Native American people do not all embrace the same values, beliefs, and customs as mainstream white Americans, we also know that members of the Navajo nation have different values, beliefs, and customs from those of members of the Sioux or the Seneca. We know that African American people in urban centers like Detroit and Boston do not share the same cultural experiences as those living in rural Mississippi. Similarly, white Americans in San Francisco may be culturally rooted in the narrative of distant ancestors from Scotland, Italy, or Sweden or in the experience of having emigrated much more recently from Australia, Croatia, or Poland.

Not all cultural membership is visibly obvious. For example, people in German American and Italian American families have widely different sets of values and practices, yet others may not be able to differentiate members of these groups. Differences are what make each group interesting and are important sources of knowledge, perspectives, and creativity.

Religion

There is wide variability in religion as well. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found in a nationwide survey that 84 percent of Americans identify with at least one of a dozen major religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and others. Within Christianity alone, there are half a dozen categories including Roman Catholic, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, Orthodox (Greek and Russian), and a variety of Protestant denominations. Another 6 percent said they were unaffiliated but religious, meaning that only one American in ten is atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular."[8]

Even within a given denomination, a great deal of diversity can be found. For instance, among Roman Catholics alone, there are people who are devoutly religious, people who self-identify as Catholic but do not attend mass or engage in other religious practices, and others who faithfully make confession and attend mass but who openly question Papal doctrine on various issues. Catholicism among immigrants from the Caribbean and Brazil is often blended with indigenous religion or with religion imported from the west coast of Africa. It is very different from Catholicism in the Vatican.

The dimensions of diversity in the religion demographic are almost endless, and they are not limited by denomination. Imagine conducting an audience analysis of people belonging to an individual congregation rather than a denomination: even there, you will most likely find a multitude of variations that involve how one was brought up, adoption of a faith system as an adult, how

strictly one observes religious practices, and so on.

Yet, even with these multiple facets, religion is still a meaningful demographic lens. It can be an indicator of probable patterns in family relationships, family size, and moral attitudes.

Group Membership

In your classroom audience alone, there will be students from a variety of academic majors. Every major has its own set of values, goals, principles, and codes of ethics. A political science student preparing for law school might seem to have little in common with a student of music therapy, for instance. In addition, there are other group memberships that influence how audience members understand the world. Fraternities and sororities, sports teams, campus organizations, political parties, volunteerism, and cultural communities all provide people with ways of understanding the world as it is and as we think it should be.

Because public speaking audiences are very often members of one group or another, group membership is a useful and often easy to access facet of audience analysis. The more you know about the associations of your audience members, the better prepared you will be to tailor your speech to their interests, expectations, and needs.

Education

Education is expensive, and people pursue education for many reasons. Some people seek to become educated, while others seek to earn professional credentials. Both are important motivations. If you know the education levels attained by members of your audience, you might not know their motivations, but you will know to what extent they could somehow afford the money for an education, afford the time to get an education, and survive educational demands successfully.

The kind of education is also important. For instance, an airplane mechanic undergoes a very different kind of education and training from that of an accountant or a software engineer. This means that not only the attained level of education but also the particular field is important in your understanding of your audience.

Occupation

People choose occupations for reasons of motivation and interest, but their occupations also influence their perceptions and their interests. There are many misconceptions about most occupations. For instance, many people believe that teachers work an eight-hour day and have summers off. When you ask teachers, however, you might be surprised to find out that they take work home with them for evenings and weekends, and during the summer, they may teach summer school as well as taking courses in order to keep up with new developments in their fields. But even if you don't know those things, you would still know that teachers have had rigorous generalized and specialized qualifying education, that they have a complex set of responsibilities in the classroom and the institution, and that, to some extent, they have chosen a relatively low-paying occupation over such fields as law, advertising, media, fine and performing arts, or medicine. If your audience includes doctors and nurses, you know that you are speaking to people with differing but important philosophies of health and illness. Learning about those occupational realities is important in avoiding wrong assumptions and stereotypes. We insist that you not assume that nurses are merely doctors "lite." Their skills, concerns, and responsibilities are almost entirely different, and both are crucially necessary to effective health care.

Psychographic Analysis

Earlier, we mentioned psychographic information, which includes such things as values, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. Authors Grice and Skinner present a model in which values are the basis for beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.[9] Values are the foundation of their pyramid model. They say, "A value expresses a judgment of what is desirable and undesirable, right and wrong, or good and evil. Values are usually stated in the form of a word or phrase. For example, most of us probably share the values of equality, freedom, honesty, fairness, justice, good health, and family. These values compose the principles or standards we use to judge and develop our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors."

It is important to recognize that, while demographic information as discussed in Section 2 is fairly straightforward and verifiable, psychographic information is much less clear-cut. Two different people who both say they believe in equal educational opportunity may have very different interpretations of what "equal opportunity" means. People who say they don't buy junk food may have very different standards for what specific kinds of foods are considered "junk food."

We also acknowledge that people inherit some values from their family upbringing, cultural influences, and life experiences. The extent to which someone values family loyalty and obedience to parents, thrift, humility, and work may be determined by these influences more than by individual choice.

Psychographic analysis can reveal preexisting notions that limit your audience's frame of reference. By knowing about such notions ahead of time, you can address them in your speech. Audiences are likely to have two basic kinds of preexisting notions: those about the topic and those about the speaker.

Preexisting Notions About Your Topic

Many things are a great deal more complex than we realize. Media stereotypes often contribute to our oversimplifications. For instance, one of your authors, teaching public speaking in the past decade, was surprised to hear a student claim that "the hippies meant well, but they did it wrong." Aside from the question of the "it" that was done wrong, there was a question about how little the student actually knew about the diverse hippy cultures and their aspirations. The student seemed unaware that some of "the hippies" were the forebears of such things as organic bakeries, natural food co-ops, urban gardens, recycling, alternative energy, wellness, and other arguably positive developments.

It's important to know your audience in order to make a rational judgment about how their views of your topic might be shaped. In speaking to an audience that might have differing definitions, you should take care to define your terms in a clear, honest way.

At the opposite end from oversimplification is the level of sophistication your audience might embody. Your audience analysis should include factors that reveal it. Suppose you are speaking about trends in civil rights in the United States. You cannot pretend that the advancement of civil rights is virtually complete nor can you claim that no progress has been made. It is likely that in a college classroom, the audience will know that although much progress has been made, there are still pockets of prejudice, discrimination, and violence. When you speak to an audience that is cognitively complex, your strategy must be different from one you would use for an audience that is less educated in the topic. With a cognitively complex audience, you must acknowledge the overall complexity while stating that your focus will be on only one dimension. With an audience that's uninformed about your topic, that strategy in a persuasive speech could confuse them; they might well prefer a black-and-white message with no gray areas. You must decide whether it is ethical to represent your topic this way.

When you prepare to do your audience analysis, include questions that reveal how much your audience already knows about your topic. Try to ascertain the existence of stereotyped, oversimplified, or prejudiced attitudes about it. This could make a difference in your choice of topic or in your approach to the audience and topic.

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2.4.4: Tools to Conduct an Audience Analysis

Learning Objectives

- Use several tools for gathering audience information.
- Explain how these tools for audience analysis are effective and their faults.

Now that we have described what audience analysis is and why it is important, let's examine some details of how to conduct it. Exactly how can you learn about the people who will make up your audience?

Direct Observation

One way to learn about people is to observe them. By observing nonverbal patterns of behavior, you can learn a great deal as long as you are careful how you interpret the behaviors. For instance, do people greet each other with a handshake, a hug, a smile, or a nod? Do members of opposite sexes make physical contact? Does the setting suggest more conservative behavior? By listening in on conversations, you can find out the issues that concern people. Are people in the campus center talking about political unrest in the Middle East? About concerns over future Pell Grant funding? We suggest that you consider the ethical dimensions of eavesdropping, however. Are you simply overhearing an open conversation, or are you prying into a highly personal or private discussion?

Interviews and Surveys



Figure 2.4.4.1 Image by Tungilik on Wikimedia

Because your demographic analysis will be limited to your most likely audience, your most accurate way to learn about them is to seek personal information through interviews and surveys. An interview is a one-on-one exchange in which you ask questions of a respondent, whereas a survey is a set of questions administered to several—or, preferably, many—respondents. Interviews may be conducted face-to-face, by phone, or by written means, such as texting. They allow more in-depth discussion than surveys, and they are also more time consuming to conduct. Surveys are also sometimes conducted face-to-face or by phone, but online surveys are increasingly common. You may collect and tabulate survey results manually, or set up an automated online survey through the free or subscription portals of sites like Survey Monkey and Qualtrics. Using an online survey provides the advantage of keeping responses anonymous, which may increase your audience members' willingness to participate and to answer personal questions. Surveys are an efficient way to collect information quickly; however, in contrast to interviews, they don't allow for follow-up questions to help you understand why your respondent gave a certain answer.

When you use interviews and surveys, there are several important things to keep in mind:

- Make sure your interview and survey questions are directly related to your speech topic. Do not use interviews to delve into private areas of people's lives. For instance, if your speech is about the debate between creationism and evolution, limit your questions to their opinions about that topic; do not meander into their beliefs about sexual behavior or their personal religious practices.
- Create and use a standard set of questions. If you "ad lib" your questions so that they are phrased differently for different interviewees, you will be comparing "apples and oranges" when you compare the responses you've obtained.
- Keep interviews and surveys short and make participation voluntary.
- Involve as many audience members as possible, to increase accuracy of results.

In addition, when you conduct interviews and surveys, keep in mind that people are sometimes less than honest in describing their beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. This widely recognized weakness of interviews and survey research is known as socially desirable responding: the tendency to give responses that are considered socially acceptable. Marketing professor Ashok Lalwani divides socially desirable responding into two types: (1) impression management, or intentionally portraying oneself in a favorable light and (2) self-deceptive enhancement, or exaggerating one's good qualities, often unconsciously.[10]

You can reduce the effects of socially desirable responding by choosing your questions carefully. As marketing consultant Terry Vavra advises, "one should never ask what one can't logically expect respondents to honestly reveal."[11] For example, if you want to know audience members' attitudes about body piercing, you are likely to get more honest answers by asking "Do you think body piercing is attractive?" rather than "How many piercings do you have and where on your body are they located?"

Focus Groups



Figure 2.4.4.2 Image by Dilban on Flickr

A focus group is a small group of people who give you feedback about their perceptions. As with interviews and surveys, in a focus group you should use a limited list of carefully prepared questions designed to get at the information you need to understand their beliefs, attitudes, and values specifically related to your topic.

If you conduct a focus group, part of your task will be striking a balance between allowing the discussion to flow freely according to what group members have to say and keeping the group focused on the questions. It's also your job to guide the group in maintaining responsible and respectful behavior toward each other.

In evaluating focus group feedback, do your best to be receptive to what people had to say, whether or not it conforms to what you expected. Your purpose in conducting the group was to understand group members' beliefs, attitudes, and values about your topic, not to confirm your assumptions.

Use Existing Data About Your Audience

Occasionally, existing information will be available about your audience. For instance, if you have a student audience, it might

not be difficult to find out what their academic majors are. You might also be able to find out their degree of investment in their educations; for instance, you could reasonably assume that the seniors in the audience have been successful students who have invested at least three years pursuing a higher education. Sophomores have at least survived their first year but may not have matched the seniors in demonstrating strong values toward education and the work ethic necessary to earn a degree.

In another kind of an audience, you might be able to learn other significant facts. For instance, are they veterans? Are they retired teachers? Are they members of a voluntary civic organization such as the Lions Club or Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)? This kind of information should help you respond to their concerns and interests.

In other cases, you may be able to use demographics collected by public and private organizations. Demographic analysis is done by the U.S. Census Bureau through the American Community Survey(opens in new window), which is conducted every year, and through other specialized demographic surveys. The Census Bureau analysis generally captures information about people in all the regions of the United States, but you can drill down in Census data to see results by state, age group, gender, race, and other factors.

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2.4.5: Using Existing Data About Your Audience

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Demographic information about narrower segments of the United States, down to the level of individual zip codes, is available through private organizations such as The Nielsen Company (www.nielsen.com/), Sperling's Best Places (www.bestplaces.net), and Point2Homes (www.point2homes.com). Sales and marketing professionals use this data, and you may find it useful for your audience analysis as well.

Key Takeaways

- Several options exist for learning about your audience, including direct observation, interviews, surveys, focus groups, and using existing research about your audience.
- In order to create effective tools for audience analysis, interview and survey questions must be clear and to the point, focus groups must be facilitated carefully, and you must be aware of multiple interpretations of direct observations or existing research about your audience.

Exercises

- Write a coherent set of four clear questions about a given issue, such as campus library services, campus computer centers, or the process of course registration. Make your questions concrete and specific in order to address the information you seek. Do not allow opportunities for your respondent to change the subject. Test out your questions on a classmate.
- Write a set of six questions about public speaking anxiety to be answered on a Likert-type scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree).
- Create a seven-question set designed to discover your audience's attitudes about your speech topic. Have a partner evaluate your questions for clarity, respect for audience privacy, and relevance to your topic.

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2.4.6: Tailoring your Speech to the Audience

Learning Objectives

- Provide examples of how you might tailor a speech with the same subject to two very different audiences.
- Explain how demographic information, audience size, and setting of a public speech influence the preparation and delivery of a public speech

Once you have gathered some basic information about your audience, you will also want to find out approximately how many people will be in the audience and what the setting will be for the speech. It is important to know whether your audience is diverse or homogenous. A diverse audience consists of people from different backgrounds, ages, educational levels, and genders, whereas a homogenous audience has much more in common and tend to be very similar to one another.

"The audience analysis information gets utilized before, during, and after your speech. In this section, we'll examine how knowing the audience allows the speaker to target gathering specific types of research that will appeal to the audience of the speech. This information will also be applied to the structure and organization of the speech and all the parts of its content, from vocabulary to visual aids. Using this information is truly an art form in and of itself, and sophisticated speakers use this data intentionally to motivate their audiences."

Audience Analysis, Topic, and Research

Once you have completed your audience analysis, you will want to consider how to use this information to make your speech more effective. The first area where the audience analysis will be helpful is in the research you choose to present in your speech. When you deliver a speech to a specific audience, it is important to think through the types of research relevant to them.

Example 1: Tailoring your Speech to your Audience

Informative Speech: Early Cancer Detection

Let's say you are giving a speech about early cancer detection. If you are speaking to a majority female audience, it would be important to include research that highlights the importance of early detection of breast and ovarian cancers. On the other hand, if your audience is primarily male, it would be essential to discuss prostate cancer. Let's say your audience is a mix of males and females. In that case, you would discuss cancers where early detection tools are available for both sexes. Knowing who is in your audience will help to focus your research, as well as to choose the most relevant citations for your speech.

Example 2: Tailoring your Speech to the Audience

Subject: K-12 Public Education

Let's take a different demographic example. In this case, let's say you are making two different speeches about K-12 public education this week. The first speech will be in New York City to the Principals of Public High School. The other speech will be in rural Mississippi to parents of public school elementary school students. Of course, as we previously discussed, it is essential to research relevant articles and government documents for each of these audiences. Beyond ensuring that the research is specific to the state where you plan to speak, you will also want to consider what type of sources these different audiences would find credible. Let's look at each audience:

1. Public High School Principals in New York City - At a minimum, most of these audience members will hold (at a minimum) a Master's Degree. They will mostly likely be familiar with basic statistics about high school students in New York City. It will be important - in order to earn and maintain credibility with this audience - to use very recent research (ideally within the last 2-3 years) from respected academic journals, government documents, and substantive news sources

2. Parents of Elementary School students in rural Mississipi - This audience may be quite diverse. In general, the poverty rate in deeply rural areas of the south may be quite high and the highest level of educational attainment may be less than 9th grade. However, there are also several college towns in rural Mississippi, where parents are highly educated, with graduate level degrees. In these college towns, the socioeconomic status of the population will likely be different, with decreased poverty. For this diverse audience, the speaker will want to use local statistics and news sources, recent information from government documents and academic journals. It makes sense to use visuals, like graphs and tables, to present information, which is helpful for all audience members, regardless of education.

Audience Analysis and Culture for Organization, and Delivery

As we consider the audience, we can consider cultural background. Two specific areas of culture that are important to think about when planning and delivering a speech are the cultural value orientation and the use of time. These two cultural dimensions are important because they shape group norms, perceptions about communication, and group dynamics. Let's start by looking at the difference between **individualism** and **collectivism.**

Individualistic Cultures value personal freedom, independence, and personal choices. Members of these cultures feel rewarded when they receive personal recognition for their achievements. America is an individualistic culture.

Collectivist Cultures value interdependence, cooperation, and the goals of the group. Members of these cultures do not seek personal recognition; instead finding satisfaction in the achievements of their group or community, due in part to their contributions. China and Japan are collectivist cultures.

Example

Imagine you are delivering a persuasive speech to a car manufacturer in the United States vs. Japan. In your speech, you speak with the car design team and encourage them to create a design that fits their culture. How might you address each audience? Write the first two sentences of your speech. We call the first sentence the **attention getter** (the first line of your speech to capture people's awareness and focus) for each group. The second sentence is often the **purpose statement**, or a one sentence description of your goal for the speech.

"Time is on my side." - The Rolling Stones


Figure 2.4.6.1 Time by Tomasz Krawczak on Flickr licensed as CC-BY-NC 2.0.

Use of time is another cultural dimension that is important to consider when writing and delivering a speech. There are two major ways cultures use time:

Monochronic Cultures value attention to doing one thing at a time. Often monochronic time users are part of individualistic cultures. Americans are highly monochronic in their use of time. They value having exact start and end times, not intermingling one task with another, and punctuality. They have sayings like "time is money." In monochronic cultures, sticking to a strict schedule is valued over relational needs.

Polychronic Cultures value flexible use of time and do not mind conducting several tasks or meetings at one given time. Polychronic time users value the relationships and consideration of other people over scheduling or maintaining strict timing. In these cultures, if you ask what time the train comes, someone may answer "it will be here." There is no reason to let someone know you might be 30 minutes late, as time is less important than your companionship and presence, whenever it happens.

Don't Forget Your Audience

Any time you are constructing a speech, it is essential that you keep your audience in mind. As you see from the examples and exercises on this page, the makeup of your audience and the setting where you will speak should provide the context for your speech development and delivery. The speaker's ability to tailor a speech to an audience will be one of the most important factors that determine whether the message effectively gets across, as intended.

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2.5: CHOOSING AND RESEARCHING A TOPIC

2.5.1: Choosing and Narrowing a Topic
2.5.2: Finding the Purpose and Central Idea of Your Speech
2.5.3: Research and Analyzing Evidence
2.5.4: Putting It Together- Choosing and Researching a Topic

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2.5.1: Choosing and Narrowing a Topic

The first thing to do when picking a topic for an assignment is to take a deep breath and know you WILL find a topic that works! Once you're ready to move forward, the second thing to do is to examine the assignment carefully for guidelines. Even the most wide open research assignment should have some parameters that help you narrow your selection of a purpose or topic area. For instance, did the instructor place any restrictions on your topic, such as providing specific options or identifying areas that you can't use?

Passion, Audience, and Knowledge

According to award-winning public speaker Andrew Dlugan, speakers should ask themselves three questions before choosing a topic:

1. Am I an expert on this topic?
2. Am I passionate about this topic?
3. Does my audience care about this topic?[1]

Following Dlugan's three areas, let's look at how considering all three of these areas help us to find a speech topic that will work for any speech. It is essential to choose a topic you feel passionate about. You will spend quite a bit of time researching this topic, writing, and delivering a speech about it. Also, the speaker's feelings about a topic will be obvious to the audience, so make sure you have a good deal of interest in what you will focus on. Once you have some areas that you feel enthusiastic about sharing with an audience, consider your audience. If your audience has no interest in your topic, all the research and passion in the world may not make this topic relatable to the people who are sitting in front of you. Finally, if you already have experience or knowledge in a specific area, you will have a level of comfort and expertise with this subject. This will likely make you a more confident and informed speaker.

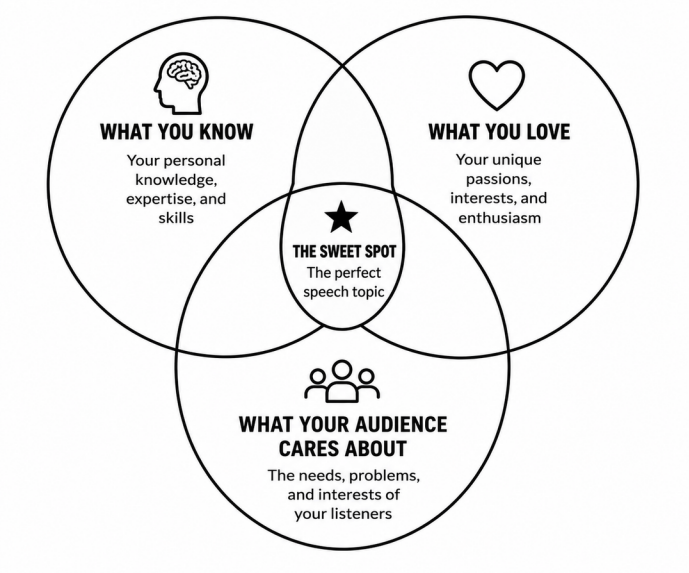


Figure 2.5.1.1 Venn Diagram – AI-generated image, adapted by the author

Narrowing Your Topic

Congratulations, you have chosen your topic area! Now it's time to narrow your topic. Narrowing your topic means thinking about what you can adequately cover in the time allowed for your speech. How narrow or broad to make your speech will depend on the amount of time you are provided. For example, let's say your topic is Classical Music. If you have a semester to lecture about this to an audience, you could discuss a different composer each week, including Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, etc. If your instructor

gives your group 20 minutes to speak, you might split up your time to cover different eras, including Baroque, Romantic, Classical, and 20th Century. The most likely scenario for an individual speech would be a 3-8 minute speech. In this case, you will want to narrow your speech to either a specific era of classical music or a specific composer. This will allow you enough time to both discuss the details of this narrowed area, while also leaving space to play audio examples for your audience.

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2.5.2: Finding the Purpose and Central Idea of Your Speech

Learning Objectives

- Identify the specific purpose of a speech.
- Explain how to formulate a central idea statement for a speech.

General Purpose

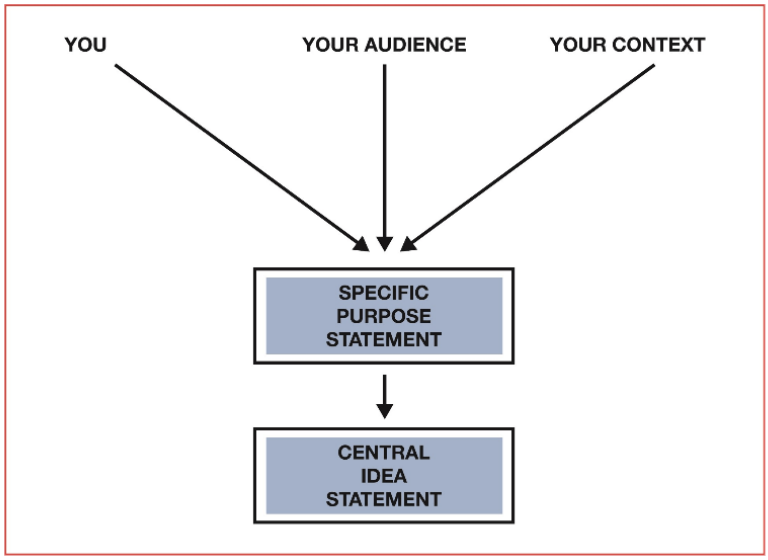
The general purpose of most speeches will fall into one of four categories: to **inform**, to **persuade**, to **entertain**, and to **commemorate or celebrate**. The first step of defining the purpose of your speech is to think about which category best describes your *overall* goal with the speech. What do you want your audience to think, feel, or do as a consequence of hearing you speak? Often, the general purpose of your speech will be defined by the speaking situation. If you're asked to run a training session at work, your purpose isn't to entertain but rather to inform. Likewise, if you are invited to introduce the winner of an award, you're not trying to change the audience's mind about something; you're honoring the recipient of the award. In a public speaking class, your general purpose may be included in the assignment: for instance, "Give a persuasive speech about . . . ." When you're assigned a speech project, you should always make sure you know whether the general purpose is included in the assignment or whether you need to decide on the general purpose yourself.

Specific Purpose

Now that you know your general purpose (to inform, to persuade, or to entertain), you can start to move in the direction of the specific purpose. A specific purpose statement builds on your general purpose and makes it more specific (as the name suggests). So if your first speech is an informative speech, your general purpose will be to inform your audience about a very specific realm of knowledge.

In writing your specific purpose statement, you will take three contributing elements and bring them together to help you determine your specific purpose :

- You (your interests, your background, experience, education, etc.)
- Your audience
- The context or setting



There are three elements that combine to create a specific purpose statements: your own interests and knowledge, the interests and needs of your audience, and the context or setting in which you will be speaking.

Keeping these three inputs in mind, you can begin to write a **specific purpose statement,** which will be the foundation for everything you say in the speech and a guide for what you do not say. This formula will help you in putting together your specific purpose statement:

> To _____ [Specific Communication Word (inform, explain, demonstrate, describe, define, persuade, convince, prove, argue)] _____ [Target Audience (my classmates, the members of the Social Work Club, my coworkers] _____. [The Content (how to bake brownies, that Macs are better than PCs].
>
> Example: The purpose of my presentation is to **demonstrate** to **my coworkers** the **value of informed intercultural communication**.

Formulating a Central Idea Statement

While you will not actually say your specific purpose statement during your speech, you will need to clearly state what your focus and main points are going to be. The statement that reveals your main points is commonly known as the central idea statement (or just the central idea). Just as you would create a thesis statement for an essay or research paper, the central idea statement helps focus your presentation by defining your topic, purpose, direction, angle, and/or point of view. Here are two examples:

- Specific Purpose—To explain to my classmates the effects of losing a pet on the elderly.
  - Central Idea—When elderly persons lose their animal companions, they can experience serious psychological, emotional, and physical effects.
- Specific Purpose—To demonstrate to my audience the correct method for cleaning a computer keyboard.
  - Central Idea—Your computer keyboard needs regular cleaning to function well, and you can achieve that in four easy steps.

Please note that your central idea will emerge and evolve as you research and write your speech, so be open to where your research takes you and anticipate that formulating your central idea will be an ongoing process.

Below are four guidelines for writing a strong central idea.

1. Your central idea should be one, full sentence.
2. Your central idea should be a statement, not a question.
3. Your central idea should be specific and use concrete language.
4. Each element of your central idea should be related to the others.

Using the topic “Benefits of Yoga for College Students’ Stress,” here are some correct and incorrect ways to write a central idea.

Strong formulation of the central idea	Weak formulation of the central idea
Yoga practice can help college students improve the quality of their sleep, improve posture, and manage anxiety.	Yoga is great for many things. It can help you sleep better and not be so stiff. Yoga also helps you feel better. (This central idea is not one sentence and uses vague words.)
Yoga practice can help college students focus while studying, manage stress, and increase mindfulness.	What are the benefits of yoga for college students? (This central idea should be a statement, not a question.)
Yoga is an inclusive, low-impact practice that offers mental and physical benefits for a beginning athlete, a highly competitive athlete, and everyone in between.	Yoga is great and everyone should try it! (This central idea uses vague language.)
Yoga practice can help college students develop mindfulness so they can manage anxiety, increase their sense of self-worth, and improve decision-making.	Yoga practice increases mindfulness, but can lead to some injuries and it takes at least 200 hours of training to become an instructor. (The elements of this central idea are not related to one another.)

A strong central idea shows that your speech is focused around a clear and concise topic and that you have a strong sense of what you want your audience to know and understand as a result of your speech. Again, it is unlikely that you will have a final central idea before you begin your research. Instead, it will come together as you research your topic and develop your main points.

Try It

https://assess.lumenlearning.com/pra...d-8e0afd5c288a

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2.5.3: Research and Analyzing Evidence

Essential to being an ethical speaker is credibility and telling the truth. What do we need to ensure we are delivering truthful information to an audience? The answer is trustworthy research. Developing a speech may start with an idea or passion for a specific subject. Once the main topic is chosen, we need to rely on evidence and research to create an outline. This section will discuss how to evaluate sources of information, how to use and cite these sources in our speech outlines and in our oral delivery.

Evaluating Sources of Evidence

It can be confusing for students looking for trustworthy sources. There are four major sources you can start with that are generally accepted as trustworthy:

1. Academic or Scholarly Journals - These are peer-reviewed articles written by and for college faculty or scientific researchers. The evidence and testing has been thoroughly analyzed by multiple readers and the projects or research have been assessed for accuracy, as well as currency. Examples include: Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), Journal of Family Communication, and American Economic Review
2. Trustworthy News Sources - This can be very tricky, as many people get their "news" from unreliable sources. Look for either local newspapers or national/international news sources that have editors who fact-check each article before publishing, correct any errors in published articles, ideally have primary sources on the ground to interview people and visit sites directly. Examples of trustworthy news sources include the Chicago Tribune, New York Times, the newswires Reuters, Associated Press (AP), and local news sources such as the Baltimore Banner and Miami Herald. Stay away from online only websites, television or radio shows or podcasts where fact-checking does not occur and there is an obvious bias.
3. Government Documents - These may be letters from an official, a report from the United Nations, or historical information from the National Archives (including Presidential Speeches). Government documents found online will typically from a website ending in ".gov" and provide the original material used without analysis.
4. University Published Books - These non-fiction books may be a published version of a student's dissertation or a faculty academic text. Although there may be a personal bias, this generally must be stated by the author, making that partisanship explicit. Typically these include a great number of citations of trustworthy sources.

Beyond looking at the type of source, make sure the information is current. It is best if the source is within ten years of publication. The more recent the source, the more trustworthy and relevant this will be to your audience.

CRAAP Test

Many university libraries suggest using the "CRAAP Test"[to evaluate sources of information. The CRAAP Test[1] asks the user to test for:

Currency - Is the publication within five to ten years?

Relevance - Does this information or research directly pertain to your subject?

Authority - Is the author or researcher someone with expertise in the topic?

Accuracy - Has the information been fact-checked? Is it unbiased?

Purpose - What is the purpose of the source? Is it informative or educational? Please consider if the source attempted to persuade the reader or sell something.



Figure 2.5.3.1 Blakeslee, Sarah (2004) "The CRAAP Test," *LOEX Quarterly*: Vol. 31: No. 3, Article 4.
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2.5.4: Putting It Together- Choosing and Researching a Topic

Choosing a topic is one of the hardest parts of public speaking. As we discussed in this module, the best topics are found at the intersection of three areas:

- What do you know about?
- What matters to you?
- What interests your audience?

Once you've found a topic that satisfies all three questions, you can start narrowing down the topic. How can you make the topic fit perfectly into the amount of time you have to speak? How can you cover it in a way that will speak to the audience's interests and level of pre-existing knowledge?

When you've found the specific purpose of your speech, it's time to do some research to find supporting materials for your speech. These might be stories and testimony or statistics and data. Either way, it's crucial to carefully vet any information you will be using in your speech to make sure it's accurate and credible.

Contributors and Attributions

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3: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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3.1: Understanding the Self—Who You Are

Learning Objectives

- Define the Self
- Define Self-Concept
- Understand how self-concept influences self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Identify how self-awareness impacts self-monitoring
- Evaluate how uppers, downers, and vultures can impact the self

The Search for "Self"

A simple Google search for self-help websites yields over 1,330,000,000 results. A search on Amazon for self-help books results in over 100,000 books. There are hundreds of quotes on self-concept and self-esteem available to purchase as wall art. It would be safe to say that the search for “self,” or the betterment of oneself, can be a lifelong journey. Like many journeys in life, there are hills and valleys, or bumps in the road, that can impact how quickly we get to our destination. But what influences how we see ourselves? How much of ourselves is a product of our own making, and how much of it is constructed based on how others interact with us? Can societal forces influence our sense of self, and if so, how do we manage how we present ourselves to others? We will begin to answer these questions in this chapter as we explore the self.

By studying the different concepts in this chapter, you will learn that your background, upbringing, family, friends, and teachers have been an integral part of the journey, informing who you are. Interpersonal communication is an integral part of our self-concept and identity. Communication helps to form our self-concept, and in turn, how we see ourselves on any given day will shape how we communicate with others. You will also see that mass media, advertising, and social media platforms greatly influence your sense of self. As you progress through this chapter, you will gain a better understanding of who you are through our communication with yourselves and others.

Perceptions of Self

Just as our perception of others affects how we communicate, so too does our perception or view of ourselves. But what influences how we see ourselves? How much of ourselves 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?



Figure 3.1.1: Reflecting Bullmatian by 6SN7 from Flickr is licensed CC-BY 2.0

Self-Concept

If we said, “Tell me who you are,” your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, and what you know about yourself. **Self-concept** refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks they are. We could say “I have brown hair,” “I am a professor,” and “I am short.” 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, your self-concept may be tied to a group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of a campus club, honor society, or athletic team. You also may consider your roles as part of your self-concept and this may include being a student, child, parent, co-worker, or friend. You may consider your heritage, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identification as integral to how you see yourself.

We are often asked in class, “Why am I the way I am?” The overall view you have of yourself is informed by both **nature** and **nurture**. The nature versus nurture debate involves the extent to which particular aspects of behavior are a product of either inherited (i.e., genetic) or acquired (i.e., learned) influences (McLeod, 2018). When considering the influence of nature, we recognize individuals as being “wired” a certain way based on their genetics, or biology. Personality traits would be considered part of nature, therefore people who are extroverted or introverted, agreeable or neurotic, show how self-concept is impacted by nature. It becomes important to understand this because these forces do impact how you see yourself, and thus how you communicate.

On the other hand, nurture takes external forces into account, such as what a person is exposed to, how they are treated, and what they are taught. For example, one of our authors shares their experience:

> I am a first-generation American and a child of immigrants. My brother and I were the first in our family to graduate college and go on for higher-level degrees. We also grew up in an economically disadvantaged family. We learned that to get ahead in life we needed to work for it. *I know that I am a hard worker.* This knowledge is a result of the environment I grew up in, the lessons I was taught, and socialization. In sum, these influences are examples of how self-concept is impacted by nurture.



Figure 3.1.2 How Do I Look? By Subharnab Majumdar from Flickr is licensed CC-BY 2.0

Self-Esteem

Whereas self-concept answers the question about who we are, self-esteem lets us know how we *feel* about the answer. **Self-esteem** refers to the judgments and evaluations we make *about* our self-concept. If the feeling is negative, then we have low self-worth or self-esteem; if the feeling is positive, then we have high self-esteem. The broad categories we looked at in self-concept are assessed at a more micro level when considering self-esteem. These self-evaluations occur daily as you assess how you feel about yourself. If we again prompted you to "Tell me who you are," and then asked you to evaluate each of the things you had listed about yourself, we would gain insight into your self-esteem. Labels such as good or bad, positive or negative, and desirable or undesirable are examples of how we assess ourselves.

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. One of our authors gives their own personal example here:

> Not everyone may be a great Salsa dancer. While some may appreciate dancing as an art form, they may not consider an ability to Salsa to be a very big part of their self-concept. If someone critiqued that person's dancing negatively, their self-esteem wouldn't suffer too much. However, I consider myself a good professor and I have spent my entire career studying and expanding my knowledge of communication. If someone negatively critiqued my teaching knowledge and/or abilities, my self-esteem would 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. Periodically I am evaluated by my students, my dean, and my colleagues. Most of that feedback is in the form of praise and 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 my 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. In addition, they are less negatively affected by work stress, can handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Most important to consider here is that you may not be viewing yourself as you truly are. That is why this chapter is so important in helping you become less judgmental about yourself.



Figure 3.1.3 Body Dysmorphia Cartoon is in the Public Domain

Self-Awareness

Awareness determines what you pay attention to, how you carry out your intentions, and what you remember of your activities and experiences each day. The way we take in information, give it order, and assign it meaning has long interested researchers from disciplines including Communication Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, and Psychology. **Awareness** means consciously taking note of the world around us. **Self-awareness** is self-focused attention or knowledge (American Psychological Association, 2020). Self-awareness in infants has been studied to reveal that infants as young as two months can recognize that they are distinct from their environments (Lawrie, 2018; Morin, 2011; Rochat, 2011). If you have ever had an opportunity to watch babies play with their feet, this example from one of the authors might resonate with you:

> When my daughter was an infant she was laying on her back while sticking her toes in her mouth. Some of her teeth had come through her gums, but she wasn't aware of that until she bit down hard. There was a look of shock on her face before she burst into tears. It was then that I realized that she was "aware" that those toes were connected to her entire body.

Even if you don't remember your infancy—and most of us don't—we am sure that each of you has a moment when you first recognized something distinct about yourself. This could range from when you realized what color your eyes were to whether you were able to proficiently throw a ball. In other words, you were noticing your feelings, your reactions, your thoughts, your behaviors, and more. According to sociologist George Herbert Mead (1934), it helps to have a strong sense of yourself, because you monitor your own behaviors and form impressions of who you are through self-observation.

Self-monitoring refers to the ability to regulate our communication and behavior to meet the demands or expectations of social situations. This means that people vary in the degree to which they manage their verbal and nonverbal behaviors and monitor how they present themselves in different situations. **High self-monitors** are particularly good at reading the emotions of others and therefore are better at fitting into social situations because they adapt their behaviors accordingly. They agree with statements such as "In different situations and with different people, 'I often act differently.'" In addition, research suggests that people who self-monitor are generally better communicators (Day et al., 2002). **Low self-monitors**, on the other hand, are individuals who behave the same in all social situations even when the situation dictates that they behave differently. Low self-monitors are more likely to agree with statements such as "I don't think I need to change who I am and I will just act the same in all situations." In short, high self-monitors try to adapt to others by behaving in ways that others find desirable (they are good self-presenters), whereas low self-monitors do not (Oh et al., 2014; Tyler et al., 2016).

Self-Efficacy

Some people have a keen sense of their ability to succeed at things they attempt to do, while others may struggle in this area. **Self-efficacy** refers to a person's perception of their ability to perform a task and their expectation about the outcomes their behavior will have in a challenging situation (Bandura, 2012). Figure 3.1.4 illustrates the interconnections of self in its relationship to our self-concept, self-esteem, self-awareness, and our self-efficacy. It is important to keep in mind that all parts of the self will

always be interconnected. It is impossible to remove even one of the parts of the self.



Figure 3.1.4 Relationship between the Self, Self-Awareness, Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy by Victoria Leonard is licensed CC-BY 4.0

One of the best ways to understand self-efficacy is to read a real-life story. In the following story, you will read one student's journey to self-efficacy. We hope that as you read the story you might be able to think of your own self-efficacy.

Student Focus

Alejandro moved out of his parent's home to attend college. For several months before he moved out, several family members questioned his ability to take care of himself. After all, for 18 years his parents helped him by providing meals, doing laundry, and helping him with car repairs. He began to doubt whether he would be successful, but he knew it was important to try. He and his roommate moved out in July to prepare for the fall semester. Alejandro began navigating his life as a college student away from home. He shopped for groceries, found recipes to cook, read up on the best way to do laundry, and found a local mechanic to take his car to. His parents came to visit him three months later and were impressed with the strides he had taken to become self-sufficient. When they complimented him on the meal he had prepared, Alejandro felt that he had finally grown up. His parents' positive feedback boosted his self-esteem with regard to "adulting." This becomes an important aspect of his self-concept.

Reflection Questions

1. What did you notice about Alejandro's journey from thinking that he did not have the skill set to take care of himself to growing in self-efficacy?
2. Have you ever felt that you did not have self-efficacy in an area of your life? How did you resolve what you felt?
3. What concrete steps can you take to become more efficacious in one area of your life?

Stories like this are important as they illustrate the interconnectedness of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-concept. Consider this example from one of the authors:

> Until I took public speaking in college, I did not have a lot of confidence in myself. My instructor was so impactful that I changed my major after having almost completed a degree in Child Development. I learned that I did well in writing, and over the next semester I changed my major to Communication Studies. I completed my undergraduate degree and was cheered on by numerous professors who told me that I had what it took to go to graduate school—so I did. I went from a rather shy young woman who wasn't really into school to a straight-A student who mastered the curriculum and ultimately became a college professor!

Hopefully, you can see that these interconnections can create powerful positive or negative cycles in our lives. While some of this

process is under our control, much of it is also shaped by the people in our lives. This is why the feedback we get from others can impact our self-esteem and self-concept.

Uppers, Downers, and Vultures

Communication scholar Julia Wood (2017) describes three types of individuals that can impact our self-esteem in positive or negative ways. **Uppers**, or ego-boosters, are "people who communicate positively about us and who reflect positive appraisals of our self-worth" (Wood, 2017, p. 189). Typically, these are people who are significant in our lives, such as family members, friends, teachers, coaches, and the like. If you were to get a 94% on your exam, an "upper" in your life would say "*Great* job! I'm so proud of you!" The opposite of someone who is an upper is a downer or ego buster. **Downers,** or ego busters, "are people who communicate negatively about us and our worth" (Wood, 2017, p. 189). Instead of a compliment on the exam score of 94%, a downer would say "94%? Why did you miss 6%?" You would feel deflated and the "A" you received would no longer matter. It's important to keep in mind that your reaction will always be based on the importance of that person in your life. If someone is not significant, you will probably have a less negative reaction.



Figure 3.1.5 "In search of the Maltese Falcon #13 - White Backed Vulture, Malta Falconry Centre" by foxypar4 is licensed CC BY 2.0

Finally, some of us have vultures in our lives. **Vultures** are an *extreme* form of downer (Wood, 2017), and they act in ways to tear you down in ways that can cause lifelong damage. Whereas a downer may make a negative comment periodically, a vulture can speak in a more abusive way. When people are not important or significant to us, we may not feel impacted by what they say—but when they *are* important to us, what they say to us will be imprinted in our hearts and minds forever, for good or bad.

For example, one of our authors shares this story: When I was a college student I took care of a toddler named Audrey whose mom was going through a health crisis. We remained connected throughout her life, and when Audrey became a teenager, she came out to her mom as a lesbian. She was an only child and these women had a very close bond, therefore what Audrey's mom said to her impacted her greatly. In essence, she told Audrey that she was "sick in the head and that no daughter of mine will live that lifestyle." Audrey was emotionally destroyed.

Downers and vultures often think that what they are saying to someone is "for their own good," and they truly believe they are not causing damage. What can be hard for us to understand is that we can be praised and uplifted by 99 people, but if the 100th person conveys negative and hurtful messages, we often negate the positive messages of the other 99 people simply because of the importance of that "one" person in our lives. Also keep in mind that *we* can be our own upper, downer, or vulture. The messages we tell ourselves can impact our self-worth. This will be discussed further in this chapter as we look at self-fulfilling prophecies.

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3.1.1: Forming the Self

Learning Objectives

- Define symbolic interactionism
- Explain how social comparison and reflected appraisal impact our self-concept
- Evaluate how family and attachment styles help to form the self
- Understand the significance of sexuality and socioeconomic class in self-concept

How Others Affect the Self

Since it's impossible to develop into adults by ourselves, how do others play a role in creating the self? Who has a significant part to play and what are the communication processes that impact this formation? This section will examine not just how family or friends contribute to who you become, but also how society contributes to this process.

Symbolic Interactionism

One of the most significant theories in the social sciences to help us understand how the self is formed is **symbolic interactionism** (Mead, 1934). In short, this theory says that our understanding of ourselves, and indeed the world around us, is shaped by our interactions with others. This means that although we may believe objects, persons, or situations simply appear to have *natural* meanings, in truth all meanings are a result of communication between people. Even a simple bike ride in the park is based on social interactions from your past. Can you ride without considering actions or events from your past bike rides, or rides you have heard about, read about, or seen on television? Even the meaning of a "good ride" influences your perception. Indeed, the very idea of what constitutes "a bike ride in a park" depends upon all the varied meanings you have acquired through your exchanges with others.

To illustrate this principle, let's look at a study on the use of marijuana back in the 1950s. The research shows us how our shared meanings of objects and/or events are truly affected by social interaction (Becker, 1953). In the study, people who had never smoked pot were questioned to understand what they knew about marijuana. Becker, the study's author, found at least three things that new pot smokers learned by interacting with others: first, how to properly use the drug; second, how to recognize physical cues of being "high"; and third, how to judge these physical sensations as actually pleasurable. Becker explained that not only did new smokers not understand how to smoke, but they also did not automatically recognize the effects of the drug upon their bodies. That is, smokers did not know they were "high" until they learned, through interaction, to differentiate such sensations. They needed to be taught to consciously sense the effects of the drug. Perhaps most interesting, the research showed that smokers didn't immediately define the effects of smoking marijuana as gratifying. Beginners needed to be told they *ought to enjoy it*. Here then we see that meanings for marijuana—in this case, its use—are surely not natural. Becker shows us that marijuana is understood by smokers—if even enjoyed—because of the exchange of meanings about the drug through communication.

But how might this principle influence the idea of developing your own unique concept of self? Before we answer this question, think of a friend you may have had in the past that had an impact on your judgment of yourself as a person. Did interacting with this person add to your self-esteem? Detract? Did you feel empowered simply by spending time with them—or did you feel criticized, inferior or unimportant? This perspective of yourself, at least as a friend, is a function of what you believe this person believed about you, according to the theory of symbolic interactionism.

Reflected Appraisal

Mead suggests that our self-concept is developed by virtue of how we view ourselves through the "mirror" of others. This process is called **reflected appraisal** (Mead, 1934). We develop a self by taking on others' views, as if those other persons were like mirrors reflecting our selfhood back at us. Based upon the ways others communicate with us, the feedback we receive, and the labels others use to define us, we construct the self. In this process, we look at ourselves from the eyes of the "other." We perceive what we *think* they think, and then absorb or internalize that picture of ourselves. In the case of a previous instructor, if you believed that they evaluated you as academically gifted, it is quite possible you might believe yourself to be just that.

Take a moment to consider the reflected appraisal you have experienced in your life thus far. It may be interesting to ask these questions: Whose version of myself have I absorbed? Who are my mirrors? Have the mirrors I have used to form myself been positive or negative?

Social Comparison

Social comparison (Festinger, 1954) is also key to how symbolic interactionism takes place. When we judge ourselves in terms of how we compare to others, we engage in such a process. The use of social media is one way to think about how we can constantly question if we “measure up” to others. If you have ever entered into a social situation like a party or a workplace event and compared yourself to your peers—either positively or negatively—you have experienced social comparison firsthand.



Figure 3.1.1.1 Comparison by ER0L is licensed CC BY 2.0

A **superior comparison** occurs when you make an assessment that you look better, are more intelligent, are more talented, or more athletic, or any category like this when comparing yourself to someone else. These are a few examples of how a superior comparison manifests. If you receive a performance review at work and one of your co-workers receives an evaluation that is less favorable, you may think you are a better employee than they are. However, we can also engage in an inferior comparison in the same fashion. **Inferior comparison** means that we feel we don’t measure up to others. Looking at friends or even strangers on Instagram or TikTok may lead us to believe that we are not as intelligent, good, talented, or attractive as others. Our brains are hardwired to engage in comparison. So how can we manage social comparison in our day-to-day lives? When you find yourself comparing yourself to others, ask yourself two questions. First, is this comparison useful for my self-concept? If you compare yourself to your classmates when you get a paper returned from your instructor, comparing your grade to others may help you understand how you are performing in class. However, sometimes comparisons are not useful. If you compare yourself to the physique of other people, you may be setting yourself up for an unfair comparison. Second, ask yourself if the comparison is realistic. For example, are you comparing yourself to real images, or are you comparing yourself to filtered social media images that have been cultivated by media influencers? Ultimately, we can't stop ourselves from engaging in comparisons, but we can become aware of the process and use the questions from above to manage our expectations about ourselves.

When we engage in superior comparisons, we are less likely to tell others about it because to do so may gain us the title of being a braggart, conceited, or full of ourselves. Yet, isn't the idea that we *want* to have a positive view of ourselves? How do we strike this balance in having a healthy, positive self-concept, without appearing full of ourselves? There is a greater societal expectation of humility. Sometimes that can sound like you are putting yourself down or minimizing your positive qualities when you are complemented. When you are comfortable in who you are you will eventually be able to acknowledge compliments by simply saying "thank you" and not feeling as though you need to put yourself down.

The Self and Family

You have already learned that your self is formed through your interactions with others. We cannot talk about the formation of

self without acknowledging the critical impact that family has on us. Family is not necessarily defined by blood relationships, but rather through a system of support and nurturing given to you by whatever family of origin you grow up with. From birth, your primary caretakers provide feedback that influences the development of your self-concept, and thus your self-esteem. Two factors that help to determine your worldview and view of self are **identity scripts** and **attachment styles**.



Figure 3.1.1.2 Mali Family by Ferdinand Reus is licensed CC-BY-SA 2.0

Identity Scripts

When we are young, our families begin the process of helping us understand what's important or expected. What becomes instilled in us at a young age can inform our communication behaviors throughout life. **Identity scripts** are social expectations regarding how members of a particular group behave and communicate as a part of their social identity (Wood, 2017). These scripts may be thought of as "life scripts" because they provide us with rules for living. These rules are important because they frame how we see the world and our role in it. Most often these scripts provide instructions on what a family stands for. These scripts are largely unconscious, even though we may hear them stated throughout the time we live with our families of origin. Identity scripts may sound like this:

- “Live life to the fullest.”
- “Be a good person.”
- “Always tell the truth.”
- “Stand up for yourself.”
- “Don’t waste food.”
- "Don't let opportunities pass you by."
- "Strive to be the best you can be."
- "Take care of others before you take care of yourself."

You could create an endless list of identity scripts for yourself—and we know that you get the point! Although these scripts seem straightforward, what happens if you violate one of the scripts you've been taught? Read this story by one of the authors:

> When I was a child my mother used to make this amazing coffee cake. The only part about it we didn't like was the crust at the edge of the cake. When my mom wasn't looking, my brother and I would run to the bathroom and flush the crust down the toilet! To this day I think about that because I grew up hearing the script that it was “wrong to waste food.” Another script I heard growing up is “always tell the truth because lying will get you into more trouble.” I was not a perfect child and there were times I did lie, like telling my mom I didn’t feel well so I could stay home from school. When we don’t conform to the scripts we grow up with and we violate them, we may end up feeling bad about ourselves. However, there is also a multitude of scripts that I have lived my life by that give me peace and joy, and many of those were used in raising my own children, such as “always help others when you can.” I spent 20 years financially supporting a child in the Dominican Republic as a way of fulfilling an important identity script.

Culture is also an integral part of identity scripts. You may have grown up in a religion where if you sin, you need to go to confession to be absolved of sin. Different religions will have identity scripts that shape you. Identity scripts are also influenced by race. Interviews conducted with young Black adults in one study focused on how identity was constructed by the internalization of racism. It revealed that

> Black participants in this study did internalize racist scripts in early childhood, but were more adept at resisting negative racial messages in early adulthood. Parenting strategies could have contributed to the internalization of negative cultural scripts given that each respondent reported that their parents did little to shield them from internalizing presumptions of their racial inferiority. Instead, college served as a time when participants were able to develop and redefine their sense of worth and belonging into a more positive racial identity. (Llaguno Velarde, 2018, p. 2)

I hope you understand identity scripts are quite often unique to an individual's culture. The impact of culture will be explored later in this chapter.

Attachment Styles

Family not only helps form your self-concept, but it also impacts the future relationships you may have as an adult. **Attachment theory** examines how our early attachments to primary caregivers affect us. In 1958, psychologist John Bowlby developed the concept of attachment theory based on the bond that infants form with their mother (McLeod, 1970). Although his research focused on the mother–child relationship, not all children are raised by their birth mother. We see the primary caregiver as integral to defining the attachment or bond to the infant. Bowlby's research defined healthy attachments as those in which a child is secure and has an overall sense of safety. Fulfilling a child's physical, social, and emotional needs is integral to a secure attachment. Thus, attachment theory explains how the caregiver–child relationship emerges and influences subsequent relationship development with others, and ultimately affects how we communicate with others.

Based on this early research, other scholars have continued to explore how romantic attachments develop. Early attachments impact adulthood: attachment styles in infancy influence a person's development of positive and/or negative views of self and others. Figure 3.1.1.3 describes four attachment styles that have been posited as evolving from these early attachments we form: secure, fearful-avoidant, anxious-preoccupied, and dismissive-avoidant attachment styles. As shown in the figure,

- Individuals with a secure attachment style have a positive view of self and a positive view of others.
- Individuals with a dismissive-avoidant attachment style have a positive view of self and a negative view of others.
- Individuals with an anxious-preoccupied attachment style have a negative view of self and a positive view of others.

Individuals with a fearful-avoidant attachment style have a negative view of self and a negative view of others.

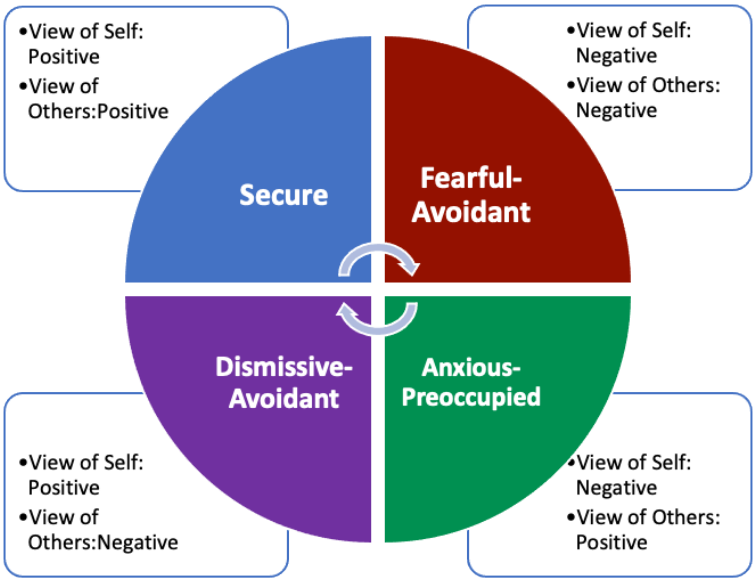


Figure 3.1.1.3 Attachment Styles by Victoria Leonard is licensed CC-BY 4.0

Secure Attachment

Individuals who have consistently caring and attentive parents or caregivers develop a **secure attachment style**. If the caregiving they receive is loving and stable, they develop a positive view of themselves and a positive view of others. Given this style, as people become adults, their approaches to romantic relationships are generally positive. Their communication behaviors mirror this positivity. They find it easy to become emotionally close to others and they report greater relationship satisfaction. Securely attached people are also comfortable being both independent and interdependent with their partners. In addition, when a relationship hits a bump, securely attached individuals have the capacity to communicate well and work on those relationships. However, if a relationship doesn't work out, they are able to grieve and move on rather than ruminate over the dissolution of the relationship for a long time.

Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment

One of the more difficult-to-understand attachment styles is the **dismissive-avoidant attachment style.** Here, individuals have a positive view of themselves, but a negative view of others. Early caregiving by parents is characterized by a lack of interest in the child, and the caregiver is more focused on their own needs and comfort than those of the child. Aside from being emotionally unavailable, parents may also be physically unavailable, such as not being at home much. If a parent is unavailable it could be by choice, or it might be by necessity. The parent could have made the choice not to be around by hiring a nanny or child sitter; or, it may be the child is raised by a single parent who cannot be around because they have to work. In any case, the child is encouraged to be particularly independent. The communication from the parent may sound like: "You can do it yourself," "buck up," or "get over it." Parents who foster this kind of attachment do not encourage their children to cry or express their vulnerabilities. Single parents may also be loving and consistent, so it is *not* the absence of the parent that dictates the outcome. Rather, the attachment style develops as a result of the interactions that occur when parent and child are together.

Interestingly, someone with this attachment style tends to view themselves positively. Why is this? Because the child was forced to be independent and autonomous, they often develop a positive view of self. They don't accept the view that *they* are unlovable, but rather dismiss *others* as unworthy. This makes relationships difficult for people that are dismissive-avoidant. Their early experiences were left wanting. They didn't experience closeness with their caregiver, so they avoid closeness with others. They may also deny needing anyone or may say that relationships are not important. Communicative behaviors might include phrases like "I don't really need an intimate partner or close relationship," or "I'm just not a relationship kind of person." If you think there is a tone of defensiveness in these statements, there often is. The desire that someone may have for a close relationship may be hidden or suppressed, making it harder to couple romantically. However, in the event that a dismissive-avoidant person does find a partner and later that relationship ends, they tend not to fall apart.

Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment

Children that grow up believing that their needs won't be met (even if that belief is subconscious), may develop an **anxious-preoccupied attachment style**. The caregiver is inconsistent in their treatment of the child. They may be nurturing one day, and insensitive or uncaring the next day. Children who grow up in homes where their primary caregiver struggles with substance abuse or alcohol might develop this attachment style. Under such conditions, the child has difficulty trusting the parent or might be clingy due to unpredictable behavior. The pattern for this attachment style produces adults who have negative thoughts of themselves, but positive thoughts of others. This may seem counterintuitive since the child experiences the treatment received by their caregiver as inconsistent. However, this result actually makes sense *because* of the inconsistency. Anxious-preoccupied attachment causes individuals to have negative thoughts about themselves because the caregiver was often insensitive or uncaring, so they feel they don't deserve love. But, as children, they also had days when they were treated with love and kindness. Thus, they are able to see enough positive behavior in their parent or primary caregiver that they can still form positive attachments.

The communicative outcome of the anxious-preoccupied attachment style is a person who experiences more anxiety and is less secure in relationships. This insecurity can manifest in behaviors such as neediness, possessiveness, and jealousy. They will need continual reassurance that they are loved, and will seek validation. They may also struggle to be alone and have a tendency to think negatively. If you are a person with this attachment style, or you are in a relationship with someone like this, you might see frequent texts to just check in, or questions such as, "Why haven't you answered my text?" There may be questions about who you communicate with, or a request to see your phone.

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment

The final attachment style we will examine is one that can have the most severe negative impact on one's sense of self. **Fearful-avoidant attachment styles** are created when a child experiences physical or emotional cruelty. There could be times when the "care" they receive is life-threatening. Clearly, this poses a dilemma for the child, who rightfully feels the parent should be their safety net. The only way a child can cope with the threat of verbal or physical abuse is to detach from the parent. As a result, they have a negative view of both themselves and others. Most people want intimate relationships in their lives. However, when someone has grown up in fear it is difficult to trust other people. An inner conflict exists in this person. The desire for intimacy is often resisted based on their inability to trust or rely on others. They are often suspicious of others' intentions or actions, so they push people away. This is why expressions of affection are not readily expressed.

Students always ask, "Can your attachment style change?" Yes, it can, for either better or worse. As you experience life and relationships, you can change your attachment style. If you have a dismissive-avoidant style and meet a wonderful person who has a secure attachment style, you can change over time as trust is built. Similarly, if you have a secure attachment style, and end up in an abusive relationship, you can develop a fearful attachment style. Students also ask, "Can you have one attachment style with one person, and a different one with someone else?" The answer is yes, but most of us tend to have one dominant attachment style.

The Self and Society

We have acknowledged that the self is not something created in isolation, by a person alone. But are there aspects of who we are that are impacted by society more than others? One answer to this question might be an examination of social identity categories. **Social identity categories** set the stage for meaningful life experiences that have cumulative effects. Interpersonal relationships impact and are impacted by such social identity categories as race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and socioeconomics or class. In order to understand selfhood, we must examine how societies have a part to play in forming identities. While there are a variety of social identity categories, let's examine these three.

Race and Ethnicity

It is not a well-known fact that each human being, no matter which racial category they might claim as their own, shares 99.9 percent of their genetic material. This means there are often more differences found between people of the *same racial category* than there are *between people of different racial categories*. The Human Genome Project asserts that race is a social construct, not a biological one (Bonham, n.d.). The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of "historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association, 1998, May 17).

It would be an error, however, to argue there is no such thing as racial identity. Just because race is socially constructed does not mean it is not real. Rather, race is a concept that is meaningful only through human meaning-making—that is, through communication. We may talk about how someone living on Earth can stand still. But in reality, we are never actually standing still, given that the Earth is rotating at about 1,000 miles per hour. Of course, the notion of "standing still" is still a useful distinction when we communicate with others. The same can be said of race. While race is not a biologically accurate designation, it has real-world impacts on social perception—in fact, those impacts are undeniable.

Racial identity is a multidimensional construct that includes the strength of one's identification with one's racial group, a sense of attachment to other group members, and evaluation of group membership (e.g., how much the individual likes or dislikes being White, for example), and may include group-relevant attitudes and behaviors (Broman, 2008, March 18, para. 1). Indeed, at different times in history, the classification of race has shifted between race, ethnicity, culture, religion, geography, nationality, and language.

President Barack Obama's comments on racial identity may help us to see the complexities of talking about racial identity:

> I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a depression to serve in Patton's army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave owners—an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles, and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that and

> no other country on earth is my story even possible. (National Public Radio, 2008, March 18, para. 8)

The ways that individuals construct meanings around racial identity and its significance influence how one understands selfhood, as well as interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it makes sense to explore the meanings we give race—if only to consider how we want to grow, develop and unfold as a community.

A person's sense of self may also be influenced by ethnic identity as well as race. Ethnic identity refers to traits that link to ancestry and heritage. To talk of one's ethnicity we typically include several dimensions:

> (1) self-identification, (2) knowledge about the ethnic culture (traditions, customs, values, and behaviors), and (3) feelings about belonging to a particular ethnic group. Ethnic identity often involves a shared sense of origin and history, which may link ethnic groups to distant cultures in Asia, Europe, Latin America, or other locations. (Martin & Nakayama, 2004, p. 160).

While our discussion here is limited, we would be remiss if we did not suggest that social perceptions about race and ethnicity—much like other social identities—can lead to prejudice and/or discrimination. When one considers the impacts of the social and political history of slavery and segregation, for example, Black and indigenous people still experience systematic racism.

Discussion: Impacts of Bias and Stereotypes on Identity Development and Self

"The Talk": One Way Some Families Discuss Identity and Social Interaction

Depending on your identity, you will experience different social interactions from different perspectives. This can be especially true when it comes to your racial identity. If you are racially categorized as a member of a dominant or minority group, you may be stereotyped. (I define **stereotype** as a widely believed but generally fixed and oversimplified idea of a person or thing.) As a result, you may experience different types of privilege or disprivilege.

Have you ever talked with your parents or other members of your family or community about your racial identity, and the impact it could have on your interactions with other people? Why might certain people, with certain identities—racial or otherwise (like gender or sexual orientation)—have had these conversations, while others might not?

Consider listening to the "Today Explained" podcast, linked below, which illustrates how two different families have talked about police brutality in the United States shortly after the brutal killing of George Floyd in 2020. Mr. Floyd was a Black man who died while a White male police officer held his knee on his neck for more than eight minutes. Most of that interaction was caught on camera. As you listen to the podcast, consider the similarities and differences between the conversations.

- Audio (24 minutes): Podcast: Today Explained, "The Talk"
- Transcript: Podcast: Today Explained, "The Talk"

Questions for Journaling or Discussion

- What identities were present in this podcast?
- What did you notice about how the people in this episode discussed identity?
- Have you ever had similar conversations?
- Can you relate to any of the people involved in this story?
- Jot down any other thoughts you have from listening to this podcast, esp. as they relate to terms you learned this chapter and experiences you have had with identity, race, class, and communication.

Finally, racial identities, and how we talk about them, might ultimately be the best example of symbolic interactionism. Researchers note that "52 percent of folks who self-categorize as nonwhite in the Census Bureau's projections for America's 2060 racial makeup will also think of themselves as white." Another 40 percent of those who self-categorize as White "will also claim minority racial identity" (Brooks, 2021, July 22, p. A-18). This means the distinctions between races and ethnic identities seem to be blurring. In some ways, they are taking on different social meanings which complicate our very ways of thinking about these classifications.

Gender and Sexuality

Concepts and definitions that refer to sexual orientation and gender identity are evolving. Many of the terms used in the past

to describe LGBTQIA+ people, for example, namely in the mental health field, are now considered to be outdated and offensive. Because identity is such a sensitive area of personhood, the terms we use to describe it seem to shift year to year. This means we must stay attuned to these changes, especially as interpersonal communication creates shifts in how identities are understood and expressed.

The term **gender identity** was coined in the middle 1960s to describe one's persistent inner sense of femininity, masculinity, a unique blend of both, or neither. One's gender identity may be the same as or different from the sex assigned at birth. **Gender fluidity** describes a person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity. **Transgender identity** is an umbrella term used to account for one whose gender identity does not correspond to one's birth sex (American Psychological Association, Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance (2009) para. 6; The Human Rights Campaign).



Figure 3.1.1.4 Gender by David Wallace is licensed CC-BY 2.0

Alternatively, according to the American Psychological Association, "**Sexual orientation** refers to the sex of those to whom one is romantically attracted" (American Psychological Association, 2012, para. 4). The terms "lesbian" and "gay" are used to refer to people who experience attraction to members of the same sex, and the term "bisexual" describes people who experience attraction to members of both sexes. It should be noted that, although these categories continue to be widely used, sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and, instead, occurs on a continuum, or in a more fluid way (ibid., para. 3). Although social views of gender are shifting in the 21st century, it is still true that children are taught different ways of understanding selfhood on the basis of gender identity and gender expression. We experience powerful communication messages that socialize us by way of television, school, play, and family. By and large, we are taught how to be "masculine" or "feminine," what those categories mean, and the rewards or punishments we may experience if we violate the expectations aligned with them.

Socioeconomics or Class

Perhaps class identity is the least talked about of the three social categories mentioned in this section. Most people do not discuss class, but it certainly plays an important part in how our selfhood develops. We send and read others' communicative messages about class in part through objects like high-priced automobiles, fashion, or food. If you think about the question "Where do you live?" you recognize that part of the meaning of such a question can be related to where a person comes from—and this information tells us a bit about the community of people that form the context for our development of self. To say you are from Beverly Hills or Pacific Heights sends a very particular communicative cue. Beyond what types of objects you own or where you live, we also judge an individual's class identity upon the vocabulary a person uses when speaking, their use of slang, and even linguistic accents.

Our celebrity culture encourages us to aspire to wealth as a key to happiness and self-realization. Counselors report that children today, when asked what they want to be when they grow up, often simply answer, "rich." Materialism and consumer culture are celebrated in Western/American culture even while we admit that money can't buy satisfaction. Popular films, television shows, and social media posts often criticize the rich, but declare—albeit covertly—that the opportunities and lifestyles of those at the upper end of the class hierarchy are still the most desirable. In short, we seem to get mixed messages about the value of class

status, even though most people aspire to be wealthy.

A number of signs point to the fact that our class hierarchy is becoming less flexible. The American Dream—the notion that hard work and persistence will surely result in prosperity and plentitude—is attractive, but largely a myth when we examine the numbers of people who move from poverty to the top echelons of wealth. In fact, the disparity in the United States between the top income earners and those at the bottom, far from moving toward equalization, is presently increasing each year. Executive pay and the wages earned by an average worker provide a snapshot of this condition. Chief executives of large corporations earn on average 320 times the amount of a typical employee, according to the Economic Policy Institute: "In 1989, that ratio was 61 to 1. From 1978 to 2019, compensation grew 14 percent for typical workers. It rose 1,167 percent for C.E.O.s" (Gelles, 2021, p. 24).

As our society moves toward a greater divide between those who are affluent and those who are not, the promise of opportunities and protections for all—regardless of economic standing—can seem uncertain. In any case, wealth and income play a role in shaping identity since they influence life experiences and thus attitudes and values.

Race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status all influence our sense of self and communication with others—and certainly impact the context within which interpersonal relationships develop and thrive. These social categories also overlap and are interrelated. The concept of **intersectionality**, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, is key to recognizing how forms of inequality that may accompany social identities can overlap, compound, and affect a person's privilege or disprivilege (Crenshaw, 1995). Crenshaw suggests that often when we view racism, for example, we may not realize how other social identities like gender or sexuality can combine to create complicated webs of prejudice or discrimination. Stereotypes about LGBTQIA+ people, for instance, may merge with those about working class or impoverished people. This "intersection" can multiply inequality—meaning it can become a complicated matrix of prejudice or discrimination.

Intersectionality as a concept is also valuable as a tool to show us how an individual may be privileged by virtue of *some* social identities but not by others. One may have high socioeconomic status, for example, and be able to afford to lobby for favors from government officials in power. That same person, however, may also be transgender and experience discrimination while inhabiting government institutions. As you can see, privilege and disprivilege do not always materialize in easily recognizable patterns. Intersectionality demonstrates how social identities are complex and their meanings can often shift as social perspectives move, evolve, and challenge the status quo.

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3.1.2: Communicating the Self

Learning Objectives

- Define the dramaturgical approach
- Explain the presenting self
- Distinguish between Goffman's concepts of front and back stage
- Identify how facework is constructed and impacts the presenting self
- Evaluate the impact social media has on self-concept

Presentation of Self: Communication and Identity Management

So far, we have explained how communication plays a part in how the self develops. But how do we use communication to influence how others view us? In his classic text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman describes a new way of thinking about how we attempt to form the self and simultaneously influence others' perspectives of that self we perform. This process is often called **identity management**, and it draws upon a dramaturgical approach. A **dramaturgical approach** is one where we see life as a drama or stage play unfolding. Everyday life is not just an experience we individually perceive and make sense of; rather, we collaborate with one another to act out a series of events as if we were characters in a story. As Shakespeare declared: "All the world's a stage," and it is this notion that helps Goffman frame the concept of identity management.

The idea of "single secret behavior," from an episode of the cable television show *Sex and the City,* demonstrates how we may think about self-presentation in a social setting. The made-up term was used in the show to describe behavior that's private, what we do when nobody is around, or what we would not do in front of other people. The character, Carrie, cited her compulsion to stack saltine crackers with jelly while her friend Charlotte reported her tendency to stare at a magnifying mirror and examine her pores. Clearly, it's not necessary to be single to have private or secret behaviors, indeed, we all have private selves at each stage of our lives. But as Goffman explains, our public selves and private selves must be managed as we navigate interpersonal relationships.

In social situations, we rely upon a "script" that tells us what is expected in that situation. For example, we know what behavior is expected at a funeral, on a first date, or inside a classroom. Goffman (1959) explains we have both a perceived self and a presenting self. The term **perceived self** describes the person you believe yourself to be. When you reflect upon who you are, whether that reflection is indeed objectively true or not, you conceive of your perceived self. This self is not typically shared with others, and it contains some of your most private and intimate perceptions. If you have ever kept a journal, you may be able to observe how you see yourself. It is interesting to reread old journal entries since often you can detect changes in your view of yourself over periods of time.



Figure 3.1.2.1 "Day 165: 2 Self Portraits" by Sodanie Chea is licensed CC-BY 2.0

On the other hand, the **presenting self** is that public self we perform for others. It is our representation of the self we want to project to others, a self that typically conforms to approved social norms. When you go into a job interview, for example, you cultivate a public image—a presenting self. Rarely do you show up in your slippers, without a shower, and use profanity.

The perceived self and the presenting self may help us to understand Goffman's concepts of **front stage** vs. **back stage.** When we think of a stage play, we see that there are at least two different locations for actors: out in front of the audience and back behind the stage sets. Impression management occurs out in front of the "audience." When we are in front of others whose impressions of us are important, we may feel a greater pressure to manage our behaviors. This is what we might call being front stage. However, according to Goffman (1959), the back stage is "where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude" (ibid., p. 113). Thus, we are in the backstage area when we are away from others and don't have to consider their judgments.

One of our authors provides an example:

> I can remember being in graduate school years ago and having my first teaching experience. After I taught class one day, I went to the gym. As I was changing into my gym clothes in the women's locker room, I turned to see one of my students, who coincidentally I had been speaking with about an assignment that very day. As our eyes met, it was clear we were both embarrassed. Why? Not only was our relationship at that time forged frontstage, and removing one's clothes is a *backstage activity*, but also our relationship of student–instructor signified a difference in power (since in my role I was responsible to assign grades). While we ignored one another and pretended in class that the locker-room event never happened, I learned a great deal about social roles and the differences between frontstage and backstage. Have you ever had an experience in which these two clashed?

More often than not, within interpersonal interactions, we constantly construct **face**, which refers to the positive impression we would like to make upon others. If we fail to maintain face—for example, if we make an embarrassing remark or act out in some way—it may cause others to have a bad impression of us. Social anxiety derives from the fear of such an event. After all, we are just humans who want to feel good about ourselves. However, to maintain face or repair some damage done to lost face we engage in what Goffman calls facework. **Facework** describes the communicative behavior that we use, both verbal and nonverbal, to enact and maintain our own presenting image or that of another. It is any work that one does in order to construct, or save face (Goffman, 1967). Although most of the time we are not aware we are doing facework, since it is such a familiar activity, we constantly coordinate our identities with others to legitimize our version of self.

Insight into our desire to shape others' views of who we are (even when this desire is unconscious) is helpful when we consider that social interactions are the basis of successful interpersonal relationships. If others do not accept our social performances, we are unable to coordinate with others to achieve our goals—even if those goals involve simply being liked. Perhaps more interesting is that Goffman theorized that the process of impression management is actually a way we form and reform selfhood. By interacting with others, we *realize* the roles we play for others—that is, we become those roles. When you go to your workplace and perform your job, you recognize yourself as the working role you play in that social situation. Thus, from Goffman's perspective,

your selfhood is born in and through performances with/for others.

Discussion: Identity and Face Negotiation Theory

Have You Ever "Saved Face?"

Being in control of how we are perceived and feeling respected for our identities is crucial to our self-esteem and confidence. So what happens when that self-assurance is threatened? For instance, what do we do when we are embarrassed? Or how would you behave after you are caught in a lie? Typically we try to "save face," in other words, as we learned earlier, we perform facework. We communicate in a way that either explains the behavior or compensates for the behavior. According to **conflict face-negotiation theory** (Ting-Toomey, 2004), a perspective that overlaps in many ways with identity management, we are actually doing things every day to save face and attempting to manage how we, and others, are being perceived. The act of saving face, or doing facework, might sound simple since essentially we are just trying to uphold our pride and ego—but it often happens unconsciously, meaning we aren't even fully aware we are doing it because it is so automatic and habitual.

However, depending on our identity and background, saving face can actually get quite complicated: we may feel pressure to not only save our own face, but also to represent ourselves in a way that promotes a positive image for our entire culture or community. There might be certain behaviors that are expected of you based on your identity within a culture, and as part of facework, you may have to struggle to uphold those standards. Furthermore, if we consider our **intersectionality** (our multiple overlapping identities) as we discussed earlier, we have to juggle a lot of potentially competing identities or stereotypes associated with those identities, all at once!

For example, imagine someone who identifies as a woman and as Asian American. If she is on a women's soccer team where she does not have many Asian American teammates, she might feel more protective of her cultural identity since she is part of a minority within this context. She would most likely perform facework to promote a positive image of Asian Americans. Conversely, if she is on a soccer team that is co-ed (mixed gendered), but made up of mostly Asian American players, she might perform facework to promote a positive self-image of women.

As you can see, the precise identities that we prioritize often depend upon the context within which we find ourselves. Our choices are often fluid, unconscious, and quite subjective (after all, there is no right or wrong way to save face), which only complicates how we perform facework.

Reflection

- Can you think of a time when you behaved in a certain way to "save face?"
- What parts of your identity were most prominent or salient at that time, and which were less significant or more muted at that time? Why?

Presentation of Self: Communication in the Virtual World

We have already learned how impactful social comparison can be when we hold ourselves up to others in our lives. Today, we are finding that social comparison is even more magnified in the virtual world. There is a fine line between social media and social networking sites. Social media broadcasts, or relays content without a necessary interactive component, like YouTube. Social networking sites (SNS) can be interactive so that users have the option to communicate directly with others, like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat, to name a few. With the increase in popularity across the globe, there is a greater tendency to engage in social comparison as more personal information is disclosed on these sites. The use of social media and social networking connects to our sense of self as we engage in social comparison through these sites. **Social comparison** relies on having information about others readily available. All you have to do is open any of these apps to look at others' posts. Recent research suggests that the use of social media and social networking leads to a greater degree of social comparison and depression (Nguyen, et al., 2020). Why do you thank that is?



Figure 3.1.2.2 Social Media Addiction by Today Testing is licensed CC-BY-SA 4.0

Most of what we see online is **idealistic,** given that most people tend to post positive things about themselves, such as successes or attractive photos. The “norms,” or “standards” for attractiveness, success, intelligence, etc., become the basis for social comparison. It is not surprising that people who spend more time on these sites are more likely to agree that others have “better lives” and are “happier” than themselves. Individuals’ self-perceptions and self-evaluations tend to suffer after being exposed to profiles of attractive others on social media and social networking sites.

The way in which we engage online also impacts our self-esteem. Some people are **passive users** and simply read what others post, whereas others are **active users** in that they post and interact with others. Individuals who are active users find their worth primarily from feedback given to them by others, and this includes the number of “likes” and/or comments they receive. Upward social comparison, (thinking that others are superior to you), is associated with decreased life satisfaction and other negative feelings like envy and jealousy among SNS users. By disabling the “Like” feature, one might be able to avoid some of these negative feelings. However, like many addictions, it is difficult for us to consider disabling this feature, since each time we see that our post is liked, our brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is responsible, in part, for our moods. Why would we want to give up the high that we get while actively using social networking sites?

According to Nguyen, et al., as cited in Casale and Banshi (2020), “Social media addiction (or problematic social media use) classified into DSM V is a proposed form of psychological or behavioral dependence on social media platforms” (p. 257). Meanwhile, mental disorders (or mental illnesses) are conditions that affect your thinking, feeling, mood, and behavior (Medlineplus, 2020). It is hard for physicians to diagnose the disease if the addict does not report their problem. Young people and students are considered to be most vulnerable to problematic internet use (Kuss et al., 2013; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Loannidis et al., 2018). A study in India showed that the rate of social media addiction was 36.9% among 1,389 social media users who were pre-university college students (Ramesh et al., 2018). Furthermore, the problem of social media use in children and young people is often associated with symptoms of mental disorder, for example, anxiety and depression (Hoge et al., 2017). In the United States, approximately 25% of college students surveyed showed signs of depression when using Facebook (Moreno et al., 2011). A 2013 survey from the American Psychological Association found that psychological problems were increasing among college students, such as anxiety (41.6%), depression (36.4%), and relationship problems (35.8%) (American Psychological Association, 2013).

We can also see how social media platforms and networking can lead to positive outcomes. Individuals who would normally not interact with others due to social anxiety find their voice through social media. They will be more interactive and communicate with others positively because they feel safer. In addition, social media can be used to promote a cause or event that is for the betterment of society.

In short, findings on social media use suggest that first, symptoms of depression and anxiety are associated with excessive social media use. Second, people who have a passive lifestyle are at a higher risk of depression. Third, excessive social media usage time (over three hours a day), is a significant risk to users' anxiety and depression. Finally, social comparison habits are likely to cause depression and psychological disorders because users often feel lost when others share positive experiences. Do you or people you know use social media? Most likely, the answer is “yes.” Given the research discussed in the sidebar that follows, it is worth your time to consider how social media may play a role in your self-concept and/or self-esteem. I am not advocating you simply cease using electronic platforms; rather, I urge you to be mindful of the ways you use them, and how they impact your interpersonal relationships.

Explore: Social Media Use and Politics

A recent article by writer Brooke Auxier posits that "From global protests against racial injustice to the 2020 election, some Americans who use social media are taking to these platforms to mobilize others and show their support for causes or issues. But experiences and attitudes related to political activities on social media vary by race and ethnicity, age, and party, according to a Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted June 16-22, 2020 (Auxier, 2020). Auxier further notes that individuals use social media to post pictures in support of a cause, look up information about events like rallies or protests nearby, or encourage others to take action. The data reveal significant differences between the use of social media based on race, age, and political affiliation. For example, the Pew Research Center found that "Black users stand out: 48% of Black social media users say they have posted a picture on social media to show their support for a cause in the past month, compared with 37% of Hispanic users and 33% of white users. Black adults who use social media (45%) are also more likely than their Hispanic (33%) or white (30%) counterparts to say that in the past month they've taken to social media to encourage others to take action on issues that are important to them" (Auxier, 2020).

Reflection

- Would you agree with these results based on your own experience with social media?

Try this: Read the rest of the Pew Research Center report on differences in age and political affiliation. Would you agree with the data that are presented? How does this make you feel about your race, age, and political views? Is this one aspect of yourself that you are particularly pleased with, or one that you might hope to change?

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3.1.3: The Role of Self-Disclosure

Learning Objectives

- Define self-disclosure
- Understand the Johari Window and evaluate how each element plays a vital role in self-concept
- Define Uncertainty Reduction Theory and identify the three strategies people use to reduce uncertainty
- Evaluate your own application of URT

Initiating and Forming Romantic Relationships



Figure 3.1.3.1 Gender Spectrum Zackary Ducker licensed CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

Think about the last time that you were messaging someone on a dating site like Tinder, OkCupid, Bumble, or Grindr, or perhaps the last time you were talking with a new person you met in a class, or even at an event, or maybe work? When we engage with other people and share information about ourselves, we are self-disclosing. **Self-disclosure** is the process of voluntarily revealing information about yourself to another person, not already known by them.

Getting Plugged In

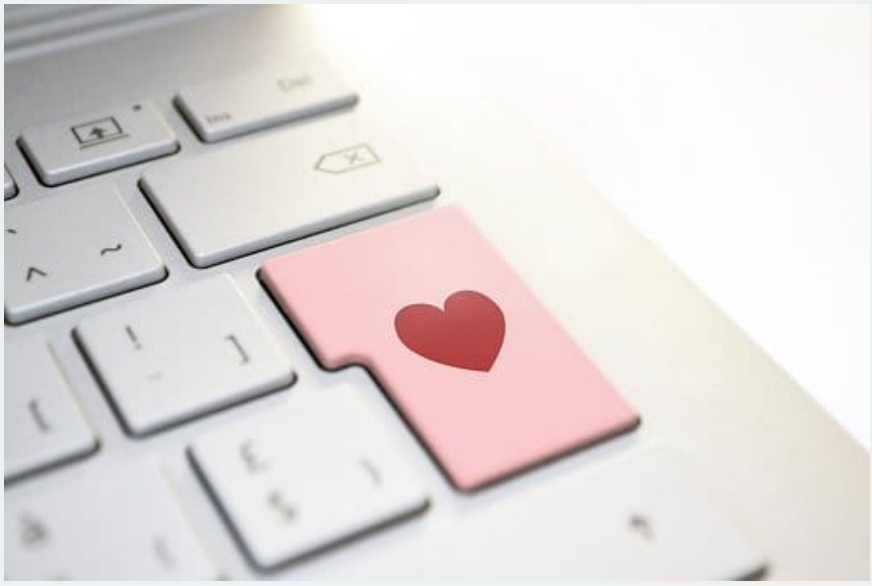


Figure 3.1.3.2 Heart Love Keyboard Enter Button by Athree23 on Pixabay

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

Social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, are undoubtedly prevalent in the world of online social networking. Many users self-disclose personal information on these sites, ranging from moods to religious affiliation, relationship status, style, food, travel, and personal contact information. Social platforms offer convenient opportunities to stay in touch with friends, family, classmates, and coworkers. We also have apps designed for dating, and meeting potential romantic or sexual partners. Dating services and apps like Grindr, Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, Scruff, Christian Mingle, Black People Meet, Plenty of Fish, Match, EHarmony, OkCupid, and more were created to bring people together.

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

Reflection Questions

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

Johari Window

The Johari window can help us examine self-disclosure in relationships. Displayed in Figure \(\PageIndex{3\), the Johari window examines what information we have about ourselves, as well as the information others know about us (an accessible text description is linked in the figure caption). Based on the combination of our self-knowledge and others' knowledge about us, there are four types of selves: Open Self, Closed Self, Blind Self, and Unknown Self. Let's examine each of these.

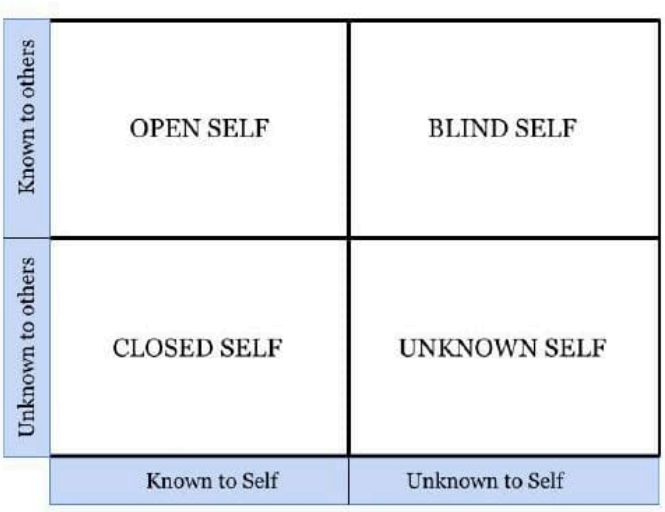


Figure 3.1.3.3 Johari Window by Hilary Altman adapted from Johari Window by Spaynton on Wikipedia Commons is licensed under CC BY 4.0

A longer description of the Johari Window

Open Self

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

One of our authors shares this example:

> When I was in college, I shared mostly surface information with most of my classmates, keeping the size of my Open Self small. As a work-study student, I cleaned dishes at one of the campus dining halls to help pay my tuition. I became very close with another work-study student in dining, as we felt more comfortable sharing about the challenges of balancing work and school, as well as dealing with financial aid and student loans. When I self-disclosed more personal information to my work-study friend, my Open Self became larger.

Closed Self

The **Closed Self** (also sometimes called the **Private Self**) represents the parts of ourselves we know well, but that we choose to keep secret or not tell others. With someone we know well and trust, we tend to have a larger Open Self and a smaller Closed Self. Let's say Jean has known her girlfriend Kennedy for three years. They get along well, have high trust in their relationship, and also live together. In this situation, Jean is likely to self-disclose more freely with Kennedy, and due to this, her Closed Self would be smaller. However, Jean shares only surface information with her colleagues at work. In her work relationships, Jean's Closed Self or Private Self is much larger.

We keep information about ourselves from others in order to protect ourselves. For example, when Jean gets a phone call from Tom, someone trying to sell her a magazine subscription, she would be hesitant to provide information about herself other than her name. When Tom asks Jean to talk about how many magazines she subscribes to, she may or may not provide this information. If she chooses not to self-disclose, Jean keeps this part of herself within the Closed Self. The size of the Open Self is directly proportional to the size of the Closed Self. In other words, people with a large Open Self have a small Closed Self or Private Self. Individuals with a large Private Self or Closed Self have a small Open Self.

Blind Self

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

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

Unknown Self

The **Unknown Self** represents the parts of our selves that no one knows. It is difficult to think about what the Unknown Self may include, since neither we nor others are aware of this information. Sometimes this information is buried deep in our subconscious, due to trauma or because there was an event that happened when we were young, and we cannot remember. For example, when JD was less than 2 years old, his family was awakened in the middle of the night by a fire alarm. JD's parents grabbed them from bed, rushed them out of the house, and had to stand outside in below freezing temperatures until the fire department could put a small fire out in the garage. Although JD has no memory of this incident, any time they hear a fire or car alarm or smell smoke, their heart races, their blood pressure increases, and they get very emotionally upset. Without a memory of this event, JD cannot explain this strong reaction to alarms or the smell of smoke. That part of themselves would be considered the Unknown Self.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The second theory we will discuss as we explore self-disclosure is the **uncertainty reduction theory** (**URT**). Developed by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975, the theory states that people are uncomfortable with the unknown and naturally seek to predict and explain others' behavior. The theory is built on the idea that when you meet someone new, you lack information about them, making you feel anxious. According to the theory, you try to solve this by using three main strategies to gather information: passive strategies. active strategies. and interactive strategies. These theories help to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability and the feeling of safety when interacting with others.

Application

Let's starrt with an example: Keisha saw a photo of Lidia on a dating app, and she is interested in her. Let's look at how Keisha might apply the strategies of URT to help her feel safe and comfortable moving forward with Lidia in the pursuit of a new relationship.

Passive, Active, and Interactive Strategies

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

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

Finally, the **interactive strategy** focuses on a direct exchange of information with the other person. After using the passive and active strategies to find out more information about Lidia, Keisha messaged Lidia directly and engaged in a conversation with mutual self-disclosure. The interactive strategy allows for the most in-depth and direct exchange of information. Thus, Keisha used all three strategies to gain information about Lidia. These three strategies help us not only to reduce uncertainty about others but also to more accurately predict future behavior.

Now that we have explored many of the theories associated with the formation of love relationships, we will discuss strategies for maintaining romantic relationships.

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3.2: Perception Process—Parts 1 and 2 (Selection and Organization)

Learning Objectives

- Define the basic components of the perception process.
- Understand how need, expectations, and salience contribute to the selection process.
- Identify how primacy and recency, similarities and differences, and proximity impact the organization process.

Making Assumptions

Imagine that you've sign up for a dating app at the recommendation of your best friend. You are excited to meet like-minded individuals, whom you hope to start a romantic relationship with. After scrolling through multiple “matches,” you land on someone who catches your eye. You notice their profile picture was taken at the beach, which you also love. You notice the career they list is one that has a six-digit income. From your perspective, the location they list is in a highly desirable area—and their hobbies and interests (for example, skiing, sailing, and international travel) require access to cash and free time.



Figure 3.2.1 Binary Heart by Alexander Sinn on Unsplash

Reflection Questions

1. What assumptions did you make regarding the “match” in the dating app?
2. What cultural norms or expectations did you notice in this person’s perception?
3. Can you name any stereotypes that you may have, based on the assumptions that you made in this vignette?
4. Can you pull in the concept of presenting self, from the previous chapter, to evaluate how the profile on the dating app may be intentionally projecting an image, that may or may not be accurate?

We make assumptions about people we have never met every day. Since we will not have the opportunity to get to know most of these individuals, we will never find out if our assumptions are accurate. There are many factors that go into how we interpret the world and the people we encounter. In this chapter, we will discuss the process of how we form perceptions, the factors that influence our perceptions, and how we can challenge ourselves to question our first impressions of others.

None of us enjoy it when others make assumptions about us, simply based on appearance—yet we are hardwired to be efficient in

our lives, which sometimes involves taking shortcuts and making educated guesses about new people and situations. As you read through the chapter, we hope that you will take notice of factors in your own life that affect how you perceive others. Furthermore, we encourage you to engage in a process of perception checking, or questioning your assumptions of others, on a regular basis.

Basic Components of the Perception Process

The perception process has three stages: selection, organization, and interpretation (Knudsen, et al., 2021). As shown in Figure 3.2.1, the **perception process** is both cognitive and psychological. It can influence how we communicate with ourselves and others. Look at any number of objects around you. What you choose to focus on, how you would describe it, and finally what you think about that object is unique to you. In this section, we walk you through some of the basic components of the perception process. The goal here is to gain a better understanding of how our perceptions are formed, giving us some unique insights into how those impact our interpersonal relationships.

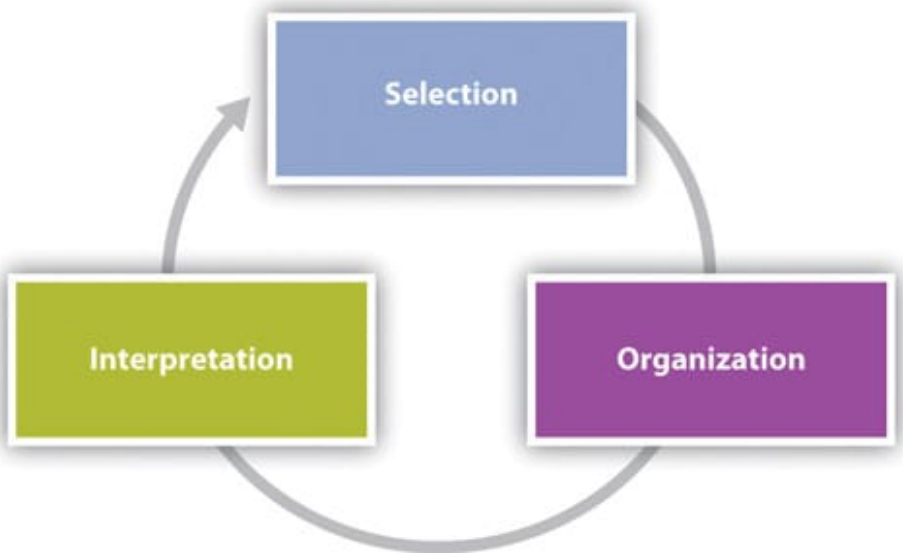


Figure 3.2.2 The Perception Process by Alex Mata licensed as CC-BY 4.0

Figure 3.2.1 shows a continuous interaction of the three stages of the perception process. Selection influences organization; organization influences interpretation; interpretation goes back into selection; then the process starts over again.

Selection

The first step in the perception process is **selection**. To build a foundation for selection, we must first attend to the senses. On any given day, our senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) are bombarded with stimuli. Because we cannot respond to them all, we will choose what to pay attention to and when. This process is called **sensory selection**. Sensory selection is a process for determining which stimulus gets our attention. This often occurs subconsciously and with little effort on our behalf (Knudsen, et al. 2021). So in our very busy lives, how do we choose? Let's dive deeper to see how the selection process is influenced by salience, needs, interests, and expectations to shape our perceptions.

Salience

Salience is a key component of understanding how and why we pay attention to. Salience is defined as anything that attracts our attention (Perception Process, 2020). Based on context, anything from an object, an idea, a quote, a concept, or a particular person can be salient to us. For example, say you are looking at the Instagram feed of your local news organization. There is a story about the rise in college tuition. As a current college student, you would likely stop and read that article. However, your friend, a recent college graduate, may not even take note of the headline. The post is not inherently more important than anything else on your feed. The importance lies in the salience to you, the viewer. With so much information at our fingertips, our brains will pick and choose, or select, the information we pay attention to and what to ignore. This will directly impact our unique perceptions. Let's look at some influences that make stimuli salient.

Needs

Our basic needs often drive our perception. If you are hungry, you will mostly see opportunities to eat. You might notice restaurant fronts, hear ads for takeout on the radio, or see a person eating an ice cream cone walking down the street. You are selecting (most likely unconsciously) stimuli related to your basic need of hunger. Now let's consider needs as they relate to relationships. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), humans have a need for love and belongingness. In times when we might feel lonely or isolated, we may be especially in tune to the nonverbal cues of our friends or significant other. Or we might take special note of someone in class who goes above and beyond to give us special attention and care. These cues may not be relevant to those around us, but at times when this need is triggered, we may select to note the actions of others that may otherwise seem mundane.

Let's consider how we could use our understanding of needs in the selection process to communicate with our loved ones more effectively. Take for example that we are feeling particularly disconnected from a friend. Because our perception of what is happening is based on our own needs at that time, our perception may not match up with our friend's perception of the situation. As an example, imagine a friend in a hurry to get to work, but doing their best to be kind and communicative. This friend may not notice that because they are in a hurry, their communication seems terse or abrupt. Should you communicate to that friend that you are feeling especially lonely or isolated? Communicating our needs and perceptions of the situation with each other is a positive step. If your friend knows you feel unsure or concerned about the relationship, perhaps they will take extra care to check in with you or make an effort to not be so short on replies via text. Effective communication means that instead of jumping to conclusions, we recognize our needs, identify what would help fulfill them, and then use interpersonal communication. This will help to avoid hurt feelings, and instead go towards building maintaining a healthy relationship. Other influences on our perceptions include our interests and expectations.

Checking In: Basic Needs

Let's take a moment to check in with ourselves as we read this chapter.



Figure 3.3.3 Eating ice Cream by Megan Bucknall on Unsplash

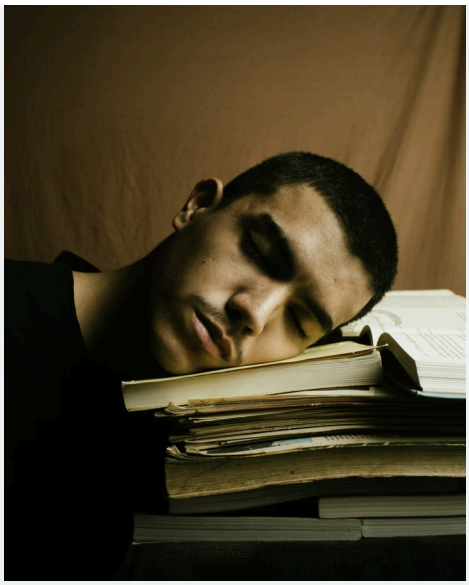


Figure 3.3.4 Asleep on books by Matheus Farias on Unsplash

How Are You Feeling?

If you are tired, hungry, busy, stressed, or distracted, you may be having a hard time focusing on this chapter. If you are calm, warm, comfortable, and focused, you may have a better time tuning in with our concepts.

Take a moment to scan your senses. Is there anything you could do at this moment to alter your state for a favorable outcome: the ability to enjoy and understand learning about the perception process as you read more?

Expectations

Perhaps one of the most powerful and truly impactful aspects of selection is **expectations**. Expectations can be seen as a two-sided coin. On one hand, we pay attention to those things we think should happen, and on the other hand, we pay attention to things that violate our expectations.



Figure 3.3.5 Selfie by June Aye on Unsplash

Let's look at an example of how we select to pay attention to what should *not* have happened. Say you get up earlier than normal one day just to send your significant other a quick "I love you, have a great day" message before they head to work. You don't

hear back. Hours go by. When your inbox is still empty, you are on high alert. There was nothing to signal the silence, no fight or argument the day before that would warrant no response, so it is unexpected. You jump on social media and they're tagged in a video with a friend, laughing and singing. Now you know they are OK, and apparently in good spirits, so this lack of response is even more unexpected. You begin to feel angry, anxious, hurt, and confused. You start to pay attention to things you would have otherwise found mundane: the time the video was posted, who else is around, what your significant other is wearing, etc. You decide to leave an angry comment on the social media post. Your significant other calls you, clearly upset by your post. You learn in your conversation that they not only left their phone at home in a rush to make it to work on time but weren't expecting to hear from you until after their shift, per your normal routine. You realize that your anger is not necessarily based on objective facts, but on your perception of what your partner should have done.

The trick is learning how to separate our expectations from our reality. Can we objectively measure anything, really? Our perceptions influence our reality, not the other way around. Therefore, the goal is not to void ourselves of past experiences, but to be aware of how our needs, interests, and expectations shape our perceptions.

Organization

Now that we understand how we select which stimuli to pay attention to, let's look at how we organize that information. How we understand this process of organization comes from **gestalt theory**. *Gestalt* is German for "pattern" or "shape," and the theory asserts that we essentially process stimuli by blending external stimuli with internal processes (Rock & Palmer, 1990). In essence, how we perceive the external world is heavily determined by internal influences. To break this down further, we will look at how we organize stimuli based on the three most common factors: similarity, difference, and proximity (Coren, 1980).

Assumed Similarity and Difference

When we believe or sense that someone is similar to us, we are more likely to be attracted to them as friends and give them the benefit of the doubt. The opposite is also true: if we find someone to be different from us, we will distance ourselves. It would be very hard to start this section off by not blatantly acknowledging that assumed similarities and differences often stem from stereotypes. So let me start with why we might stereotype in the first place: To put it simply, because it is easy. As we mentioned earlier, we are bombarded by stimuli on a daily basis. To be efficient—which many of us know is not always advantageous—we may stereotype because of its appeal to simplicity.

Stereotypes have been described in psychology as "allowing easier and more efficient processing of information" (Hilton & Hippel, 1996, p. 240). Our brains are trained, from early childhood on, to function in this way. Whether it's learning about animals, shapes, colors, or letters, we are taught to group similar-looking objects together as a means of understanding our environment. Through repetition of such activities, our perceptions based on similarities and differences are formed, reinforced, and encouraged. Although stereotyping can serve as a path of least resistance, we know that it can also create barriers for our ability to create healthy relationships with others. Now that we understand why we may stereotype subconsciously, and how that can be dangerous, let us continue to build these assumed realities.

Proximity

Proximity refers to how we perceive one object based on its surroundings. So, as we go about our day, we do not see objects, situations, or scenarios as isolated, but in context to the surroundings. This concept has been highlighted in the figure-ground relationship, which argues that our focus, whether it be on the object or the background, will change our perception (Knudsen, et al., 2021). This is highlighted in the classic faces/vase image displayed in Figure ({3{.}2{.}\eatSpaces{4} \endSpaces}\). Depending on whether you focus on the black or white portions of the image, this determines which figure becomes prominent. Try for yourself. Do you see different the vase or the profiles?

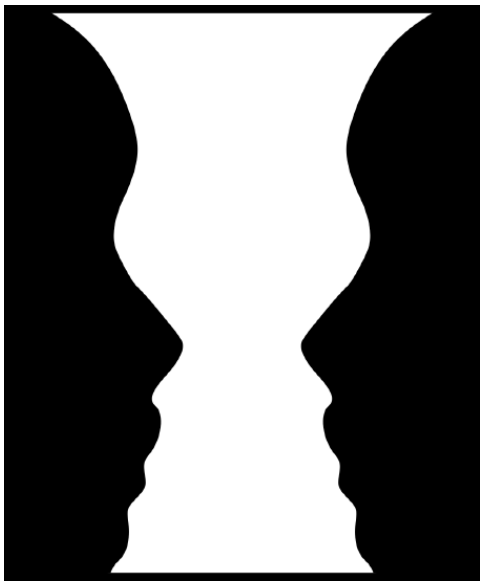


Figure 3.3.6 Profiles/face by Bryan Derksen licensed CC 1.0

Let's add a layer here, building on our past key terms: salience and selection. Let's say that you see a couple on a busy commercial street arguing, perhaps screaming. You may look at them and think, "wow, that is strange." You may attribute their behaviors to many factors, but you continue to drive, as you do not know the individuals or the situation. Now, let's say you turn onto your street, get very close to your home, and see two people arguing, perhaps screaming. This is very close to where you live. These people could be your neighbors. You now feel that, because of the proximity of this confrontation to your home, it is more salient. You may also select to pay close attention to the two people arguing; you may even decide to take action, such as stepping in or calling the police, because you may organize the event as a threat to you and your family's safety. The situation is the same, but the surroundings of the people in conflict have changed, thus making your perception of the situation different.

Before we leave this section on proximity, let's acknowledge how commonly we, and others, use proximity to organize the intentions of those around us. Have you ever been out with a friend to have someone assume you were together, or on a date? Or if you encounter the scene in Figure 3.2.5, where one child stands over another, who is on the ground and crying, could there be an assumption that one child hit or caused the other to be upset? Based on proximity, your physical immediacy to another person, object, or location could lead to false perceptions about you and others. Perhaps these perceptions are harmless, but they can cause significant harm to one or more parties involved, particularly when it comes to how we manage our relationships with others. Asking questions and consistently examining our biases as we move through the world can help us avoid making assumptions.



Figure 3.3.7 Young boy crying on the floor. Photo by yang miao on Unsplash

Primacy and Recency Effects

It has frequently been said that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Social psychologists use the term **primacy effect** to describe the phenomenon that people weigh what they see/learn first more heavily, seeing it as more salient than what comes later. To understand this further, let's put the primacy effect into context with studies by Solomon Asch (1946) and Edward Jones (1968).

Asch (1946) conducted a study that asked participants to share their overall impression of a person based on a list of characteristics that he read off. All participants were given the same set of characteristics: intelligent, critical, impulsive, industrious, stubborn, envious. However, the order in which the characteristics were listed was changed. Asch's findings led him to conclude that when the list of characteristics started with the more positive traits, the participants were more likely to rate a person more positively. Conversely, when the negative characteristics were shared first, the overall impression was negative. In a related study by Jones (1968), participants were asked to watch one of two videotapes of a woman taking an intelligence test. Reading these studies, you might think that first is always best. The answer is much more complicated than that.

To demonstrate just how complex the human mind is, in some cases, the information that comes last is influential. **Recency effect**, though less common than primacy effect, explains the phenomenon that people give more weight to the last thing they see or hear. In a study by Wändi Bruine de Bruin (2005), higher marks were given to competitors who performed last in particular competitions (ice skating was one). So the question remains, what is best? As you might have guessed based on the theme of this chapter: it depends.

Now that we have a foundation for how influential similarities and differences, proximity, and primacy and recency can be in how we organize stimuli, let's take a deeper dive into how we might interpret our perceptions.

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3.2.1: Perception Process - Part 3 (Interpretation)

Learning Objectives

- Define the interpretation process
- Understand how contribution bias and self-serving bias should prompt perception-checking
- Identify Attribution and Attribution Error in the interpretation phase of the perception process
- Contextualize how the halo and horn effects can create inaccurate interpretations of others

Interpretation

The third stage of our perception process is **interpretation**. To close this loop, let us take a moment to review the perception process (Figure 3.2.1.1).

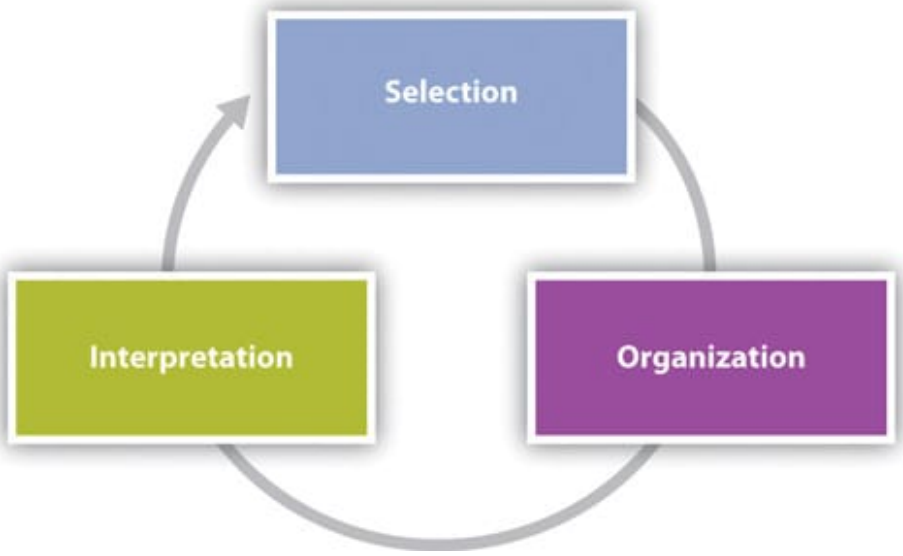


Figure 3.2.1.1 Perception Process by Alex Mata licensed as CC-BY 4.0

Once we have selected what to pay attention to, we organize it into a preconceived pattern or category, and then we interpret its meaning. This is essentially the outcome of our perceptions. Though all the stages in this process are important, this last stage will serve as the tangible consequence of this process. We can also note here that, as we have learned so far about perceptions, our brain is essentially trying to make sense of the world around us. One way to maintain simplicity is to confirm what we already think we know. Changing our minds can be challenging, painful, and/or complicated. Therefore, we will start with confirmation bias.

Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is our tendency to attend to evidence that supports preconceived notions while ignoring or disregarding evidence that is contrary to our desired reality (Gray, 2010). This can make it challenging for us to see things as they really are; instead, we see things as *we* are.

Interpretation: An Interpersonal Example

Let's say you hear a rumor that your best friend, who is married, is having an affair. You know your friend. He is a great guy, a loving husband, and a devoted father. You dismiss the rumor. Of course, you could see why it seems like he might be texting more or missing regularly scheduled get-togethers, and yes, he seems to be a bit distant. But you know your friend has been very busy. A mutual friend then shows you a picture on a social media platform that seems to be your best friend and a person other than his spouse. You respond with denial and even get angry at others who ask you to talk to him, or approach him about it. Your friend would never engage in an affair. You start to look for cues to confirm your stance. He did say work was picking up; he is probably dealing with a lot of emails and meetings related to that. He tells you he has a friend from college in town and you find comfort in believing that is probably who is in the picture with him on social media.

In this scenario, your interpretation might be viewed as noble or loyal—but in other scenarios, you may be confirming biases that are harmful or inaccurate, like stereotypes, preconceived opinions, or assumptions.

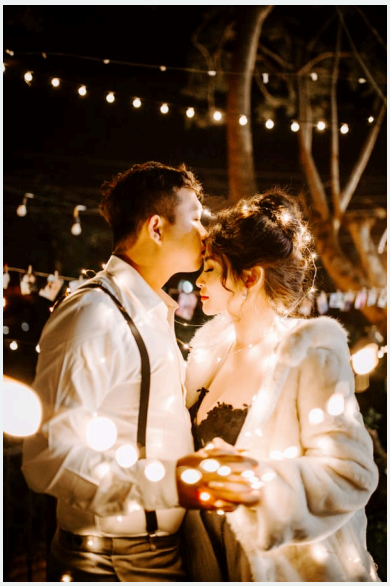


Figure 3.2.1.2 Man Kissing a Woman by Anthony Tran on Unsplash

As we move through this stage of the perception process, let's continue to consider confirmation bias, noting its power to reinforce our preconceived notions, while at the same time avoiding anything that would challenge those. Let us continue to be aware of our brain's desire to be right, even at the cost of disregarding facts.

So let us dive into the most prominent facet of interpretation: making attributions.

Attributions

Attribution is defined as "the interpretive process by which people make judgments about the causes of their own behavior and the behavior of others" (Heider, 1958, para. 3). When we engage in interpersonal communication, how we interpret messages directly influences the quality of the interaction as well as the relationship. In this section, we explore the psychological tendencies associated with perception and how they affect our communication interactions.

Fundamental Attribution Error

Fundamental attribution error is the tendency to attribute others' behavior to internal, rather than external, factors (Ross, 1977). For example, Sam is in a hurry to get to work on time and accidently blocks wheelchair access to a sidewalk when they park. When Sam gets to their car after a long shift, they see a ticket. Their initial reaction is "Those parking jerks have nothing better to do than to give me a ticket. They love ruining people's day!" Now, let's break this down. Sam is attributing the parking enforcement officer's action (writing a ticket) to their desire to ruin someone's day and has labeled this officer as a jerk. There is no acknowledgement of a parking violation, the hurry to make it to work on time, or the possible inconvenience to others. We could continue and consider that the officer, while noting the violation, labeled Sam as selfish and not a law-abiding citizen. Say

that a person in a wheelchair was unable to access the sidewalk and thought of Sam as a person who is uncaring of those with physical limitations. These attributions happen quickly, and they attribute a person's behavior to who that person is, rather than to external factors. Some of these assumptions—or all of them—could be true. However, we can see how miscommunication and conflict could arise quite quickly if we used attributions as the basis for our interactions with others.

Self-Serving Bias

Have you ever been driving on the freeway when your lane suddenly merges with another and you hear a loud honk? Whoa, that car came from out of nowhere! "Geeze," you think. "Calm down, everyone is fine." You may find yourself feeling overwhelmingly frustrated that someone got so upset when you didn't see them in your mirrors. Later that day, you are driving and someone cuts you off. You honk loudly and think, "Pay attention to the road, you idiot!" The hypocrisy of the situation is most likely sinking in already.

Self-serving bias is essentially an attribution process that we engage in to portray ourselves in the most desirable light. Although research shows that we do this almost effortlessly for ourselves, we do not offer those same grace so easily to others.



Figure 3.2.1.3 Driver Looking In Rearview Window by Joshua Wordel on Unsplash

So how does self-serving bias work, exactly? We can start by understanding where we likely place blame for undesirable behavior. Research shows us that when we are the perpetrators of undesirable behavior, we will likely place blame on external attributions (we are tired, it was an accident, it happened because someone does not like us). Conversely, when we are the victims of undesirable behavior, we place blame on the internal attributions of others (that is their character, they are inconsiderate, they did it on purpose). This was illustrated in research by Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990), in which participants were asked to describe an experience when they angered someone else (i.e., when they were the perpetrator of an undesirable behavior) and then asked to describe an experience where someone angered them (i.e., when they were a victim of the undesirable behavior). As you might imagine, participants were quick to identify situational factors, and external attributions, as the source of their own undesirable behavior, asserting that their actions caused no lasting harm to the other. However, when describing the undesirable behavior of another, in which they were a victim, participants often cited character flaws and internal attributions, and noted the lasting damage of the interaction. These findings are quite significant if put into the context of the harm that attribution biases can have on interpersonal relationships. A good reminder here can be to check perceptions, acknowledge biases, and extend some grace to those we interact with.

Halo and Horn Effects

We have learned so far that our brains are wired to conserve energy and opt for simplicity. We also learned that initial interactions (first impressions) hold strong and for a long time. So, what happens when our first perceptions of someone are positive? What happens when they are negative? These initial perceptions stay with us for quite some time. In fact, this occurrence is so prominent that researchers have coined the terms **halo** and **horn effects** to identify them as interpersonal communication

phenomena. The **halo effect** occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive (Hargie, 2011). The **horn effect** occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Just as the metaphor suggests, you can imagine these initial interactions as creating mini halos or horns above those around you, guiding your interpretations of subsequent interactions (discussed in the section on the primacy and regency effects on page 3.2).

Halo Effect

Let's say your sister wants the family to meet her new boyfriend, Damien. Your mom hosts at her house, and all your immediate family is in attendance. Your sister and Damien show up right on time. Damien brings flowers for your mom a bottle of wine to share and immediately asks if he should remove his shoes because they are wet from the rain outside. He introduces himself to everyone in the room and offers to help cook and set up for dinner. Damien has earned himself a **halo**.

The next time you meet Damien, he and your sister are running late. "This is so unlike Damien," you think to yourself. They must have gotten stuck in traffic. Damien gives you a big hug and you think, "He is so friendly." However, for much of the night, Damien is on his phone. That halo will have you thinking he must be busy with work, or you may feel bad that he seems distracted by something else. You think you know who Damien is, based on your initial interaction with him; therefore, any negative interactions after that are attributed to external factors.



Figure 3.2.1.4 Woman Holding a Cow's Skull in Front of Face by Mallory Johndrow on Unsplash.

Horn Effect

If we flip the script, you could imagine another introduction where your sister and Damien show up late for dinner at your mom's house. Damien is more reserved or shy with introductions, and perhaps he walks into the house wearing wet shoes. He does not bring anything to contribute to dinner and he certainly does not offer to help. In this scenario, perhaps Damien has earned a **horn**. In any subsequent meetings, that initial introduction guides your perceptions of Damien's behavior. Say Damien offers you a hug. You might find this "out of character," even though you have only met him once. While he is on his phone at dinner, you reconfirm that he is distant, introverted, and not particularly interested in interacting.

You can see how the initial interaction shapes how you perceive future interactions with someone new. Though you may have many subsequent interactions, research shows us that it takes some time to shake that halo or horn (Hargie, 2011).

Understanding how perceptions are formed can be a very powerful tool in helping us navigate our interpersonal relationships. Acknowledging our tendencies to make snap judgments might help us pause and reassess how accurate those judgments are.

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3.2.2: Influences on Perception

Learning Objectives

- Define physiology and culture as it relates to intercultural communication.
- Understand how age, sexual orientation, differing abilities, ethnicity, and sex influence our perceptions.

How Physiology and Culture Influence Perception

There are many factors that influence how we perceive others. Our own health and physiology, the culture or cultures we are raised within, the social/professional roles we take on, our cognitions, and the physical and environmental surroundings are just some of the circumstances that affect how we see, hear, feel, and react to other people. In this section, we focus on how physiology and culture influence our perception.

Physiology

Our health or physical well-being, in a given moment, influences our perception of others we come into contact with. When we are healthy or feel generally good, we have more patience, we can listen effectively, and we can process complex information. However, when pain, hunger, breathing issues, or stress are present, our bodies are compromised. Have you had to go back to work or school after getting a vaccination or having work done on your teeth? Even a small bit of pain can be distracting. Physical hurt and discomfort may negatively affect our ability to focus and pay attention (Gong, et al., 2019). Additionally, an inverse relationship between pain and executive function seems to indicate that our judgment and decision-making are not at their best when our bodies experience discomfort or suffering (Abeare, et al., 2010). These physiological effects go beyond pain.

Culture

For the purposes of this online educational resource, **culture** is defined as a group of people who share values, beliefs, norms, and a common language. Due to this shared way of thinking and behaving, people from the same culture often share similar perspectives on the world. Although we are likely to associate culture with a specific country or part of the world (for example, Western vs. Eastern culture), even within a specific country, there are often smaller groups of like-minded individuals that develop into co-cultures. Co-cultures may be a group of people from a specific religious or ethnic group. Other examples of co-cultures include the LGBTQIA+ community, those who subscribe to a specific political affiliation, or even community college students. Marginalized groups often form co-cultures, as this allows people to maintain strong bonds and unique shared experiences with which to build relationships within a larger cultural context. (The term **co-culture** replaced the formerly used term **subculture**, in order to emphasize that no one culture is superior or inferior to another.)



Figure 3.2.2.1 Final Dance at Pamplona City Hall by San Fermin Pamplona - Navarra on Unsplash

Our cultural groups or cultural identities shape our perceptions of others. This includes the groups we belong to or are assigned to based on our race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability. Most of us are steeped in the teachings of the cultural groups that we belong to from a very young age. Paraphrasing Bonn (2015), children gradually learn to make sense of their existence in the world through ideas about identity and what purposes their lives serve; they depend upon the symbols that hold society together. For example, **CODA** is a term that hearing children of deaf adults have chosen to represent the "unique heritage and multicultural identities of adult hearing individuals with deaf parents" (CODA International, 2022).

We know that a strong cultural identity correlates positively with self-esteem (Phinney, et al., 1997; Bracey, et al., 2004). So it follows that people in the same cultural groups or with the same cultural identities would benefit from the link they share to beliefs and values. It is important for us to name some of these cultural groups and consider how membership might impact perception.

Race

Race refers to a category of people who may share certain inherited physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and stature. Although race is a social construct, people often make assumptions about others that are based on their perceived racial category. When was the last time you were asked to self-identify your race? Chances are that you have filled out an online form or answered this question recently. When you open a credit card account, fill out a form at your doctor's office, or even sign up for a social media account, you are generally asked about your race. How does our perception of our own and others racial identities affect communication?

This is obviously a complex subject and not something that can be adequately explained in a few paragraphs. In fact, the University of Connecticut offers a semester-long course called "People of Color and Interpersonal Communication" to address a greater number of issues and situations than is possible in this short section. For now, it is important to state that our perception of our own race, as well our perception of the racial identity of the person we interact with, influences the quality and outcomes of the interaction.

Pros and Cons of Racial Categories



Figure 3.2.2.2 "Child With Mom" by Tyson on Unsplash

According to the 2020 US Census, the largest shift in how Americans self-identified in terms of race was the increase in people who self-identify as "more than one racial category" from 2.9% (9 million people) in 2010 to 10.2% (33.8 million people) in 2020 (Jones, et al., 2021, August 12). Although we have complex understandings of our own multiple identities, this does not protect us from other people's quick perceptions. In real-life situations, we are sized up very quickly by those we meet for the first time. They look at our facial features, skin color, and clothing; and they listen to how we speak. Then they decide which racial category we belong to. Comedian Trevor Noah, in a February 2016 show he did for Comedy Central, talked about opening his first bank account in the United States. Trevor Noah was born in South Africa during the era of apartheid. He is the child of a Black African mother and a White European father. When he sat down with the banker, he recalled the woman who helped him to open his account, stating that he could "just go with whatever race you want." He said that when he told the woman that he was going to choose White, it was obvious she had no idea what to do but was clearly having trouble accepting that choice. (You may watch the two-minute video clip on Comedy Central.) We do not have a choice when other people categorize us into racial categories. Please use the following questions to reflect and discuss your thoughts on racial categories and how they affect us. Reflection Questions: Discuss the pros and cons of using racial categories in your own life. How do you think we, as the United States, should move forward regarding race as a label? When you are asked to state your race, what feelings come up for you? Perhaps you identify with more than one racial background or the race you identify with is questioned by others. How can we effectively communicate our self-identified race or cultural group(s) to others? Has anyone ever misidentified your cultural background or race? How did you react to this? How can we communicate most effectively to give individuals the right to self-identify their cultural background?

Ethnicity/Regionalism

Where we are from, and the people we are surrounded by as we develop from infancy to adulthood, impact the way we see the world and thus how we engage in interpersonal relationships. Often the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are used interchangeably (SAMHSA, 2014). At other times, ethnic groups are identified by a shared heritage. In other words, **ethnicity** refers to people with the same country of origin. Of course, many ethic groups speak a common language and practice shared behavioral norms, meaning they also share culture.

Regionalism refers to geographic areas made up of multiple states, communities, or countries that work in concert or have common goals (Nye, 1968). Within the United States, you might be familiar with the regions such as the South, Midwest, or New England. Whether we are talking about what ethnic group or region someone is from, we know that our perceptions are influenced by our families, communities, in some cases religious institutions, and even by the language that we speak.

For example, if Chiara grows up in Italy, she likely speaks Italian and practices Catholicism, and she may consider spaghetti and meatballs to be a staple of her diet. She may encounter Rajit from India, who practices Sikhism and is vegetarian. Due to Chiara's ethnic group and her upbringing, particularly if she is from a homogenous region, her perception of Rajit will be of someone who is outside of her group and she will recognize their differences. This is in contrast to when she meets Carlo (another Italian from her region), and notices their similarities.

Sex Assigned at Birth, and Gender

In the United States, a **gender binary** perspective has been imposed as a norm for the majority of the population since the country's founding. Within the gender binary perspective, not only are there only two possibilities for gender expression (male and female), there are also very set characteristics (often opposing) for each gender. Here are some examples you may be familiar with: Females are assumed to have long hair, whereas males are assumed to have short hair; males are strong and females are weak; females are emotional and males are unemotional. It may be obvious to you that these exaggerated differences between genders are stereotypes and often untrue. However, these societal assumptions guide our perceptions of others, as well as our interpersonal interactions.



Figure 3.2.2.3 Two Students in a Gender Neutral Bathroom by Zackary Drucker licensed as CC BY NC ND 4.0

When you see a baby dressed in pink, do you automatically assume the baby is female? If a baby is crying, would you treat that baby differently, based solely on your assumption of their gender? Many research studies have found that parents interact differently with a baby based on whether they perceive the baby to be a boy or a girl. From the amount of touch to the quality of the caretaker's voice and how the caretaker demonstrates affection are influenced by the caretaker's perception of the baby's gender (Fausto-Sterling, 2015). These differences in how we talk with and treat people based on our perception of their sex or gender continues into adulthood.

Sexualities

There are many different sexualities, and none is more "normal" or "abnormal" than any other. We live in a **heteronormative** culture, where through politics and social pressure, heterosexuality is viewed as the "norm." Unfortunately, having a perspective where one sexuality is seen as the norm leads to discrimination of people who identify and/or practice other sexualities. In terms of interpersonal communication, let's consider how this discrimination affects real-world interaction.

In 1993, the Clinton administration signed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Department of Defense directive, which stipulated that anyone, regardless of sexuality, had a right to serve in the military—so long as they did not disclose their sexuality. However, this was not exactly true. Anyone who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or otherwise queer would be discharged from military service if they openly discussed their relationships, while people in heterosexual relationships were free to discuss dating, partnerships, and thoughts about sex. "Don't Ask Don't Tell" was repealed in 2010, after 17 years, but discrimination still limits safe and free speech for LGBTQIA+ community members in the military.

In more positive news, limits on interpersonal interactions based on sexuality have seen some progress. In 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States (in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, reaching a 5–4 decision) found that the right to marry is a fundamental right, regardless of the sex or gender identity of the two partners. This decision, along with changing and more accepting attitudes in younger generations, has resulted in an increase of Americans who openly identify as **queer** (or anything outside of straight and cisgender). In fact, in 2020 15.9% or one in six 18–23 year olds (Generation Z) self-identified as other than straight. For these young adults, it is easier to self-identify as queer and speak freely regarding their sexualities, as there is less stigma and

discrimination among others in their generation. Discrimination still exists, however, as evidenced by Florida House Bill 1557, which became effective in July 1, 2022. Also known as “Don’t Say Gay,” this legislation limits discussion of sexuality in elementary schools.

Abilities

Quote

"Inclusion is about willingness to take a unique difference and develop it as a gift to others. It is not about disability." — Judith Snow

One in four (26%) adults in the United States live with a disability (Okoro, et al., 2018). Despite how commonplace disability is among US citizens, discrimination against people with disabilities occurs regularly. Able-bodied people may see a person who uses a wheelchair and imagine how difficult or terrible it would be to not be able to walk. For a person with a physical disability, using a wheelchair may equate to freedom of movement.

There is a strong international disability movement that recognizes “disability” is actually created by environmental barriers, as opposed to any person's physical issues. For example, someone who is deaf communicates as well or better with sign language than with the spoken word. The limits on this person’s communication are due to a lack of people who use sign language or a skilled translator. In healthcare, to determine pain level, many hospitals and doctors offices use a number of measures, including a number scale and the Facial Action Coding System (Kripke, 2018). However there is still work to be done to improve communication with neurodiverse patients, who may have different interpretations of facial expressions (Dildine & Atlas, 2019).

Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution (2020)

The documentary *Crip Camp* features teenagers who participate in a summer camp (Camp Jened) for disabled adolescents, and it looks into their futures as adult advocates for accessibility and disability rights. Perhaps you watched this documentary, or the movie *CODA*. (The acronym CODA stands for "child of deaf adults.") Each of these Oscar-nominated films features people living with disabilities who lead multifaceted lives, speak and act with power and leadership, and look at disability as a culture or community. In both of these films, we see disability as one aspect of identity, and how intersectionality—the different parts of our identities, including race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, etc.—plays a role in power, privilege, and the way we are treated and function in our everyday lives.



Figure 3.2.2.4 Camp Jened by Steve Honigsbaum licensed as CC BY-ND-NC 2.0

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), **intersectionality** sees the various human identities as connected, shaped by, and influenced by one another. What this means is that as multifaceted human beings, we experience these multiple aspects of our human identity concurrently. Please read the following questions to consider, reflect and discuss your own experiences with the disability community.

Reflection Questions

1. Are you someone who lives with a disability? Or do you have a friend or relative who lives with a disability? Please discuss how other people's perceptions of disability may be different from people who live with disabilities.
2. How can we be more mindful and aware of the intersectionality of other people's identities in our everyday perception of others?
3. The creators of the film *Crip Camp* chose this title. Discuss how using terminology that may be perceived as offensive by some, acts as a way of taking power when it is used by a marginalized group.
4. Please take a moment to read this blog on disability-affected speech by disability advocate Denise Sherer Jacobson. How can each of us work to eliminate barriers to inclusivity for people with disability-affected speech?
5. Movies like *Crip Camp* and *CODA* provide a way to increase inclusivity and representation of people with disabilities on a wider scale. What are other ways that each of us can increase inclusivity and representation for people with disabilities?

References:

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Social Cognitive Abilities

Cognition or thinking processes are in some ways interwoven with the perception process. Here we focus specifically on social **cognitive abilities**. "Social cognition is a set of cognitive processes applied to the recognition, understanding, accurate processing, and effective use of social cues in real-world situations" (Harvey & Penn, 2010). If our ability to engage in social cognition is impaired, this inevitably affects our power to perceive others and the situation. When we are physically and mentally unimpaired, we have a full range of experiences and sensory feelers that help us to determine who is safe, what is going on, and how we fit into a potential interaction. However, when our senses are diminished or damaged, or our cognitive abilities are functioning at less than 100%, our internal radar is negatively affected.

Face Blindness



Figure 3.2.2.5 Who Are You? by Afif Kusuma on Unsplash

Known in the medical literature as **prosopagnosia**, people who have **face blindness** have difficulty recognizing the face of another person and connecting that with a name or personality. A neurotypical individual recognizes approximately 5,000 different faces (Jenkins, et al., 2018). “Accurate and rapid recognition of a face is critical for social [interaction] because it allows one to gauge behavior, intent, and appropriate social response, based on previous experiences” (Avery, et al., 2016). Without the ability to connect a name to a face of someone familiar, people with face blindness must depend on other cues, including hair, voice, height, and dress. Receiving or recognizing a diagnosis of face blindness can be very helpful for those who live with it. Shelly Beaser, an individual with face blindness, stated that she previously thought she was a “lazy observer,” until her condition was named (Altman, 2021).

Age

Perception is both physical and psychological. Let’s start with how physical perception is affected by age. Very few children (two to three of every 1000) are born with detectable hearing loss (CDC, 2010). However, as we age and are exposed to environmental factors such as loud noises at work (airport workers, for example) or self-select to listen to music at a high volume using earbuds, more of us will experience auditory declines. Approximately 15% of adults in the United States experience some hearing loss (Blackwell, et al., 2014). As we age, the percentage of people who experience hearing loss increases, with the highest rate of hearing loss occurring over age 60 (Hoffman, et al., 2016).

Hearing is not the only sense that declines with aging and helps us with our ability to perceive the world. Many people also experience a decline in their ability to see. Although many people use corrective lenses to improve their vision (even at a young age), non-correctable visual impairment increases with age, with the highest rates occurring over age 60. With hearing and/or vision issues, it becomes more difficult to get an accurate perception of other people, the environment, and our physical surroundings.



Figure 3.2.2.6 Lima market by Juan Arrondodo licensed as CC BY NC 4.0

Beyond the physical issues that occur with aging and perception, there are also cognitive or psychological elements. Processing speed and memory decline with age (Salthouse, 2010). However, it is said that as people get older, they also exhibit wisdom. The definition of "wisdom" varies widely, but most often it is associated with the ability to carefully consider information in the context of experience, as well as making decisions based on knowledge, as opposed to instinct. If we consider the integration of life experience and increased interpersonal communication skills that come with aging, it may well be that there are some cognitive advantages to aging that contribute to perception.

Obviously, regardless of the statistics on physical or cognitive abilities or loss and their association with a specific age range, there is individual variation. In other words, it is more likely that a 20 year old will have better vision and hearing than a 55 or 70 year old. However, a 20-year-old marine veteran may have damaged hearing from exposure to gunfire and loud jet engines.

Attributions

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3.2.3: Stereotyping, Microaggressions, and Bias

Learning Objectives

- Define stereotyping, microaggressions, and implicit bias, and descrimination
- Understand how schemas and scripts contribute to perceptions
- Define stereotype threat and opportunities to reduce its impact on interpersonal communication

Stereotyping

Stereotyping is the opposite of seeing a person as an individual. There are many reasons that humans may depend on stereotyping: We engage in hundreds (sometimes thousands) of interpersonal interactions in a given day and need to be efficient; humans are wired for survival, and quick judgments upon first meeting others are meant to protect us from those who may be dangerous; humans register basic information about others' faces in milliseconds after first meeting them (Willis & Todorov, 2006). Perhaps it is only natural for humans to make judgments about these faces (and the people who wear them), given our natural tendency to scan and inspect new visual information.

No matter the reason, humans seem to have a natural propensity to stereotype others upon first meeting them. Stereotyping involves seeing someone primarily as a member of a group as opposed to an individual, and assuming that the person shares all social, cultural, and behavioral traits with others in that group. In this section we explore both the processes involved in stereotyping and the effects.

Schemas and Scripts

If you think about the human brain like a computer, you can imagine that information storage is an important part of the brain's function. On a computer, there are file folders, within which we can store relevant files. In the human brain, scientists posit that there is a similar situation. **Schemas** are like file folders or categories, where relevant memories, experience, and knowledge about a specific subject area are stored. For example, you might have a schema for Thanksgiving. Within the schema, you might have memories of air travel, eating turkey, gathering with relatives, Uncle James drinking a little too much, laughter, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. Any time one of these memories is triggered by a new stimulus (e.g., a television commercial showing a large family gathering), your "Thanksgiving" schema will be triggered. You may incorporate new information into this schema or, based on how well this new information "fits in" with what is already included, decide that it does not belong.

Scripts (also called **event schemata**) are sequences of events related to a specific schema. Most people have a script for taking an elevator. A typical elevator script might go something like this:

1. I press the elevator button and wait.
2. The elevator door opens.
3. I step into the elevator, then turn around to face the elevator door.
4. I do not engage in conversation with others on the elevator.
5. When the elevator reaches my floor, the door opens and I exit.

We like when actual events follow our scripts (or expectations of how the event will go); humans become uncomfortable when any part of the script is violated. For example, let's say one day you wait for the elevator, but when you step inside, everyone else is facing away from the door. In this case, it would be confusing to know whether you should follow what the others in the elevator are doing or whether you should face the door as you always do.



Figure 3.2.3.1 Going Up! by Clyde Robinson licensed as CC BY 2.0

Microaggressions

n the United States, and in many other societies, there is a social structure that provides power and access to some people—based on race, gender, age, sexuality, and ability—while denying access and power to others. The word **power** here implies the processes of privileging, normalizing, and valuing certain identities over others. This definition of power highlights the ways in which culture works in the creation and privileging of certain categories of people. Power in US society is organized along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, nation, and religious identities. Some identities are more highly valued, or more normalized, than others—typically because they are contrasted to identities thought to be less valuable or less "normal." Thus, identities are not only descriptors of individuals, but also grant a certain amount of collective access to the institutions of social life. It is important to understand that some people have more or less power than others in our society, due to their race, gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, or ability.



Figure 3.2.3.2 Photo by Alexis Brown on Unsplash.

A microaggression is a statement or action that is made by a person with more power and privilege and delivered to a person who has less power and privilege. For example, an able-bodied interviewer might say to an interviewee using a wheelchair: "I'm impressed that you got here on time." Notice that the statement itself may not seem offensive at all. According to Derald Wing Sue, who coined the term, microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities,

whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults. ... Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communication" (Sue, et al., 2007) The statement "I'm impressed that you got here on time" carries the implication that due to using a wheelchair, the interviewee may have more difficulty navigating the travel from home to the office where the interview is held. Although this may be the case, the wheelchair user may hear the message that the interviewer has low expectations of their performance, before they have even had an opportunity to discuss the job itself.

It may not be obvious when you deliver a microaggression. However, if someone lets you know they felt diminished or harmed by a statement that you have made, this is an opportunity to apologize and move forward. Our first reaction to being told we have made a microaggression may be defensiveness. This is especially true given that microaggressions may be unintentional and ambiguous. However, taking responsibility and apologizing for a microaggression allows both people who participated in the interaction to heal their relationship. Here are three steps to apologize for a microaggression:

1. Take responsibility. If you need more information about how your statement or action negatively impacted the other person, it's OK to ask. Allow the other person to clearly explain their perspective—and take it seriously.
2. Apologize with sincerity and acknowledge how the microaggression may have impacted the other person. For example: "I'm sorry that my statement made you feel I don't value or respect you."
3. Let the other person know you want to repair the relationship and move forward. Working through a microaggression can feel awkward and embarrassing for both parties. A simple statement can be helpful to let the other person know you want to move forward: "I appreciate that you were honest with me about how my statement negatively impacted you. Please let me know, in the future, if I cross any lines or say something insensitive or disrespectful."

Reflection Questions

1. What microaggressions do you experience in your day-to-day interactions with your friends, classmates, fellow employees, teachers, managers, family members, etc.?
2. Reflecting back, what microaggressions have you verbally or nonverbally expressed toward others?
3. Have you ever clutched your purse, bag, or wallet when a person of a specific race, gender, nationality, or age walks by you?
4. What are ways you can combat microaggressions using communication?
5. How can you challenge your own microaggressions?

Stereotype Threat

"Stereotype threat is being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group." Coined by researchers Steele and Aronson (1995), the term **stereotype threat** refers to the effects that negative stereotypes have on the people who are members of specific groups. The original study (conducted with Stanford University undergraduates) looked at how Black and White students scored on an exam in two different scenarios. In Scenario 1, the students were told that the exam would rate their intellectual ability. In Scenario 2, students were instead told that the exam was a "laboratory problem-solving task" and not diagnostic of intellectual ability. To further distance participants from having the negative stereotype triggered in Scenario 2, participants were asked to "please take this challenge seriously even though we will not be evaluating your ability."

The results of the study clearly demonstrated the negative effects of stereotype threat. When presented with Scenario 1, where students were told intellectual ability was being measured, Black students scored significantly lower than White students. However, with Scenario 2, which used the same exact test, but indicated the exam was a way to measure problem-solving (not intellectual ability), there was not a significant difference in test scores by race. Although stereotype threat is not 100% responsible for testing variability between students who identify with different racial backgrounds, it does partially explain why people from groups that society places negative stereotypes on often underperform on tests that measure academic aptitude (Sackett, et al., 2004).

Listen to this Podcast on Stereotype Threat



Figure 3.2.3.3 Image by Yasin Yusuf on Unsplash

This podcast from Hidden Brain Media talks about how the stereotypes we hold impact every part of our lives, from parent–teacher conferences to workplace interviews, all the way to romantic relationships. Please listen to the podcast linked below, or read the transcript that appears on the podcast's web page.

Podcast: How They See Us | Hidden Brain MediaNow, use the Reflection Questions to have an immersive small group, classroom, or discussion board conversation.

Reflection Questions: The podcast begins with a story that describes when Claude Steele (the person being interviewed) first realized that he, as a Black person, was treated differently. Think about your various human identities: gender, socio-economic status, race, sexuality, nationality, ability, education, kin, etc. Discuss a time when you were treated differently due to one of your human identities. You may have been treated better, worse, differently, etc. What happened and what did you experience?Thinking of college and academia, what types of stereotypes are highlighted through the course content, assignments, lectures, and readings, etc. What ways could college and universities be more inclusive and break away from stereotypes? Did any of the stories and information within the Podcast resonate with you? Could you relate to any of the stories? How has the Podcast adjusted your understanding of perception?

Reducing the Effects of Stereotype Threat

Importantly, stereotype threat occurs not only across racial identity, but also with gender, sexuality, age, disability, and even ethnicity and religion. Recently, there has been more research devoted to strategies for reducing the effects of stereotype threat in academic settings. Beyond removing terms that trigger the stereotype, empirically validated research suggests that the following is helpful:

- Emphasize the value of diversity (Purdie-Vaughns, et al., 2008).
- Improve minority representation, especially when there's underrepresentation in that specific field (Carrell et al., 2010; Dee, 2004; Massey & Fischer, 2005).
- Highlight that classroom tests are for the purpose of facilitating learning, as opposed to measuring ability (Good et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995).
- Make students aware of stereotype threat and work with them to attribute the anxiety brought on by this social-psychological condition to the stereotype threat itself, rather than other internal factors (Johns, et al., 2005; Johns, et al., 2008).

Implicit Bias and Discrimination

Human beings value a sense of belonging. We enjoy being members of a group, where we are treated with respect and kindness. At times, people become attached to their group in such a way that they believe the group they belong to is better than other groups. If you think about it, this is pretty normal in some scenarios. For example, if you play on a baseball team, you and your teammates may talk about your team members' talents, while dismissing the players on the other team. In this scenario, you can see how this would boost team morale. Unfortunately, in the real world, this type of thinking often goes beyond cognitive considerations or conversations. People may exhibit bias, or "attitudes, behaviors, and actions that are prejudiced in favor of or against one person or group compared to another" in how they treat others, when those others come from a different group (US Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.).

Bias can be explicit, meaning the people who hold these attitudes are conscious that they have these beliefs. However, bias can also be implicit. Implicit bias occurs when people favor one group over another, in thoughts and actions, however, they are unaware that this bias exists. Bias often occurs in societies where there is a majority group that is more powerful than a less powerful cultural minority group. When the group who has power uses laws, rules, or actions to hurt, diminish quality of life, or take power away from a group who lacks power, this is called discrimination. The United States has a long history of discriminating against Black and Brown people. Beginning in 1619, the United States kidnapped, sold, and enslaved people from Africa. Slavery, which included horrific traumas such as rape, separation of families, erasure of family history, and murder, was legal until the Emancipation Proclamation issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863. Slavery continued in some parts of Texas through June 19, 1865, or Juneteenth, when Federal troops ensured that any remaining enslaved people in Galveston, Texas were set free. Juneteenth was declared a federal holiday in 2021.

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3.2.4: Guidelines for Effective Perception

Learning Objectives

- Define the steps of perception-checking
- Distinguish between subjectivity and objectivity
- Understand how verbal and nonverbal skills contribute to perception-checking
- Apply opportunities for compassion cultivation in perception-checking practices

Perception Checking

Due to all of the influences on our perceptions, from physical and cognitive differences to membership in cultural groups, if we are going to practice effective communication it is essential for us to use strategies that decrease the inevitable biases each of us have. Perception checking involves taking extra time and effort to examine a situation from multiple perspectives, with the goal of increased understanding between two parties.

Subjectivity vs. Objectivity

Assumptions are subjective opinions. When something is **subjective**, according to the APA Dictionary of Psychology, that means it is "1. taking place or existing only within the mind. Or 2. particular to a specific person and thus intrinsically inaccessible to the experience or observation of others" (American Psychological Association, n.d.a). This is as opposed to **objective** observations, which involve facts or items "having verifiable existence in the external world, independently of any opinion or judgment" (American Psychological Association, n.d.c).

Let's imagine that Fernanda and Tran are assigned to be lab partners in Chemistry. It is the first day of class. Both partners identify as female, high-achieving students, and both are sophomores at the same college. Fernanda, a Mexican American student, stayed up late the night before, supporting her roommate through a very difficult time. As a result, she did not get much sleep and came into class wearing the sweatpants and T-shirt she put on for bed. Tran, who identifies as Vietnamese American, went to sleep early and got up at 6:00 a.m. to exercise, then showered, put on makeup, and dressed in a business casual outfit, because she has an interview for an internship later in the afternoon.

Although both Fernanda and Tran have a lot in common, in terms of their gender identity and excellent work ethic to meet their goal of succeeding in school, they are likely to make some wrong first impressions of each other, based solely on physical characteristics like clothing/dress or cultural identity/ethnicity. Tran may see Fernanda dressed in wrinkled sweatpants and a T-shirt and believe that she is not a serious student. She may therefore be disappointed in having her as a Chemistry lab partner. Fernanda may see Tran's makeup and business casual outfit as a sign that her lab partner is stuck up or thinks she is too good for anyone else.

Distinguish Facts from Non-Facts

In order to distinguish facts (or objective data) from non-facts, we can follow these steps:

1. Determine the facts or observable information. In this case, the facts include: Fernanda is dressed in sweatpants and a T-shirt that are wrinkled. Tran is dressed in a business casual outfit and is wearing makeup. Notice that these facts are listed without any interpretation or personal feelings associated with them.
2. Identify your emotions and mental/physical state and assess whether how you are feeling influences your interpretation of the situation. In this case, Fernanda might recognize that she is exhausted and not at her cognitive best due to lack of sleep. Similarly, Tran may be able to identify the fear of failure that tends to lurk deep in the back of her mind and how that fear is driving her disapproval of her new lab partner
3. Use interpersonal communication to have a conversation or ask questions and confirm or refute any ideas you are not sure about. For example, Fernanda might say to Tran: "Wow! You are dressed for success today." In this case, Tran may explain that she has an interview coming up.

Monitor Self-Serving Bias

When checking your own perceptions, it is important to pay attention to your internal biases. Self-serving bias is "the tendency to interpret events in a way that assigns credit for success to oneself but denies one's responsibility for failure, which is blamed on external factors" (American Psychological Association, n.d.b). For example, let's say Aiesha does not study for her first Biology quiz, yet she gets a perfect score. In this example, if Aiesha gives herself credit for getting 100% on that Biology quiz, even though she has not studied, she would be attributing her success to internal factors—perhaps her knowledge of biology or her innate ability in the sciences. Now let's take this same example, but change one thing: this time, Aiesha (who still has not studied for the exam) gets a "D." If she is influenced by self-serving bias, Aiesha will attribute her bad grade to something outside of herself. For example, she may blame the teacher for giving an unfair quiz or for not reminding the class to study the day before.

Although self-serving bias is common in many cultures worldwide, some people are more likely to fall prey to this tendency than others. According to a meta-analysis of 266 different studies of self-serving bias, the likelihood that a person would apply this bias depends on age, home country, and mental health (Mezulis, et al., 2004). Children and older adults were more likely than adolescents and young adults to demonstrate a self-serving bias. People in Asian countries displayed a much lower propensity for self-serving bias than Americans. Understanding that many Asian cultures are collectivist or value the goals of the larger group over personal needs may help explain this difference. Finally, subjects with depression and anxiety had lower rates of self-serving bias than the general population. One of the symptoms of depression, according to the current Diagnostic Statistical Manual is "feelings of worthlessness" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). We know that people with low self-esteem are more likely to underrate their abilities (Davis, et al., 2006), and this in turn could affect self-serving bias.

Avoid Mind Reading

While trying to form an objective and fair perception of another person, we must be aware of, and work to avoid, **mind reading**. It is easy to jump to conclusions about what another person's motivations are or to assume what they are thinking. We must be mindful that it is impossible to know what another person is thinking or feeling, simply by guessing from their words and facial expression. Practicing effective listening and asking questions can help us to clarify other people's thought processes and intentions. A saying that captures this sentiment appears on inspirational websites and memes (with a variety of wording and not attributed to a specific author): "You never know what another person is going through. Be kind. Always."

Verbal/Nonverbal Communication Skills

As you will learn in Chapter 4, effective communication skills are attained over time and with practice. Continuing to sharpen our verbal skills is one way to help us avoid misunderstandings.

Checking In

A great way to ensure we keep our perceptions in check is to engage in perception-checking strategies. Instead of assuming we know what others are thinking and feeling, we can learn to ask them. Imagine a scenario where you wrongly assume the feelings and thoughts of another, and base your entire interaction with them on this perception, only to learn that you were wrong. Aside from possibly damaging your relationship, you have also wasted time and energy on a misperception. To avoid these kinds of missteps, we can ask questions. Phrases like, "I wonder" or "I have noticed" can help us open up dialogue to check in with others. Imagine you start a challenging conversation with "I wonder if you are upset with me" or "I have noticed that you have been quiet today. Could something be bothering you?" When we ask questions, we can show others that we truly care and are interested in understanding how they feel (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005). Asking questions could also allow us to move towards a solution more quickly, convey more compassion, and be better listeners. Perception checking can take on many forms. One of the most basic starting points is a three-step process, outlined in the chart below.

Table 3.2.4.1 Three Steps for Engaging in Perception Checking

Step	Description	Example
1	Describe the behavior or situation without evaluating or judging it. Perception checks include “I” language and a clearly stated observation or fact: “I heard you mention ____."	"I noticed you have been unusually quiet this evening."
2	Think of some possible interpretations of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process. This is followed by 2 possible interpretations: "I am wondering if ___ or ___ is the case for you?"	"Earlier in the week, you weren’t feeling well. I wonder if it is that. If not, did I say something to upset you?"
3	Verify what happened and ask for clarification from the other person’s perspective. Finally, the perception check is completed with a clarification request: "Can you clarify?"	"I am sorry that comment was hurtful. I see how that was crossing the line and I will try not to say it again. Can you please clarify how I can do better?"

Perception checking can be new and uncomfortable at first, and here are some reasons why. First, perception checking might seem time consuming. After all, it takes a lot more work up-front to inquire, rather than just jump in with assumptions. However, jumping to conclusions could lead to more conflict or unnecessary back-and-forth, so perhaps this process can actually help you save time, and possibly avoid hurt feelings. You might also notice that even though we are the ones initiating the conversations in perception checking, we are serving as listeners, rather than speakers. For some people, listening can be a challenge. As you get used to this process, try to work on actively listening and giving the floor to the other as they work through their feelings. Finally, perception checking really forces us to be accountable. We are encouraged to use “I” language, even when describing another’s actions, because this is our perception of those actions. Lastly, you may have noticed that in the perception-checking process, we are taking ownership of our observations. This can be uncomfortable. We may need to own up to hurting others and accept fault in times of conflict. For those of us who are still practicing this, be patient and show yourself some grace. This serves a perfect segue into our next section, building compassion through perception.

Building Compassion Through Perception



Figure 3.2.4.1 Two People Talking at Across a Table by Christina @ wocintechchat.com on Unsplash

In literature posted by the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research Education from Stanford Medicine (2021), compassion is defined as:

1. An awareness of suffering in others
2. A feeling of being emotionally moved by suffering
3. A motivation to see the relief of that suffering
4. An action and willingness to help relieve that suffering when possible

Research in compassion cultivation shows that “when perspective-taking is particularly geared toward imagining the other person’s emotional state, rather than just her point of view, empathic responses and helping behavior are even more pronounced” (Batson et al. 2003, as cited in Seppala, et al., 2013, p. 416-417). There have been many publications regarding how compassion can benefit us in areas of physical and mental health, survival, happiness, social competence, and more (UCSD Center for Mindfulness, 2021). As you might conclude, understanding perception is of key importance in interpersonal communication. It is a foundation upon which we can build stronger and more meaningful relationships.

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3.3: Introduction to Verbal and Nonverbal Elements of Communication

Using Language to Communicate

One of our authors shares this personal example, illustrating how easy it is to misunderstand someone else, even when we share the same language:

> In college, the car I drove was still registered to my parents, so when I got parking tickets they were mailed to my parent's house. At some point in my first year my parents threatened to stop paying for the registration because of the parking tickets. Stunned, I pleaded my case arguing I had only gotten a few tickets. In the course of nine months I had gotten seven parking tickets—and that was definitely not "a few tickets" in my parents eyes. Where they live, street sweeping comes once a month and they had a driveway to park in. So getting seven tickets was a lot. Where I was living at college, they came twice a week and I could only park on the street. In my mind the fact that I could get eight tickets a month, and I was only getting one meant those seven were just a few.

As you learned in Chapter 1, when we use language to communicate, we are engaged in verbal communication. When we think of verbal communication we often focus on speaking, but both verbal and nonverbal communication can be spoken and written.

Table 3.3.1: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

Means	Verbal Communication	Nonverbal Communication
Oral	Spoken language	Tone, inflection, laughing, crying, etc.
Non-Oral	Written language/sign language	Gestures, body language, etc.

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. Verbal communication is an agreed-upon and rule-governed system of symbols used to share meaning. This chapter will explore verbal communication in greater depth focusing on the nature of language, the impact of language on our lives, language barriers, and finally how to improve our verbal communication.

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3.3.1: The Nature of Language

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish the different elements of verbal and nonverbal communication
- Explain symbolic communication
- Describe the rules that govern language
- Evaluate how language shapes our worldview
- Understand how language shapes and reflects our relationships
- Explore how language conveys power
- Describe how language evolves

Using Language to Communicate

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Let's begin our examination of verbal and nonverbal communication by exploring verbal messages first.

Qualities of Symbolic Communication

Our language is **symbolic**, meaning it is made up of symbols. A **symbol** is something that stands for something else. The symbols that we use stand in for something else, like a physical object or idea; they do not actually correspond to the thing in any direct way. For example, there is nothing fundamental about a cat that leads to calling it a "cat." The use of symbolic communication is uniquely human, and it allows us to have abstract conversations about things that are not in our immediate reality. Our use of symbolic language has three distinct qualities: it is arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract.

Symbolic Language Is Arbitrary

We use symbols to encode what is in our heads, the thoughts, emotions, concepts, etc. so we can share them. The symbols we use are **arbitrary:** there is nothing inherent about the things we are sharing and the symbols that we use to represent them. If symbols are arbitrary, then how do we use them to communicate? Communication is only possible because speakers of the same language have agreed on these arbitrary meanings. We understand that when someone uses a particular word (symbol) that it represents a specific thing. This agreement is what makes communication via language possible. Ogden and Richards (1923) illustrated this idea with their triangle of meaning (Figure 3.3.1.1). In this example, the word *cat* represents both the concept of a cat and an actual cat. Communication is successful when the meaning attached to the symbol is shared.

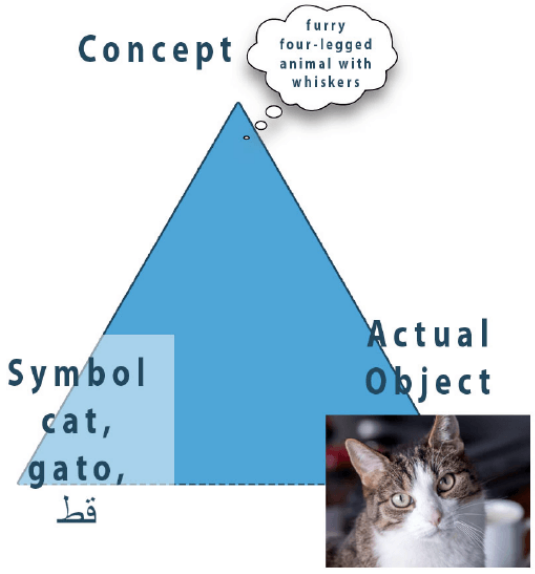


Figure 3.3.1.1 Triangle of Meaning by H. Rayl is licensed CC BY 4.0

Symbolic Language Is Ambiguous

In addition to being arbitrary, symbols are **ambiguous** because they can have multiple meanings. If you are hanging out with a friend and she says “check out that girl” and you respond, “she’s fine.” What do you mean? You could mean, she is alright. But you might also mean that she is really good looking. In this case the symbol alone is ambiguous; we would have to rely on the context to find meaning. Meanings also change over time. One of our authors shares their own experience as an example:

> When I was headed to college I got my first cell phone. At that time, most people still had landline phones—so we distinguished between our “phones” and our “cells.” These days most of us have cut the cord and now our cell phone is just our phone. If I asked my kids to help me find my “cell” they would have no idea what I was looking for.

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.

Symbolic Language Is Abstract

Finally, symbols are **abstract**. The verbal symbols we use are not material. Because they are only representations of objects and ideas, a level of abstraction is inherent. In 1941, linguist S. I. Hayakawa created what is called the **abstraction ladder**. The abstraction ladder starts with the most abstract at the top and then moves toward the bottom rung ,which is the most concrete. For example, we could start with the most abstract (animal), moving to more concrete (fox), to the most concrete (a specific American Red Fox). As we move down the ladder, the symbol becomes more concrete and less abstract. In addition to relying on arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract symbols, the language we use is also governed by rules.

Language Is Rule-Governed

Verbal communication is rule-governed. Remember in order for communication to succeed we have to have shared meaning. One way to help facilitate shared meaning is to follow agreed-upon rules to make sense of the symbols we use. What would happen if there were no rules for using the symbols (letters) that make up different words?

> If placing letters 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? (Hahn & Paynton, 2021).

As you can see, it is important to have rules to guide our use of verbal communication. In this section we focus on three general rules: **semantic**, **syntactic**, and **pragmatic**.

Semantic Rules

Semantic rules are those that help us with meaning. We would not be able to communicate with others if we did not have semantic rules. When we look a word up in the dictionary, the definition provides the semantic rules for that symbol. The dictionary definition is the general meaning of the word, but that meaning can also vary based on the context in which it is used. Even though a word has a definition, its meaning can change based on the particular context.

Take the word *run* for example. Most of us would claim to know what this word means and we could look it up in a dictionary if we needed to, but on its own we can't know what it means. We need to know in what context it is being used. "I'm going for a run," "I need to *run* an errand," "He is giving me the *run*around," or "I am feeling *run*down today," all imply different meanings based on the context.

Syntactic Rules

Syntactic rules are those that help us with language structure and symbol arrangement. How we combine words into sentences is governed by syntax. These rules are what make meaning coherent and understandable.

In English, most basic syntax follows a subject–verb–direct object formula. For example, "Charlie kicked the soccer ball." The structure of the sentence is fundamental to how we make shared meaning. The other aspect of syntax that influences our verbal communication is grammar. For example, a comma can make a big difference in how people understand a message. As shown in Figure 3.3.1.2 "Let's eat grandma!" is quite different from saying "Let's eat, grandma!" The first implies cannibalism and the second a family dinner.



Figure 3.3.1.2 Punctuation Saves Lives by Darin McClure on Flickr

Pragmatic Rules

Finally, **pragmatic rules** help us use language appropriately. What is appropriate in one circumstance may not be in another. While you are working, you are likely to be more formal with your boss and customers than you are with your co-workers. Think about the terms *bowel movement, 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.

We learn pragmatic rules from our lived experience within our larger culture. A recent anecdote that we saw on Twitter helps illustrate this idea. “In Australia we often have a meal where people are invited to bring some food to share. It’s referred to as ‘bring a plate.’ A friend from Scotland literally brought an empty plate and was very confused, thinking we didn’t own enough dinnerware” (Sarah Harris @sarah_sirrah).

Language Creates Meaning

Miscommunication often occurs when individuals assign different meanings to the same symbol. We think about communication in terms of finding the right words— but this view of language assumes that the meaning is in the words, and it is not. Meaning is in *us*. We assign meaning to the symbols we use, and there are many potential meanings that we could draw upon. As you have learned, symbols are arbitrary and their meaning is not inherent. While dictionaries can help us with standardized definitions—a word’s denotative meaning—shared meanings are not always standard and vary contextually.

Language Shapes Our Worldview

Verbal communication helps us define reality. “We use verbal communication to define everything from ideas, emotions, experiences, thoughts, objects, and people” (Hahn & Paynton, 2021). Think about what you are doing right now. How would you describe this experience? Are you reading, learning, studying? Are you engaged, bored, stressed, motivated? There are a variety of different ways we can make sense of our experiences, and we use verbal communication to label and define our reality.

Verbal communication helps us organize complex ideas and experiences into meaningful categories. It would be impossible for us to focus our attention on the overwhelming stimuli that we encounter every day. Instead, we use verbal communication to help us make sense of the world through simplified categories that help to establish meaning.

For example, think about how you organize your physical space. We organize things based on estimates: for example, your friend's house might be close, but a favorite hangout spot is far away. We may categorize them based on another location: for example, perhaps you could walk to the grocery store from your house, but you have to take the bus to get to campus. In the United States, we tend to give directions using egocentric language and coordinates: “From our classroom you go left to the quad, then take a right and you will see the library.” We could just as easily give these directions using fixed geographical coordinates: “Exit the classroom and head east. When you get to the quad turn north and you will see the library.” Both of these directions are correct, but they vary in how the speaker categorizes their physical space with language (Deutscher, 2010).



Figure 3.3.1.3 Shelli Getting Directions by Alan Levine on Flickr

Verbal communication helps us think, and to engage in abstract thought. 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. Animals can communicate about what is present. Many animals have sounds used to designate the presence of food or to warn of a threat. What they lack is the ability to discuss complex ideas. Humans can talk not only about a visible and present threat but also the potential for threat and how to prepare for it. It is this capacity of verbal communication that allows humans to reflect on the past, consider the present, and plan for the future.

Verbal communication helps us shape our attitudes about our world. 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 (Whorf; Sapir; Mandelbaum; Maxwell; Perlovsky; Lucy; Simpson; Hussein).

In recent years, various experiments have shown that grammatical genders can shape the feelings and associations of speakers toward objects around them. In the 1990s, for example, psychologists compared associations between speakers of German and Spanish. There are many inanimate nouns whose genders in the two languages are reversed. A German bridge is feminine (*die Brücke*), for instance, but *el puente* is masculine in Spanish. The same goes for *clock, apartment, fork, newspaper, pockets, shoulders, stamps, ticket, violin, the sun, the world,* and *love*. *Apple* is masculine for Germans but feminine in Spanish, and so is *chair, broom, butterfly, keys, mountains, stars, table, war, rain,* and *garbage*. When speakers were asked to grade various objects on a range of characteristics, Spanish speakers deemed bridges, clocks, and violins to have more "manly properties" like strength, but Germans tended to think of them as more slender or elegant. With objects like mountains or chairs, which are masculine in German but feminine in Spanish, the effect was reversed (Deutscher, 2010).

Those of us who speak English are entirely oblivious to this phenomenon because our language does not create these associations; nonetheless our language still shapes our attitudes and impacts how we perceive the world.

Language Is Impactful

One of our authors shares this example:

> At the end of the day, I ask my children what they want for "supper." If it is my husband asking, he will inquire about what they want for "dinner." If we are going to have eggs or pancakes or the like, we might comment that we are having "breakfast" for dinner.

The language choices we make help us make sense of our world. As we explained earlier in the chapter, meaning is not in the words that we use, it is in the people. The author's children know that supper and dinner both refer to the last meal of the day, but in the case of "breakfast for dinner" they are more interested in the kind of food and not when we are eating it. In this section we focus on how verbal communication defines reality, shapes relationships, evolves, and conveys power.

Language Defines and Labels our Reality

Verbal communication helps us define reality. If you ever played organized sports as a child, you know how difficult it can be to process a hard loss. It is easy to be sad and frustrated that your team was not victorious, but a good coach will redirect those feelings by reminding the team of how hard they tried and the fun they had playing regardless of the outcome. We have choices in 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 those choices shape our understanding of the world we live in.

One area of language and identity that has taken on prominence is the use of pronouns. A pronoun is a word that can function by itself as a noun phrase and that refers either to the participants in the discourse (e.g., I, you) or to someone or something mentioned elsewhere in the discourse (e.g., she, it, this). Pronouns are essential in our communication with one another. In English we have historically relied on gendered pronouns that reference someone's perceived gender (he/him/his or she/her/hers). When we use gendered pronouns, we are identifying someone's gender and those part of their identity.

> "Pronouns are basically how we identify ourselves apart from our name. It's how someone refers to you in conversation," says Mary Emily O'Hara, a communications officer at GLAAD. "And when you're speaking to people, it's a really simple way to affirm their identity." (Wamsley, 2021).

Pronouns have historically related singularly to a person's gender. Over time, with the help of language, this has evolved to be more inclusive.

Table 3.3.1.2 Pronoun Table (by Tiffany Ruggeri, licensed CC BY 4.0)

Subject	Object	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
She has a tree.	Her tree is in the yard.	Her tree is tall.	The tree is hers.	She planted the tree by herself.
He	Him	His	His	Himself
He has a tree.	His tree is in the yard.	His tree is tall.	This tree is his.	He planted the tree by himself.
They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
They have a tree.	I saw them water the tree.	Their tree is tall.	The tree is theirs.	They planted the tree by themselves.
Ze	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Ze has a tree.	I saw hir water the tree.	Hir tree is tall.	The tree is hirs.	Ze planted the tree by hirself.
Ze	Zir	Zir	Zirs	Zirself
Ze has a tree	I saw zir water the tree.	Zir tree is tall.	The tree is zirs.	Ze planted the tree by zirself.

Using someone's preferred pronouns demonstrates respect and acceptance. If you are unsure of what pronouns to use, simply ask. Start by sharing your own, for example, "I'm Kristine, my pronouns are she/her. What about you?" This may seem awkward at first, but the more we do this the more regular it will become. How someone presents their gender doesn't indicate their gender identity, so asking about pronouns helps us get to know someone better and ensures that we are affirming and respectful in our interactions with others.

Consider This: "What's the Deal with Gender Pronouns?"

"And just because my family loves me, does not mean they are not confused, okay?"

—Che Diaz

This quote comes from Che Diaz, a nonbinary character played by actor Sara Ramirez on the 2021 *Sex and the City* reboot *And Just Like That...* It captures the essence of the recently resurfaced debate about gender pronouns. Sociolinguist Archie Crowley, who identifies as nonbinary, dedicated their research to identifying harmful and incorrect beliefs about language that create barriers to building and strengthening relationships with people in the LGBTQIA+ community.

In Crowley's TED Talk (2020), they discussed three mistaken beliefs that have contributed to the difficulty in embracing new pronouns and new uses of familiar pronouns.

Grammar Rules Don't Change

Today we use *you* as both singular and plural. However, back in the 1600s *thou* was used as the singular and *you* referred to more than one person. When some began using *you* to refer to a single person, many people had a problem with that because it wasn't grammatically correct. Sound familiar? Nowadays, people are having a hard time wrapping their minds around using *they* to refer to a single person, which is the exact same problem people had with *thou* and *you*. Here we are today, comfortable using *you* as singular and plural—proving that grammar rules can and have changed.

Dictionaries Provide Official and Unchanging Definitions

Dictionaries are actually "living documents that track how some people are using language. Language doesn't originate in dictionaries. Language originates with people and dictionaries are documents that chronicle that language use" (Crowley, 2020), Living documents are continually changing and updated. Therefore, dictionaries not only record a history of how a word has been used, but they also show the fluidity and adaptability of words by reflecting their most current usage and meaning.

You Can't Just Make Up Words

Language is like music: there are endless combinations of notes (letters and sounds) that create all sorts of utterances. These utterances become words, and words are assigned meaning by their users. Consider these new words that have made their way into dictionaries: *binge watch, mansplain, twerk, upcycle,* and *vlog*. They didn't exist when 1999 turned into 2000.

Crowley has established that pronouns and new vocabulary represent a way for trans people to "understand their own identities" (Crowley, 2020). Language, like life, is ever-changing. Right now, it may still be confusing: we are all learning to adapt the tool of language to help us define who we are and appreciate everyone around us. The biggest takeaway from Crowley's TED Talk? When in doubt simply ask, "What is your preferred pronoun?"

Discussion Question/Journal Prompts

1. What is the role of pronouns in recognizing/acknowledging someone's gender identity?
2. What is your appropriate pronoun(s)? How does this help define who you are? This short video on "Why Pronouns Matter for Trans People" might give you some further insight.

Additional Resources

- A Brief History of Singular "They"
- Why Gender Pronouns Matter
- A Guide to Gender Identity Terms
- Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Gender-Neutral Pronouns
- Gender-Neutral Pronouns Make Headlines

Language Shapes and Reflects Relationships

How we use language shapes and reflects our relationships. Our group affiliations are evident in the language choices we make. For example, if you were catching up with a friend at a coffee shop and complaining about an upcoming assignment that wasn't clearly explained or not included in the syllabus, your verbal communication demonstrates that you are a student. In addition to highlighting the groups that we affiliate with, our language also shifts depending on who we are communicating with. We can see this in action through convergence/divergence, the use of idioms and slang, and a phenomenon known as **code-switching**.

Communication accommodation theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles, focuses on the ways in which individuals adjust their

communication with others. When you tell the story of a college party to a friend andto a parent, do you tell it the same way? Do you leave out or highlight certain details? The kinds of decisions you make when telling a story reflect the ways in which you accommodate your communication to your specific audience.

In general, there are two types of accommodation: **convergence** and **divergence**. When we **converge** our communication we make it more like the person or persons with whom we are speaking. We attempt to show our similarity with them through our speech patterns. When we **diverge**, we attempt to create distance between our audience and ourselves. Here, we want to stress our difference from others or our uniqueness.

Sometimes our ability to decode others' language is dependent on our relationships. Take, for example, “cat got your tongue?” If you understand that this question is not literally asking about a feline holding the large muscular organ in your mouth, then you are likely part of the larger US culture in which this idiom is used. An **idiom** is a phrase or expression that typically presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase. In this case, if someone is asking you this question, they want to know why you are being unusually quiet or disengaged. The ability to engage in this kind of verbal communication is dependent upon your participation in the larger culture in which it is used. Similarly, **slang** is informal language used by members of a particular group. One of our authors shares this example:

> “Are you a Blackpink stan?” The only reason I can even ask a question like this is because my Gen Z students have shared their K-Pop obsessions with me in class. Otherwise this is not the kind of language I would use or understand.

There are some additional examples of regional slang in Table 3.3.1.3

Table 3.3.1.3 Examples of Regional Slang

Region and Saying	What It Means	What Other Regions Say
West Coast: “Animal Style”	The famous In-N-Out burger chain started out in California. Ordering something “Animal Style” meant ordering your fries or burger with cheese, Thousand Island dressing, and grilled onions.	No such thing as “Animal Style,” but In-N-Out has been expanding east...
New England: “Clicker”	Remote control for TV or other entertainment units.	“The remote” or remote
South: “It doesn’t amount to a hill of beans.”	Whatever you’re talking about isn’t worth much.	“Don’t waste your time.”
Midwest: “Puppy Chow”	Homemade sugary snack like Chex Mix with peanut butter and chocolate	“Muddy buddies” or “Monkey Munch”

Finally, we occupy many different identities and cultivate a number of different relationships in our lives, so our language choices are constantly changing depending on the context and who we are talking to. This process is referred to formally as **code-switching**. Code-switching involves changing from one way of speaking to another between or within interactions and includes changes in accent, dialect, and language (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Code-switching can also refer to the process of multicultural individuals using more than one language in conversation or other communicative acts. When you use different languages at the same time, your brain switches back and forth between transmitting and receiving messages. Code-switching among multicultural individuals creates a dual communication system in which people are able to maintain their identities with their in-group but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in a larger dominant society (Yancy, 2011).

People who work or live in multilingual settings may code-switch many times throughout the day, or even within a single conversation. Some cultural linguists have argued that, as a result of social media, the majority of Americans engage in code-

switching regularly. Words like *text, tweet, liked,* and *googled*, and communicating with symbols (e.g., emojis) are used every day, across technological platforms and by individuals of all ages. Also, within the United States, some people of color may engage in code-switching when communicating with dominant group members because they fear they may be negatively judged. Code-switching may minimize perceived differences; it may also signal a shift from formal interactions to more informal interactions. Individuals may code-switch to reinforce their ingroup identity (Heller, 1992).

Language Conveys Power

As you can see there is a strong relationship between language and identity, including in our relationships. One additional aspect that we want to talk about in this relationship is power.

Language conveys power in a variety of ways, including who gets to speak, to whom they may communicate, how we address others. Withholding speech also conveys power. Children should only speak when spoken to. Did you ever hear this when you were younger? This view of language is all about power, in this case the power dynamic between adults and children. Denying children the ability to speak is about emphasizing their place in the larger societal hierarchy. This is also evident in our primary school classrooms where students are required to raise their hands if they wish to speak, then wait to be acknowledged. They are shushed and at times punished for speaking out of turn. In addition to who gets to speak, we can also see power dynamics in our relationships when we examine who gets to speak to whom. As we have just explored, adults may speak to children but children need permission to speak to adults. Can you think of other relationships that have explicit or implicit rules about to whom we may communicate? What about work: re you allowed to speak directly to the owner or CEO?

Beyond whom we may speak to, we also see power in how we address others. When we go to see a physician, we generally refer to them as "doctor." Doing so is a sign of respect, and it also highlights the disparity in our relationships. In the classroom our students may call me "doctor" because we have a Ph.D. in our field, but when we go to our primary-care physician we don't introduce ourselves as "doctor": in that setting, our professional credentials are not relevant the same way that our physician's are. The United States is considered a low-power-distance culture, so generally speaking we are not very formal in our use of titles. However, the military is a high-power-distance culture within the United States, and you can see that in the formality of rank and greetings. When in uniform, you salute when you meet and recognize an officer entitled to a salute by rank, except when it would be inappropriate or impractical. Generally, in any case not covered by specific situations, a salute is the respectful, appropriate way to acknowledge a superior officer.

Finally, withholding speech is another way we use language to convey power. Sometimes we are silent because we don't have anything to say, but to be clear while silence is the absence of speech, it is not the absence of communication. Deliberately withholding our verbal communication is a choice and one that can convey power. Not speaking is a point of privilege and doing so to deny others the connection that comes from communication is only possible when we have power and we choose to employ it. Giving someone the silent treatment is a way to deploy power even when we have very little.

Consider This: The Last-Name Game—Defining Women's Identities

In many cultures, traditionally women take on their husband's last name when they marry. This is a historically patriarchal act where upon marriage the woman becomes the man's possession. Even as we are becoming more gender aware, and the idea of "owning" wives has been antiquated for over a century, most women still adhere to the tradition of taking on their husband's last name.

In 2015, *The New York Times* conducted and analyzed three Google Consumer Surveys and almost 8,000 opposite-sex wedding announcements from selected years between 1985 and 2014 (Miller & Willis, 2015). They found that about 70% of women who married adopted their husband's family name. While the statistics for this romanticized tradition is still rather high, it is lower than it was a century ago.



Figure 3.3.1.4 Thinking by Starlit Beaches from Flickr is licensed CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

There are many reasons why a woman might want to shed her last name for a new one when she marries, from disliking how her maiden name sounds to wanting to distance herself from her family. Simon Duncan (2019) from the University of Bradford, UK, is a professor in family life who has done extensive research on name-taking after marriage. He and his team have identified two core reasons women continue the tradition of taking their husband's last name. The first being the "persistence of patriarchal power." The second perpetuates the idea that it's good for the family.

The "persistence of patriarchal power" can be found idealized all over the media in the form of romance novels, rom-com movies, social media postings of fancy proposals and men asking a woman's father for her hand in marriage—just to name a few. Depictions of these traditions help to maintain the romanticized dreams that girls can be swept away by a knight in shining armor for their "happily ever after." The second core reason is more about maintaining the public optics of commitment to the family. Everyone having the same last name represents family unity. Duncan's study also found that parents were concerned their children would be confused if parents had different last names. However, Davies (2011) found children to be much more adaptable and accepting than adults.

Women who choose not to adopt their husband's last name also have a variety of reasons. Back in 1855, Lucy Stone, a pioneer for the women's rights movement, made headlines by deciding to keep her maiden name upon marriage to make a political statement. Since then, keeping one's last name upon marriage has become a symbol of the women's rights movement. Other factors influencing women's decisions to keep their maiden names include becoming better educated and gaining professional careers. As a result, women are marrying later in life and have established careers that identify them by their maiden names.

All in all, even though the tradition of assuming the husband's surname is antiquated, it is a relentless and persistent social norm that doesn't seem to be going away any time soon. However, as is reflective of the times, people have become quite creative with their names. Some women hyphenate their maiden name with their married name, while choose to use their maiden name as their middle name. Yet others merge their last names with their husband's to create a whole new name. For example, the married actors Alexa Vega and Carlos Pena both go by the last name "PenaVega." Former Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa was Antonio Villa prior to marrying Corina Raigosa. Do men adopt their wives family names? Yes, but only 3%, according to Emily Fitzgibbons Shafer and Mackenzie Christensen (2018) in a study done at Portland State University. This result supports the strength of this archaic gender social norm.

Discussion Questions/Journal Prompts

1. Regardless of your gender, would you change your last name if/when you marry? Explain why/why not.
2. It's a "patriarchal tradition" to adopt the husband's last name upon marriage. How do you think the issue of last names is negotiated amongst same-sex couples?
3. What is the origin or back story to your last name?

4. Is there a difference in the importance placed on last names in different cultures? For example, Chinese culture is collectivistic, therefore your surname/last name is placed first. In the individualistic US culture, you're identified by your given name first.

Language Evolves

As you may have noticed through much of what we have already discussed, language is not static: rather, it evolves as it is used. Language that was once used regularly is now rarely used, while new words come into popularity all the time. One easy way to see this in action is to look at the difference in language use across age groups. Think about some language that your parents or grandparents still use that you would never hear from a peer. One of our authors gives this example: "My mom still refers to her purse as a *pocketbook*. Even *purse* is starting to lose footing in my experience, as most of the time I and those around me would just say *bag*." Another change we see is the evolving definition of individual words. The word *literally* used to mean "in a literal manner or sense; exactly." For example, "Until I get paid next week, I literally have no money." Now the word is used more regularly in a figurative sense, to add emphasis. For example, "I'm literally starving." This use has become so common that it was added as an accepted definition for the term, much to the chagrin of older generations. Language does change, and young people are the drivers of that change. Language evolution is random; it is not objectively better or worse, just different.



Figure 3.3.1.5 Father Taking a Selfie with His Son, by August de Richelieu on Pexels

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3.3.2: Language Barriers

Learning Objectives

- Explain how verbal communication competence can positively impact interpersonal relationships
- Define communication apprehension
- Explain how language is a responsibility
- Describe the elements of defensive communication
- Evaluate how language can be used to promote hate, bias, prejudice, racism, and sexism

Increasing Communication Competence

We encounter many language barriers. How we address or work with these barriers can increase our communication competence. Conversational skills are learned. Despite what we may have learned in the past, these skills are something we are consistently working on. We assume that because we have been communicating our whole lives that we have attained skills. However, communication does not mean that we simply get “better” with experience, without knowledge and practicing specific skills. In fact, when employers describe their ideal candidate, “communication skills” is on the top of the list. Therefore, it is important for us to learn about barriers we experience, skills that will improve our communication competence, and putting those skills to practice. One of the many barriers we experience is related to apprehension.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension is the hesitancy or discomfort surrounding our communication events. This is common in oral communication (Loureiro, et al., 2020). One of our authors gives this example:

> As a professor, I feel comfortable lecturing. However, when my family and I are ordering food at a restaurant, I am uncomfortable. In part, this is my lived experience. People can be rude when they are hungry and take it out on food servers.

Those who have worked in the food industry have been on the receiving end of this incivility. Our lived experience is one of many reasons for our communication apprehension. We may not fully understand the reason(s) that we have high communication apprehension in some realms but not others. However, James McCroskey designed an assessment tool, the PRCA-24, to help us determine where we experience different levels of communication apprehension in different spheres (public, interpersonal, group, and meetings). Knowing where we experience communication apprehension helps us appreciate the way we typically react and how to change these behaviors in an attempt to lower our communication apprehension.

Jung and McCroskey (2004) found that non-native English speakers experience communication apprehension at an increased rate. Moderating factors included the number of years that participants had lived in the US and the number of years of that they had spoken English. This means that when we communicate interculturally, communication apprehension is higher and that becomes a barrier. We can utilize intercultural communication competence tools to help us achieve a positive communication event.

Culture

There are many skills at our disposal that relate to culture. Culture is influenced by communication and our perceptions (Balakrishnan, et al., 2021). We can start by becoming more culturally empathetic. “Cultural empathy requires a perception of the needs of others, as well as the knowledge of their cultural specificities" (Gonçalves, et al., 2020, p. 246). We should try to be attuned to the emotional needs of others and be able to practice perspective-taking—that is, attempt to understand the other person’s perspective.

Social intelligence and cultural sensitivity can help mitigate language barriers. **Social intelligence** in this context means that we seek understanding of someone’s language and culture in an attempt to reach communication competence. For example, we can learn about the rituals and customs of someone’s culture, which would help us to understand our communication partners and

avoid language barriers. **Cultural sensitivity** relates to how we are open minded and overcome these barriers. When we seek out information about a culture without preconceived notions, we can be both culturally sensitive and more socially intelligent.

We can also avoid ethnocentric behaviors. **Ethnocentrism** is when we tend to see the world through our own cultural lens and judge others' behaviors by the standards we hold. When we hold other people to our own standards, we are asserting our dominance and superiority, and we not taking into account cultural differences or barriers that exist. While it may sound straightforward to avoid ethnocentric behaviors, we must begin by becoming aware of what ethnocentric ideals we have and when we apply them. Only then can we start to eliminate our ethnocentric behaviors. This relates to the way we communicate and taking responsibility with our language use.

Consider This: Introducing English Idioms to Second-Language Speakers

One of our authors shares this example:

> Since English is my second language, I translated *very literally* when I first began to learn English. I was confused by many of these strange American sayings—and I wasn't the only one! A good friend of mine from graduate school was an international student from Japan who spoke very proficient English. She went to one of her advisor's classes to talk about her thesis. Before leaving, her advisor asked her to come back and share the results of her thesis when she had finished. She agreed, and he responded, "It's a date!" She was utterly baffled, but she did not want to disrespect her advisor. With a slow and reluctant nod, she answered, "OK... but I will have to ask my boyfriend first." I later learned that some of these "strange American sayings" are referred to as *idioms*.

Idioms are figurative-language phrases that require understanding of cultural context to determine meaning—which is never the literal, dictionary definition of the strung-together phrases. Table 3.3.2.1 lists some common idioms that may cause confusion for English language learners.

Table 3.3.2.1 Common English Idioms

Idiom	What a Non-native English Speaker Might Be Picturing	Actual Meaning
Beat around the bush		To avoid getting to the point of an issue Example: "Stop beating around the bush, and tell me the bad news."

Idiom	What a Non-native English Speaker Might Be Picturing	Actual Meaning
Let the cat out of the bag		To disclose a secret Example: “I accidentally let the cat out of the bag, and now everyone knows you won the lottery!”
Break the ice		To get to know people; get a conversation going Example: “Let me break the ice and tell you a little something about myself and our company.”

Idiom	What a Non-native English Speaker Might Be Picturing	Actual Meaning
Pull someone's leg		To exaggerate the truth, usually as a joke Example: “I was pulling his leg when I told him I swallowed a fly. I didn’t think he would be so grossed out.”
Beat a dead horse		To waste time on something that cannot be changed Example: “There is no point in beating a dead horse. It’s time to buy a new car.”

Idiom	What a Non-native English Speaker Might Be Picturing	Actual Meaning
Barking up the wrong tree		To waste time by going after the wrong thing Example: “You’re barking up the wrong tree begging for money, because I’m broke!”
Bite the bullet		To force oneself to do something difficult or unpleasant Example: “I had to bite the bullet and attend traffic school.”

Idiom	What a Non-native English Speaker Might Be Picturing	Actual Meaning
On the ball		Describes people who are efficient, effective, talented, and aware of what's around them Example: "Danny was on top of the ball and graduated in three years instead of four."
Straight from the horse's mouth		Getting information directly from the source who has direct knowledge of something Example: "Unless I hear it straight from the horse's mouth, I won't believe she is retiring."

Idiom	What a Non-native English Speaker Might Be Picturing	Actual Meaning
Kill two birds with one stone		To do two things with one action Example: “We can kill two birds with one stone by using the soup base in two different recipes.”

Table created by Kim Yee CC BY-NC-SA
Clipart source: English idioms by Graphics RF from Vecteezy (Free License)

Discussion Questions/Journal Prompts:

1. What other English idioms might confuse English language learners?
2. If you speak another language, are there idioms used in your language you’d like to share?
3. Why do we use idioms instead of saying what we mean?

Activities with Idioms:

1. Pick an idiom and draw its literal and figurative meanings.
2. Pick an idiom and act it out as a charade.
3. Use idioms as discussion starters. For example:
    - Tell us about a time you had to “burn the midnight oil.”
    - Describe something that “gets under your skin.”
    - Tell about a time when you were able to “kill two birds with one stone.”
    - Describe a situation where you had to “bite the bullet.”
    - What is the best way to “break the ice” when meeting new people?
    - Describe a situation where “beating around the bush” is necessary.
4. What are some idioms you can use to give advice? For example:
    - Take what someone says with a grain of salt.
    - You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar.
    - You should bury the hatchet.
5. What are some idioms we use during holidays?
    - Valentine’s Day (to pop the question)
    - Halloween (skeleton in the closet)
    - Christmas (snowball effect)

Responsibility

When we are participating in a communication event, it is important to understand our role. In doing so, we must accept responsibility for the role that we play. We call this the **language of responsibility**. We know that using the language of responsibility in a corporate setting facilitates relationships (Joutsenvirta, 2009).

We can act responsibly by using **it statements**, and avoiding **but statements** and **you statements**. The use of pronouns confers blame; the language of responsibility aids us in avoiding blaming others while accepting responsibility for our own actions. When we remove pronouns completely and use the term "it," we avoid pointing the finger at others and state the facts. For instance, instead of stating, "you forgot to take out the garbage," I could state, "the garbage was not taken out," or even "we forgot to take out the trash." The latter infers that "we" are in this together and the issue is not about who did or did not take an action. This helps us to avoid "you statements." Is there a way to reframe our language to avoid pointing fingers? By removing "you," we can accept responsibility and not make someone else responsible for an action. With "but statements," we essentially negate everything that came before the word but. For instance, a spouse states to another spouse, "I love you, but I really need you to take out the trash." The way this is stated assumes that the idea of "love" is not the point, but rather that who takes out the trash is the pivotal part of the phrase. It can even infer that "love" is contingent on this action being taken. If we are on the opposite end of this statement, we may in fact, be concerned that the way this is exclaimed, points to the fact that the trash is more important than the relationship. We see this in many areas, specifically politics. Have you been on the opposite end of a non-apology? "I am sorry you feel that way." I am not sorry for the action itself, but rather your reaction. By utilizing the language of responsibility, we can avoid hurting the relationship and promote relational and professional growth.



Figure 3.3.2.1 Relationship Couple Conflict, Amarpreet Singh, Pixabay

Defensive Communication

Defensiveness is the opposite of the language of responsibility, so it is important to start by recognizing when we use defensive language and then ensure we focus on the issue at hand instead of on the other person or their actions. John Gottman (2012), a leading researcher in marital relationships, found that defensive communication is one of the most destructive relationship behaviors and in fact a leading indicator of future divorce. This research has been extended to communication in a broad setting. **Defensiveness** is defined by the perception of threat or threatening behavior (Gibbs, 1965). Avoiding defensiveness and airing grievances can spur relational growth and relational satisfaction (Gottman & Silver, 1994). I focus on four main types of defensive communication in this section: dogmatism, superiority, indifference, and control messages.

Dogmatism

Dogmatism is when we use emotional justification rather than evidence-based justification (Harrison, 2021). We typically do not notice when we respond using a dogmatic perspective. We are inextricably connected to our emotions, and with dogmatism we are operating from our sense of self. This is defensive behavior: when we use emotions to justify our stance, we leave out empirical

evidence. We lack connection to our relational communication partners. This dismissive behavior hurts the relationships involved. For example, in a professional environment I was explaining why I process I had developed was a better option than our previous process. Another person said to me, “Why does that make you correct?” I realized I was using my emotions rather than logic in my explanation. I switched my tone and focused on the evidence that I had. Focusing on evidence and the argument itself can be a strong skill to develop.

Superiority

According to Gottman (2012), any time we “act superior,” we are saying that we are correct and that the other(s) must be “damaged.” Therefore, **superiority** is a form of defensiveness. We can start by recognizing when we are using judging language and attempt to use the language of responsibility in its place. We can also try to focus on why we think our stance is superior and focus on those traits, using a discussion communication style rather than prescriptive communication style. If we create a habit of challenging why we believe we are correct, we can then focus on the issue at hand and avoid superiority.

Indifference

We display **indifference** when we show a lack of caring or connection to the other person(s) and/or the content of the message. At times we do not show our interest to our communication partners, which results in harm to the relationship(s). Indifference can take many forms. At times it is intentional and meant to be understood by our relational partners, and other times we simply do not see that we lack caring or connection. This is related to the different contexts of communication: culture, relational, and situational. These contexts play a role in how involved we are in the communication event. For example, if we are communicating with someone whom we do not care to continue in relationship with, we may intentionally use indifference. Whereas, perhaps our cultural lens is different than our communication partner and we do not see our communication behavior as indifferent, but culturally we are giving space to avoid being rude or engaging in cultural clashes. If we care about the relationship, we can show caring within these contexts. By engaging in a way that shows that we care, we promote the relationship—if we also keep in mind what is appropriate culturally, and what is appropriate for the situation.

Control Messages

Control messages are meant to coerce rather than persuade relational partners to an action. We have seen this in history. If you look at the Milgram experiment, participants were asked to shock people, by use of control and authoritarian messages. Participants did not know that there was no shock being administered. The experiment showed that humans are susceptible to control messages. When we are told what to do using manipulative or coercive messages, we tend to obey. This lack of critical thinking focuses on superiority and hurts all involved. The participants in the experiment disclosed being unable to resist the commands they received, and as a result became distraught and experienced trauma. This reflects what happens to us when we receive control messages. Therefore, we can avoid control messages and use ethical means of persuasion instead. For instance, when my son exhibits “bad behavior,” instead of focusing on consequences of his actions, I can focus on the benefits of positive behavior.

Bias

When discussing language barriers, we include our understanding of culture and our perceptions, which are ingrained in the language we use and its implications. When we discuss bias, we tend to focus on the negative connotations. Simply put, **bias** relates to our preferences. If I ask you for your favorite color, favorite musical artist, or favorite podcaster, you likely have a response.

When we discuss bias when it comes to culture, we are talking about when those preferences become negative. Perhaps you prefer to have your hair or romantic partner’s hair blond. This is a preference. When this becomes negative is when we think of and treat others differently as a result. When we put people into classifications, that is **stereotyping**. Is this negative? It depends on what transpires. If I am your professor, and I assume you are brilliant because you wear glasses and then hold you to a higher standard than other students, that is negative (and should never happen). This stereotyping could be positive, too: for example, perhaps you wear glasses and do identify as a brilliant person.

However, stereotyping is largely negative. We don’t like being put into boxes. These boxes can be understood as a wide array of categories from our race and ethnicity to our demographics and personality. It would be unfortunate if being put into a certain box prevented us from potential employment. For instance, if I choose a box that states that I have a disability, will that prevent

potential employers from hiring me? Therefore, we must acknowledge our biases and try to avoid negative stereotypes.



Figure 3.3.2.2 Two people, man, woman, working at a table, Amanda Mills, USCDCP, Pixnio

Prejudice

Prejudice is when our stereotyping has turned from preferences into hate and hateful actions. **Prejudice** is defined as "a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information" (Tatum, 2017, p. 85). Many prejudices are influenced by misinformation, We have prejudiced action when we use hostile statements based on group membership (Cary & Chasteen, 2021). Prejudice is experienced in face-to-face interactions as well as online. As we are communicating more through online means, we see prejudice in many platforms and contexts. Recent research has shown that prejudice is found in gaming (Cary & Chasteen, 2022), television news (Takano, et al., 2021), social media (Capobianco, 2020), and even academia (Hurd, et al., 2022; Ruf, 2020). On gaming platforms, gamers communicate. As this is an open forum, prejudicial comments are made and are in fact commonplace. Cary, Axt, and Chasteen (2020) found that early interventions reduced these actions. Let's say you are gaming and someone says something prejudicial (i.e., a comment about you that relates to your group membership). If the comments are confronted, there is a better chance that prejudicial actions will be reduced. If the comments are not confronted, then the other person may feel like this is banter and playful instead of hurtful, thereby continuing prejudicial actions. Prejudice often turns into hate speech.

Hate Speech

Marginalized people are people that are excluded and discriminated against due to their group membership, typically related to race, sexual orientation, gender and/or gender identity, socioeconomic status, age, disability, and others. Microaggressions are hostile or negative messages towards people within marginalized groups. **Microaggressions** are defined as brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults (Wing, 2007). These microaggressions can grow into hate speech. Hate speech consists of abhorrent messages used to hurt, incite violence, and inflict psychological harm (ŞtefĂniÞĂ & Buf, 2021). It is used in multiple contexts and against many types of targets, but most commly against marginalized people. The receipt of hate speech results in fear and anxiety, which ultimately increases stress (Crichton, 2019). Targeted marginalized groups are often subject to violent acts, known as **hate crimes**. While hate speech in many forms is protected under the First Amendment, hate crimes are not.

Racism and Sexism

Stereotyping can lead to racism and sexism. **Racism** is a systemic form of oppression using power dominance to control people based on race. **Cultural racism** is defined as "cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color" (Tatum, 2017, p. 86). Racism is rooted in oppression and oppressive

systems put in place by dominant groups to control marginalized groups. Oppression occurs when the dominant group reinforces their power while withholding or suppressing marginalized groups from power. This may start with **ethnocentrism**, when we unconsciously see the world through our personal lens and fail to perspective take or see things from another's perspective. These unconscious biases and assumptions are reinforced through structural processes. This occurs through institutional practices and policies based on cultural images and ideals that affirms systemic racism. When we pair oppression and racism with hierarchical structures, we reinforce systemic racism.



Figure 3.3.2.3 Child Mother Work From Home, Max Pixel

Sexism is defined as discrimination or prejudice based on gender. When we discuss sexism we are often talking about women being treated with less respect than would a male counterpart. This can start with a generalization that turns into discrimination or prejudice. We have heard the joke that women are "bad" drivers. This may have started as a joke but become prejudicial quickly.

Sexism is pervasive and widespread, especially in the workplace. There is a disparity in wages between males and females. We are seeing more discriminatory sexist acts in the workplaces that take other forms, such as who gets parental leave when a child is born, how much time, the argument of fairness to childless persons, or the assumption that in a two-person relationship if a child is sick, a female in the relationship is responsible and thereby is a riskier hire than a male. Sexism affects those in the LGBTQIA+ community as well.

When we discuss gender, a lot of the time we discuss it in terms of biological sex, but it includes gender expression and identity. Take for instance a person who is transgender and how they may be treated in terms of biological sex norms. These "traditional" and antiquated views lead to the mistreatment of individuals based on their gender. Sexism is prevalent and we can begin to stem the tide by reviewing the language we use and exclude language rooted in negative and potentially untrue stereotypes and sexist language.

Muted group theory studies the differences in dominant and subdominant groups and explains how subdominant groups have less power and access than the dominant group. In the development of this theory, researchers started out by examining gender differences and the power dynamics in males versus females. However, muted group theory was not intended to primarily be about gender, but to lay the foundation to understand differences in the power of dominant and subdominant groups (Smith Barkman, 2018). Essentially, we are looking at why some people have power, and when they do, how they use it to keep that power and "mute" or prevent subdominant groups from attaining the same power. Marginalized or muted groups often do not see themselves as muted or do not feel they have power to change their position. According to Linda Smith Barkman (2018), there are four primary ways we can avoid people being muted:

1. We have different forms of expression, which also relates to power and how it is perceived. When we do not understand others' forms of expression, divides are created in our communication. We can learn about different forms of expression to avoid these pitfalls.
2. We can start to recognize and understand others' cultures and group membership and how that relates to their power or lack thereof.

3. Speaking up for marginalized others in an appropriate and nuanced way can benefit both dominant and muted groups.
4. It is sometimes difficult to see that a group is marginalized. It is therefore imperative to stay open-minded and ask ourselves what is happening related to group membership and power.

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3.3.3: Improving Verbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Describe the various ways we can sharpen our verbal communication skills
- Explain common errors we make when communicating verbally

Sharpening our Communication Skills

Our communication skills are attained over time and honed with practice. There are many things we can do to sharpen our skills to help us become more communication competent. We want to consider the reason for our communication, what goals we have, understand our perspectives, own our thoughts and emotions, and precision in the language we choose. There are many reasons we communicate. To explain how this can help us to improve our verbal style, in this section we examine how we communicate to show gratitude and support, when we have to deliver bad news, and to clarify or avoid misunderstandings.

Show Gratitude

As humans we need validation and confirming messages. We should show this support often. The Gottman Institute gives many helpful tips and ideas on how to improve our relationships, and showing gratitude is at the top of the list. This includes nonverbal means such as sending thank-you cards and remembering birthdays to those who celebrate—but verbally expressing gratitude, telling someone they are appreciated, and showing gratitude when someone has taken an action, can be validating. Even when the actions our relational partners take are small, showing gratitude tells the person they are seen and appreciated. This improves relational satisfaction, is a relational maintenance strategy, and can improve overall life satisfaction. Daily gratitude messages accumulate and result in an increase in relational satisfaction (Chang, et al., 2021). If we take the time to express gratitude, it will improve our relationships. For example, if you took out the trash and never received acknowledgement, it could feel like a thankless job. When your roommate, spouse, or children says, “thank you for taking out the trash,” you know they noticed that you were doing something in part for them, and they showed gratitude to you. In that moment you would feel appreciated, and that would extend to how you feel about the person(s) showing you gratitude.

Send a Supportive Message

Supportive messages play many roles in improving our verbal communication. Emotionally supportive messages increase problem-solving (Kimbler, et al., 2012). Supportive messages even extend to the online realm. When online bystanders offer supportive messages to targets of cyberbullying, these messages moderate the mental and emotional damage experienced as a result (High & Young, 2018). Repetitive supportive messages have been shown to lower the dropout rates in high school students (Strom & Boster, 2011). In our relationships, emotional support can lower the “perceptions of stress, anger, and dejection” (Pederson & Mclaren, 2017, p. 804). Validating messages can increase relational satisfaction and help improve our relationships overall. Take for instance, a time when you were feeling low, and had a friend send a message of support. How did that change your outlook on your situation and the relationship you had with that person? We can be our biggest critics and our support systems help us to moderate this. Therefore, these supportive messages improve our communication and our relationships.

Deliver Bad News and Condolence

At times we are tasked with difficult but necessary communication, such as delivering bad news or portraying our condolences. We have been in positions where we have had to tell a friend or loved one something that would hurt them. During the pandemic, many people dealt with getting COVID-19, and telling others they were exposed—and many unfortunate people had to tell others that the worst had happened, and death had occurred. So how do we do this in a communication competent way? We start with empathy. It is important to be empathetic, but also to show our empathy to others. We do so by verbally expressing our gratitude, showing support, and being there to listen and engage in perspective-taking. We do not need to have gone through what someone else has to be empathetic. One of our authors shares this example: "When my father passed away, two things happened: many people stayed silent while others did not know what to say, but still reached out." Empathy can take many forms, but listening is a primary action we can take. This also means giving others space to heal when they want privacy. Empathy is perspective-taking,

meaning that you consider what you would want if you were in their situation.

Avoid Misunderstandings

We have all experienced a time when we were misunderstood—perhaps even in a setting where clarity was paramount, such as a professional setting. There are ways to attempt to avoid misunderstandings, and there are things we can do when inevitable misunderstandings occur.

We do our best to be clear and articulate in our language, but what if we do not speak the same language or have cultural differences? We can use nonverbal communication in conjunction with our language. Although our understanding of nonverbals may be different, when nonverbals are paired with language it can increase our ability to be understood.

Once a misunderstanding occurs, what is the severity of the misunderstanding? If the misunderstanding could cost your company money, that would be severe. In that case, we can follow the steps to a "good apology" from Dr. Randy Pausch. Start by stating remorse, then take personal responsibility and then ask what you can do to help make it right. If the misunderstanding is less severe—perhaps you misspoke and your relational partner does not understand what you are asking from them—then clarity is key. We often find ourselves restating requests with different terms to avoid misunderstandings. Language is subjective and relates to our lived experience, so different terms can mean different things. Restating your request using different phrases can help with clarity.

Avoiding Common Errors

There are many tools and tips we can utilize in a general sense. The first is to visualize the impact on the audience. There are three "errors" we can avoid to help: the shared knowledge error (when we assume everyone knows what we know), the shared opinion error (when we assume everyone agrees with what we are saying), and the monopolization error (when we dominate the conversation and do not allow others to engage in the conversation. When we are aware of these errors, we can avoid committing them.

Take a Dual Perspective

We want to avoid ethnocentrism. In that same context, we strive to see things from others' perspectives. Empathy, perspective taking, or "dual perspective" relates to how we want to walk in another person's shoes when communicating. When we try to see that there are more perspectives than just our own, we open ourselves to dual perspectives. When we fail to see that there is more than just our perspective, we may alienate our communication partners. Therefore, using this dual perspective or empathy, we can become communication competent.



Figure 3.3.3.1: Older man with cane and older women walking their dog. Older People Care, Pixy

Use the Language of Responsibility

As we discussed earlier, we should use the language of responsibility (using the pronoun *I* to accept responsibility for our thoughts and ideas), while avoiding gendered terms, “you” statements, and anything that assigns blame. This choice of language helps us to accept ownership of our emotions and perspectives while avoiding blame or alienating our communication partners. The language of responsibility can be slowly integrated into our communication patterns until we do not have to think about it consciously. For instance, we know that the term *guys* is not directed exclusively toward males, but it is an exclusionary term. One of our authors shares this example: "When I started teaching, I slowly integrated the term *y'all* into my speech. Although I get asked a lot where I am from, this small change helps to make sure I do not alienate students from the conversation." Teachers also tend to use the inclusive language term *we*, as in "Our papers are due Sunday, please make sure we turn them in on time." This way we avoid blaming language and instead use an inclusive language.

Strive for Clarity and Accuracy

The abstraction ladder relates to the specific or equivocal language we use when communicating. Equivocation is when we use ambiguous or abstract language rather than concrete and specific language. For example, consider asking a housemate to take out the garbage. Specific language would be “Please take out the trash” whereas abstract language would be “the kitchen is flooded with trash.” In general an abstract message could be something like “education.” As a term this is abstract and could be interpreted differently depending on the context and the lived experience of the interpreter. However, stating someone has earned a PhD is more concrete because there are more rules that govern what this designation means.

Figure 3.3.3.2 shows examples of how we move from the abstract to the concrete. While in many relationships we create a shorthand language and can be ambiguous and still clear in our messages, most of our communication requires that we be specific in our language, which is called **concrete language**. When we lack clarity or use language that is culturally bound or ambiguous, that is considered **abstract language**. The abstraction ladder shows how we can move from the specific (concrete) to the abstract. At the bottom are "more concrete" statements, beginning with "We need to put the trash cans on the curb before the garbage collector gets here tomorrow morning," then moving up to "Tuesday night we should remember to put the trash cans out," and to "It is Tuesday, so we should move the trash cans." Near the top of the ladder, we see "We should remember to put out the trash cans this week," and finally, at the top of the "more abstract range," "Our trash cans are full."

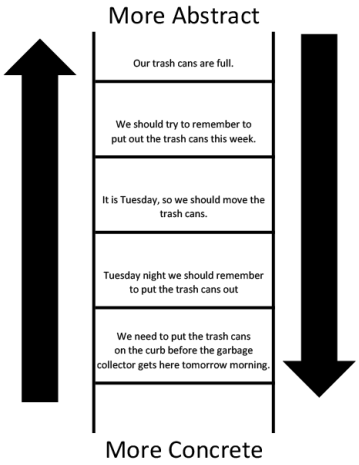


Figure 3.3.3.2 Abstraction Ladder by Tiffany Ruggeri

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3.3.4: The Roles of Nonverbal Communication in Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Define nonverbal communication
- Explain the functions of nonverbal communication
- Evaluate the significance of nonverbal communication in shaping and influencing interpersonal communication

Nonverbal communication

Now that we have explored the complexities of verbal communication, we will delve into what can be an even more nuanced and contextual element of our interpersonal dynamics: nonverbal communication. As you learned in the opening paragraphs of this section. Interpersonal communication exists not only in our body, but also as an element in our verbal communication (pace, tone, etc.). In this part of our texts, we will break down the various elements of nonverbal communication, including the functions and the channels of nonverbal communication.

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

We engage in nonverbal communication throughout the entire day. It is part of everything we do and say. It's important for us to understand how nonverbal communication affects our behavior, perception, interpretations, and understanding. In this section, we will take a look at some of the roles and functions of nonverbal communication in our daily lives.



Figure 3.3.4.1 Two women talking by Christina@wocintechchat.com on Unsplash

Persistence of Nonverbal Communication

"You cannot not communicate." Have you ever heard that expression? Nonverbal communication is always present. We are constantly communicating through our nonverbal communication. Even silence is a form of communication. Have you ever given someone the "silent treatment?" If so, you understand that by remaining silent, you are trying to convey some meaning, such as "You hurt me" or "I'm really upset with you." When sitting alone in the library, working, your posture may be communicating something to others. If you need to focus and don't want to invite communication, you may keep your head down and avoid eye

contact.

We assign meanings to people's nonverbal behaviors to interpret what they are really saying. For example, if you are having a conversation with your friend who just broke up with their significant other, your friend's facial expression, way of standing, rate of speech, tone of voice, and general appearance will indicate to you how you should respond. If they are sobbing, you might try to comfort them. If, on the other hand, they smile and sound happy, you might respond by saying, "You seem relieved. Were things not going well?"

The successful use of nonverbal communication requires an awareness of the value of nonverbal communication and the belief that it is valuable. When you were a child, did an adult ever say to you something like "It wasn't what you said, it was how you said it"? Or perhaps you tried to cover up having a bad day by saying "I had a terrific day at work," but your roommate countered with "You said one thing with your words, but your facial expression and tone of voice tell me something different"?

Nonverbal Communication in Initiating Relationships

Nonverbal communication is often the very first way in which we initiate communication. We may make eye contact or connect through touch, scent, hand gestures, physical appearance, and other nonverbal cues. We often use nonverbal communication to relay to others an interest in continuing a conversation or leaving a conversation. For example, you may run into a colleague and strike up a conversation in the hall. The conversation is enjoyable. Your colleague may recognize that they need to get to a meeting and relates this information to you by looking at their watch, beginning to back away, or looking at the door they need to enter. We use nonverbal behaviors to begin, continue, and end our interpersonal interactions.

Nonverbal Communication and "Mixed Messages"

A particularly challenging aspect of nonverbal communication is the fact that it is ambiguous. In the 1970s, nonverbal communication as a topic was trendy. Some were under the impression that we could use nonverbal communication to "read others like a book." For example, people claimed that crossed arms signaled to others that a person was closed off. It would be wonderful if crossing one's arms signaled only one meaning, but think about the many meanings of crossing one's arms. An individual may have crossed arms because the individual is cold, upset, sad, or angry. It is impossible to know unless a conversation is paired with nonverbal behavior.

Another great example of ambiguous nonverbal behavior is flirting! Consider some very stereotypical behavior of flirting (e.g., smiling, laughing, a light touch on the arm, or prolonged eye contact). Each of these behaviors signals interest to others. The question is whether an individual engaging in these behaviors is indicating romantic interest or a desire for platonic friendship. Have you ever walked away from a situation and explained a person's behavior to another friend to determine whether you were being flirted with? If so, you have undoubtedly experienced the ambiguity of nonverbal communication. It is important to take time to observe before jumping to conclusions. We need to "tolerate ambiguity" and reflect on possible differences in our nonverbal communication due to culture. This idea leads us into our next key role of nonverbal communication, which is how nonverbal communication is influenced by culture.

Nonverbal Communication and Culture

Just as we have discussed that it is beneficial to recognize the value of nonverbal communication, we must also acknowledge that nonverbal communication is culturally based. Raymond Birdwhistell, an American anthropologist who is recognized for his study of kinesics, shared the following observation in his book *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication* (1970):

> A body can be bowed in grief, in humility, in laughter, or in readiness for aggression. A "smile" in one society portrays friendliness, in another embarrassment, and, in still another may contain a warning that, unless tension is reduced, hostility and attack will follow.

Successful interactions with individuals from other cultures are partially based on the ability to adapt to or understand the nonverbal behaviors associated with different cultures. There are two aspects to understanding that nonverbal communication is culturally based. The first aspect is recognizing that even if we do not know the appropriate nonverbal communication with someone from another culture, then we must at least acknowledge that we need to be flexible, not react immediately, and ask questions. The second aspect is recognizing that there are specific aspects of nonverbal communication that differ depending on the culture. When entering a new culture, we must learn the rules of the culture.

One of our authors shares this example:

> I remember watching an American student at a gathering who, to some of my fellow instructors and me, was engaging in obvious flirting behavior with a student from Thailand. When I was driving some of my students back to the residence hall, I asked my student from Thailand how she felt because of all of the flirting behavior that she had received. She said that she had no idea that the American student had been flirting with her.

As you can see, culture certainly does play a critical role in the use and interpretation of nonverbal communication!

Nonverbal Communication and Trust

Communication scholars agree that the majority of meaning in any interaction is attributable to nonverbal communication. It isn't necessarily true, but we are taught from a very early age that lack of eye contact is indicative of lying. We have learned through research that this "myth" is not necessarily true, although this myth does tell a story about how our culture views nonverbal communication. That view is simply that nonverbal communication is important and that it has meaning.

Another example of nonverbal communication being trusted may be related to a scenario many have experienced. You may have been asked to say, "I'm sorry" to someone. Someone might not have believed your sincerity and told you that "it wasn't what you said, it was how you said it."

So now that we have discussed the role and general characteristics of nonverbal communication, let's jump into a discussion of the six functions on nonverbal communication in our everyday lives.

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3.3.5: The Six Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Describe the various ways we use nonverbal communication in interactions with others
- Explain how each element can enhance or harm interpersonal communication

Nonverbal Communication in Interaction

Research into nonverbal communication resulted in the discovery of multiple utilitarian functions of nonverbal communication. Consider the following six functions of nonverbal communication, which we adapted from "Importance of Nonverbal Communication in Interaction" (Wrench, et al., 2020):

Complementing

Complementing is defined as nonverbal behavior that is used in combination with the verbal portion of the message to emphasize the meaning of the entire message. An example of complementing behavior is when a child exclaims, “I’m so excited” while jumping up and down. The child’s body is emphasizing the meaning of “I’m so excited.”

Contradicting

At times, a person’s nonverbal communication contradicts verbal communication. This is referred to as a “double bind.” Imagine a situation where a friend says, “The concert was amazing,” but their voice is monotone. Communication scholars refer to this as “contradicting” verbal and nonverbal behavior. When the verbal and nonverbal messages are incongruent, we tend to believe the nonverbal communication over verbal communication.

Accenting

Accenting is a form of nonverbal communication that emphasizes a word or a part of a message. The word or part of the message accented might change the meaning of the message. Gestures paired with a word can provide emphasis, such as when an individual says, “no (slams hand on table), you don’t understand me.” By slamming the hand on a table while saying “no,” the source draws attention to the word. Words or phrases can also be emphasized via pauses. Speakers will often pause before saying something important. Your professors likely pause just before relaying information that is important to the course content (and could very well appear on the next test!).

Repeating

Nonverbal communication that repeats the meaning of verbal communication assists the receiver by reinforcing the words of the sender. Nonverbal communication that repeats verbal communication may stand alone, but when paired with verbal communication, it serves to repeat the message. For example, nodding one’s head while saying “yes” serves to reinforce the meaning of the word “yes,” and the word “yes” reinforces the head nod.

Regulating

Regulating the flow of communication is often accomplished through nonverbal behavior communication. You may notice your friends nodding their heads when you are speaking. Nodding one’s head is a primary means of regulating communication. Other behaviors that regulate conversational flow are eye contact, moving or leaning forward, changing posture and eyebrow raises, to name a few. You may have noticed several nonverbal behaviors people engage in when trying to exit a conversation. These behaviors include stepping away from the speaker, checking one’s watch/phone, or packing up belongings. These are referred to as leave-taking behaviors.

Substituting

At times, nonverbal behavior replaces verbal communication altogether. For example, a friend may ask you what time it is, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don't know. At other times, your friend may ask whether you want pizza or sushi for dinner, and you may shrug your shoulders to indicate you don't care or have no preference. "Emblems" are a specific type of substituting nonverbal behavior that have direct verbal translation. Emblems may generally be understood outside of the context in which they are used. Some highly recognizable emblems in US culture are the peace sign and the OK sign.

What are some of the possible messages being communicated nonverbally by the person in Figure 3.3.5.1- What functions of nonverbal communication are being displayed by this person's facial expression?



Figure 3.3.5.1 Person making a face by Ayo Ogunseinde on Unsplash

Charades! Guess the Nonverbals

Objective: Explicitly observe how much we rely on facial expressions, body language, and gestures when communicating.

Directions:

1. Divide the class into two groups.
2. Each group will send a member to pick a card from the deck and act out what is described on the card. During your team's turn, you will have 30 seconds to act out and guess.
3. Each correct guess is worth 5 points. Correct answers must include type of nonverbal communication (facial expression, gesture, or body posture) *and* the word/phrase being communicated. Note: Some of the meanings may be conveyed through one, two, or all three "channels" of nonverbal communication. However, the actor must concentrate on conveying what the card indicates (facial expression, posture, or gesture), and the guessers must guess *both* type and meaning correctly to get the points.

Debrief and Discussion:

- What types of nonverbals (face, gesture, or body) were easiest/hardest to guess?
- What types of nonverbals (face, gesture, or body) were easiest/hardest to act out?

Nonverbal Communication Charades: Facial Expressions, Body Postures, and Gestures

Facial Expression Anger	Body Posture Sympathy	Gesture Listen up!
Facial Expression Contempt	Body Posture Anxious	Gesture Go away!
Facial Expression Disgust	Body Posture Not interested	Gesture Anger
Facial Expression Fear	Body Posture Bored	Gesture Victory/Winning
Facial Expression Surprise	Body Posture Bring it on! (Aggressive)	Gesture Warning
Facial Expression Amusement	Body Posture Confidence	Gesture I don't want to hear it!
Facial Expression Awe	Body Posture Anger	Gesture I can't hear you.
Facial Expression Concentration	Body Posture Frustration	Gesture Come here.
Facial Expression Disappointment	Body Posture Guilt	Gesture Call me.
Facial Expression Pain	Body Posture I'm in control here!	Gesture Good job!

Facial Expression Anger	Body Posture Sympathy	Gesture Listen up!
Facial Expression Confusion	Body Posture Confusion	Gesture I'm not hiding anything.
Facial Expression Boredom	Body Posture Impatient	Gesture Here you go.
Facial Expression Naughty	Body Posture Leave me alone!	Gesture Thank you
Facial Expression Doubt	Body Posture Deep in thought	Gesture Money
Facial Expression Elation	Body Posture Showing interest	Gesture Naughty/Shame on you
Facial Expression Guilt	Body Posture Insecurity	Gesture I'm nervous.
Facial Expression Satisfaction	Body Posture Lying	Gesture Good luck!
Facial Expression Joy	Body Posture Shy/Introverted	Gesture Let's go.

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3.3.6: The Channels of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

- Describe the seven types of nonverbal communication
- Critically evaluate each of the seven types of nonverbal communication as they relate to one's ability to communicate effectively with others

Seven Types of Nonverbal Communication

Have you ever seen a mime perform? They never speak one single word yet you are able to understand what they say. That is because they use general nonverbal codes that we all can interpret. For example, Marcel Marceau was a very famous French actor and mime. He referred to mime as the "art of silence."

One reason that nonverbal communication is so rich with information is that humans use so many different aspects of behavior, appearance, and environment to convey meaning. These types of nonverbal communication can vary considerably across cultures. Figure 3.3.6.1 identifies the seven types of nonverbal communication that we will examine in this section:

1. Kinesics
2. Vocalics
3. Haptics
4. Proxemics
5. Artifacts and Environment
6. Olfactics
7. Chronemics

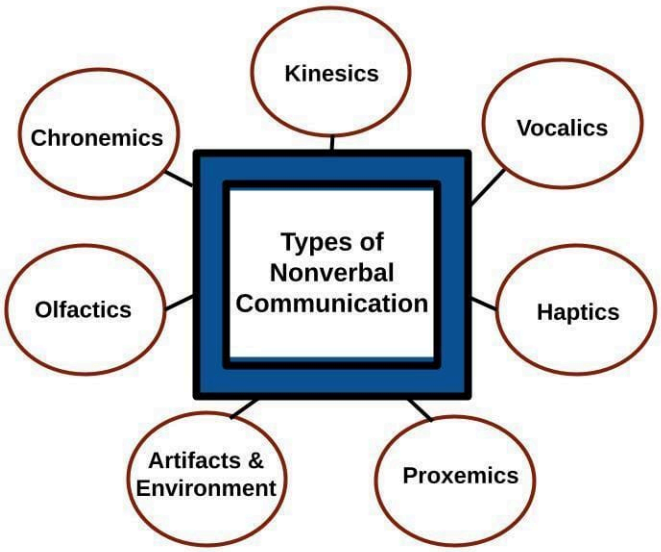


Figure 3.3.6.1 Types of nonverbal communication by Armeda C. Reitzel is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

As you read through this section, remember that the cultural patterns embedded in nonverbal codes should be used not as stereotypes for all members of particular cultures, but rather as tentative guidelines or examples to help you understand the great variation of nonverbal behavior in humans. Culture influences what nonverbal behaviors mean and how these meanings are displayed.

Kinesics

Kinesics refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements. We will look specifically at three different types of kinesics: facial expressions, eye behavior (oculesics) and gestures.

Facial Expressions

You may have heard the expression “a smile is worth a thousand words.” We have been smiling most of our lives, ever since the fourth week of life. These spontaneous smiles turn into smiles of genuine enjoyment known as **Duchenne smiles**. What is a Duchenne smile? According to the Paul Eckmann Group (2022):

> FACS [Facial Action Coding System] research has shown that in a true enjoyment smile, the skin above and below the eye is pulled in towards the eyeball, and this makes for the following changes in appearance: the cheeks are pulled up; the skin below the eye may bag or bulge; the lower eyelid moves up; crows feet wrinkles may appear at the outer corner of the eye socket; the skin above the eye is pulled slightly down and inwards; and the eyebrows move down very slightly. A non-enjoyment smile, in contrast, features the same movement of the lip corners as the enjoyment smile but does not involve the changes due to the muscles around the eyes.

The photograph in Figure 3.3.6.2 shows a great example of a Duchenne smile, that “genuine smile.”



Figure 3.3.6.2 Smiling girl by Jonathan Borba on Unsplash

One of the first foundational studies of culture and emotion was conducted by Paul Ekman and Wallace Freisen in the 1970s. The research conducted across the world led to the development of the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) that we mentioned earlier. FACS analyzed specific facial muscle movement associated with specific emotions (Tsai, 2021). Across cultures, individuals were able to correlate facial movements to specific emotions, leading to the development of what is now known as the seven “universal” facial expressions. These seven facial expressions include happiness, surprise, contempt, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger. Examples are depicted in Figure 3.3.6.3 You might consider the acronym SADFISH as a way to remember these seven universal facial expressions.



Figure 3.3.6.3: The Seven Universal Facial Expression of Emotion from the US Department of Justice CC0

While these universal facial expressions were recognized across cultural groups, research also showed that there were distinct differences in how each culture interprets and displays these emotions (Tsai, 2021). These became known as **cultural display rules**. Cultural display rules are intrinsically held within a culture's norms and standards of behaviors. They help to govern the types and frequencies of acceptable emotions (Spielman, et al., 2014). Different cultures have different structures of behavior and, therefore, different rules regarding how they display their emotions.

Research has shown that collectivistic cultures, where social harmony is emphasized, are less likely to showcase negative emotions, such as disgust or anger, in social settings. Individualistic cultures, where personal self-concept is emphasized, are more likely to showcase emotions of anger or disgust no matter the social context (Dzokoto et al., 2018). Research suggests that people from individualistic cultures, like the United States, use exaggerated facial expressions to showcase emotion as a way to influence others and gain attention from those around them (which is accepted within an individualistic culture). This is opposed to the actions of people from collectivistic cultures, such as Japan, where the tendency is to suppress or not show their emotional expressions as a way to observe the social context and interaction between interpersonal relationships. Because collectivistic cultures put primary concern on the interdependence of the cultural group, emotional displays are direct reflections of the family system, and the primary driver is to maintain relationships (Anonymous, 2022).

Understanding emotions in the context of culture is important to making sure we are aware of the ways that differences in communicating emotions may occur. The perception of emotional display rules differs between cultures, where different rules and norms are established and subconsciously understood amongst members. While these elements are rarely spoken about explicitly between cultural group members, they impact the way we interpret and communicate emotions in our relationships. Knowing the ways in which a person may express or not express an emotion will allow us to better regulate our own emotional reaction as well.

We rely on reading facial expressions so much in our interpersonal interactions. This was quite a challenge when we needed to wear face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 50% of our face was covered with some sort of cloth or covering. This often created some ambiguity when it came to deciphering what a person might be saying. In addition, Deaf individuals were not able to see the movement of the lips, face, or tongue to engage in lip reading when their conversation partner's nose and mouth were covered. Some people, such as the person in Figure 3.3.6.4 started wearing masks with a clear mouth window so that at least their mouth could be seen.



Figure 3.3.6.4: Showing a smile under a COVID-19 face mask by Armeda C. Reitzel is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Oculesics

The study of eye contact is known as **oculesics**. Eye contact provides indications of social and emotional information. People, perhaps without consciously doing so, probe each other's eyes and faces for signs of positive or negative mood. Eye contact can establish a sense of intimacy between two individuals, such as the gazes of lovers or the eye contact involved in flirting. Alternatively, avoiding eye contact can establish distance between people. When in crowds, people tend to avoid eye contact in order to maintain privacy. The customs involving eye contact vary widely between cultures. Muslims are taught to lower their gazes and try not to focus on the features of the opposite sex, except for the hands and face. Japanese children are taught to direct their gaze at the region of their teacher's Adam's apple or tie knot. As adults, Japanese tend to lower their eyes when speaking to a superior as a gesture of respect. In Eastern Africa, it is respectful not to look the dominant person in the eye, whereas such avoidance of eye contact is negatively interpreted in Western cultures. It is important to keep in mind that eye contact is culturally determined (LibreTexts, 2021).

Gestures

Gestures are movements of the body that carry meaning. Gestures may be categorized as emblems, illustrators, affect displays, or regulators.

Emblems

Emblems are gestures that correspond to a word and an agreed-on meaning. Many gestures are emblems that have a verbal equivalent in a culture. Since emblems are culturally determined, you might run into instances of ambiguity or miscommunication. For example, in the United States the "everything is OK or good" is represented by the index finger touching the thumb so that a "ring" is made. When we teach classes to international students, we avoid using this nonverbal gesture because it could mean very different things in different cultures, from "money" in Japanese culture to offensive meanings in other cultures.

Illustrators

While emblems can be used as direct substitutions for words, **illustrators** help emphasize or explain an idea. Think about a person who went fishing and then shows how big that fish that they caught was by extending their arms to show its size.

Affect Displays

Affect displays show feelings and emotions. Consider how music and sports fans show enthusiasm. It is not uncommon to see

people jumping up and down at sports events during a particularly exciting moment in a game. However, there are different norms depending on the sport. It would be inappropriate to demonstrate the same nonverbal gestures at a golf or tennis game as a football game. The gesture displayed in Figure 3.3.6.5 shows the “pure joy” of a person who just made a strike.



Figure 3.3.6.5: A man smiling in a bowling alley by Pavel Danilyuk on Pexels

Regulators

Gestures that help coordinate the flow of conversation, such as when you shrug your shoulders or wink, are called **regulators**. Raising your hand during class indicates that you want to say something. Even the Zoom videoconferencing platform uses a “raise hand” icon to help regulate communication during a session. Regulators often include head nods, eye contact or aversion and changes in posture. They are considered to be turn-taking cues in conversation. Individuals may sit back when listening but shift forward to indicate a desire to speak. Eye contact shifts frequently during a conversation to indicate listening or a desire to speak. Head nods are used as a sign of listening and often indicate that the speaker should continue speaking.

Consider This: Five Common US Hand Gestures that Are Insulting in Other Cultures

We think nothing of using the following gestures in our everyday interactions with each other here in the United States. Like words, these gestures don’t mean anything until we assign meanings to them. In the United States, these gestures have harmless interpretations. However, in other countries, using these very same gestures can have dire consequences as they have very different meanings.

Table 3.3.6.1 Gesture Meanings and Contexts

Graphic of Nonverbal	Meaning in United States	Meaning Elsewhere
 Thumbs-Up by Tumisu from Pixabay	Positive meanings including: everything is good/ OK, and good going.	Considered a very rude gesture in the following countries: Australia, Sardinia, Iran, Nigeria, Ghana, and Soviet Union. If counting - In Germany “thumbs up” = !; in Japan “thumbs up” = 5
 Fingers-Crossed by Evan-Amos from Wikimedia Commons	Wish for luck or good results. Sometimes used by children as an excuse to tell a little lie or break a promise made.	This same gesture in Vietnam is equivalent to us “giving someone the bird.”

Graphic of Nonverbal	Meaning in United States	Meaning Elsewhere
 Kid saying OK from Freesgv.org Public Domain	OK; good; everything is fine.	• In the South of France this means “zero” or “worthless.” • In Japan, this is a symbol for money because it looks like the shape of a coin. • In Brazil, this indicates female private parts and is considered extremely rude. • It is also insulting in Malta, Sardinia, Greece, Tunisia, Italy, Turkey, and Paraguay.
 Sign of the horns from Freesgv.org Public Domain  Hand sign by ChininiProductions from Pixabay	• Hang loose = chill; be relaxed; don’t take things too seriously • Rock on = positive exclamation expressing enthusiasm, excitement • Hook ‘em Horns = official hand sign of various universities in the United States whose mascot has some kind of horns (University of Texas, Austin, Texas Christian University, North Carolina State, North Dakota State).	• In Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Spain, Italy and Portugal this is a sign that tells someone their spouse is cheating. • In some African countries, flashing this gesture indicates you’re placing a curse on them.

Graphic of Nonverbal	Meaning in United States	Meaning Elsewhere
 Hand-man-number from pxhere.com CC0	In the United States, this sign (with the palm facing in or out) can have several meanings, none of which are negative. It could mean “peace.” It could also signal “V” for victory, or it could signal the number “2.”	In Ireland, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, displaying this same gesture with the back of the hand facing outward is an obscene and insulting gesture.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you come across misunderstandings as a result of using one of the above gestures? Briefly discuss what happened.
2. What are some other nonverbals you have come across that could have very different meanings and/or cause confusion/misunderstandings from culture to culture?
3. Do you know of any universal gestures? Explain.

Video Resources

- American Hand Gestures in Different Cultures: 7 Ways to Get Yourself in Trouble Abroad
- How to Describe Hand Gestures in English
- Gestures Around the World
- Handshake Etiquette Around the World

Vocalics

Vocalics focuses not on the words that we choose, but the manner in which we say the words using our vocal cords. It includes the study of **paralanguage,** which is the set of physical mechanisms that we use to produce sounds orally. These mechanisms involve the throat, nasal cavities, tongue, lips, mouth, and jaw. The specific aspects of vocalics that we will focus on are pitch, pace, disfluencies, and volume.

Pitch

Pitch is how harmonically high or low you say something. The rate at which your vocal folds vibrate in your throat are responsible for the pitch of your voice. Low-frequency vibrations make for a lower-pitched sound, while higher frequency vibrations make for a higher-pitched sound. If you end the sentence on a high note (known as “uptalk”), you might be perceived as sounding uncertain about the claim (Linneman, 2013). If you end it on a low pitch, it might sound like you are stating a fact confidently.

Pace

Pace refers to how quickly you utter your words. Often, beginning public speakers will talk fast out of nervousness or too much excitement. Their area of improvement then is learning to slow down to allow the audience to “digest” the words. In high-energy humorous speeches, the speaker might talk faster, whereas in more serious dramatic speeches, the speaker would slow down to build the drama.

The use of pauses is a natural aspect of pacing. There are two types of pauses: grammatical and non-grammatical. Grammatical pauses are used to highlight something in a sentence or to build suspense. An example would be a host saying, “And the winner is … Corey,” where the ellipsis (…) is a pause to build suspense. Non-grammatical pauses are not planned and may occur when a speaker loses their train of thought or is self-correcting.

Disfluencies

Both grammatical and non-grammatical pauses can either be filled or unfilled. Unfilled pauses have no sounds associated with them; they are pure silence. Filled pauses have some kind of noise associated with them, typically “uhh” and “umm.” The use of these non-grammatical sounds as pauses are known as **disfluencies**. Disfluencies can also include the repetitive use of a word during a pause, such as “like,” “so,” or “and.”

Volume

Volume refers to the loudness (**prosody**) of the language being spoken. You might have a friend who is a “loud talker” and can be heard from far distances having conversations with someone within social distance. On the opposite end of the spectrum, you may have a friend who is a “soft talker” who may be hard to hear in loud settings. In any case, we may have expectations for volume in certain settings. At a football game, loudness is encouraged by fellow fans. In a fine-dining romantic restaurant, soft-talking is expected by fellow patrons.

Haptics

Haptics is the study of communication by touch. Touch may indicate liking, attraction, or dominance. It is a form of communication that can be used to initiate, regulate, and maintain relationships. It is a very powerful form of communication that can be used to communicate messages ranging from comfort to power. Duration, frequency, and intensity of touch can be used to convey liking, attraction, or dominance. Duration refers to the length of time of a touch. Frequency is how often touch is used. Intensity is the amount of pressure that is applied. Touch is a powerful interpersonal tool along with voice and body movement.

Proxemics

The study of **proxemics**, which is the study of communication through space, was strongly influenced by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall back in the 1968. He categorized space into four “distances” based on observations of the use of space in cultures, such as the United States.

1. **Intimate space:** The intimate zone is typically reserved for only the closest friends, family, and romantic/intimate partners. It involves any communication that is 18 inches or less from a person’s body. It is impossible to completely ignore people when they are in this space, even if we are trying to pretend that we’re ignoring them. While some people are comfortable engaging in or watching others engage in PDAs (public displays of affection) others are not.
2. **Personal space:** The personal zone is typically reserved for friends, close acquaintances, and significant others. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our “personal space bubble” and extends from 18 inches to 4 feet away from our body.
3. **Social distance:** Communication that occurs in the social zone, which is 4 to 12 feet away from our body, is typically in the context of a professional or casual interaction. This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression “keep someone at an arm’s length” means that someone is kept out of the personal space and kept in the social/professional space. If two people held up their arms and stood so that just the tips of their fingers were touching, they would be around 4 feet away from each other, which is perceived as a safe distance. Students in large lecture classes should consider sitting within the social zone of the professor, since students who sit within this zone are more likely to be remembered by the professor, be acknowledged in class, and retain more information because they are close enough to take in important nonverbal and visual cues.
4. **Public distance:** Public space starts about 12 feet from a person and extends out from there. This is the least personal of the four zones. It is typically used when a person is engaging in a formal speech. It would be difficult to have a deep conversation with someone at this level because you have to speak louder and don’t have the physical closeness that is often needed to promote emotional closeness and/or establish rapport.

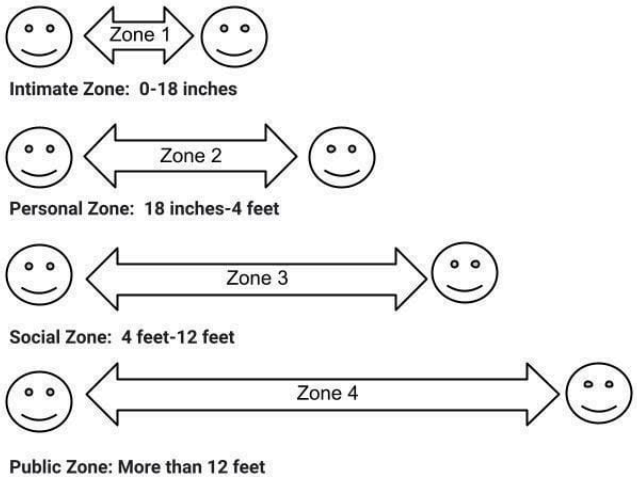


Figure 3.3.6.6: Hall's Zones of Interpersonal Distance created by Armeda Reitzel CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.You may read a full description here: Hall's Four Zones of Interpersonal Distance

You might be questioning Hall's "social" zone of distance, because a new phrase entered our everyday vocabulary in 2020: **social distancing**. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing became a that concept we saw and talked about. That term has been replaced with the phrase **physical distancing**.

What is physical distancing? "Physical distancing is the practice of staying at least 6 feet away from others to avoid catching a disease such as COVID-19" (Maragakis, 2020). Figure 4.4.6.7 displays the outline of two shoe prints along with the verbal explanation to "Please help by keeping a safe distance of 6 feet. Thank you for social distancing."



Figure 3.3.6.7: Please help by keeping a safe distance of 6 feet. Thank you for social distancing. by Elizabeth McDaniel on Unsplash.

A song that became popular again during the early days of the pandemic was "Don't Stand So Close to Me." There was a remix of the song done by Sting, Jimmy Fallon, and The Roots using the Zoom conferencing platform and at-home instruments in April 2020. You might consider checking it out at "Jimmy Fallon, Sting & The Roots Remix "Don't Stand So Close to Me" (At-Home Instruments)."

Artifacts and Environment

Artifacts are items with which we adorn our bodies or that we carry with us. Artifacts include glasses, jewelry, canes, shoes, clothing, or any object associated with our body that communicates meaning. That includes tattoos and piercings!

Tattoos have become mainstream among young people in the United States and elsewhere. Now there are policies for each branch of the military as to what and where tattoos are permitted (DePastino, 2021). Even Disney has updated its policy, according to Josh D'Amaro, chairman of Disney Parks, Experiences and Products:

> Our new approach provides greater flexibility with respect to forms of personal expression surrounding gender-inclusive hairstyles, jewelry, nail styles, and costume choices; and allowing appropriate visible tattoos. We're updating them to not only remain relevant in today's workplace, but also enable our cast members to better express their cultures and individuality at work. (D'Amaro, 2021)

Keep in mind that tattoos in different cultures, communities, and countries may still have a negative connotation. What do the tattoos in Figure 4.4.6.8 communicate to you nonverbally?



Figure 3.3.6.8: Woman with Tattoo by Annie Spratt on Unsplash

Clothing stimulates meaning. For example, my father always asked me, "How do you know if someone is a priest, painter, judge, police officer, or doctor?" It is because they have a uniform that represents that profession. Dress and physical appearance can be important identifiers for membership in particular groups. What do the casual sweatshirt and shorts worn by the person in Figure 4.4.6.9 say to you? How does the environment that this person is in affect your reading of their clothing?



Figure 3.3.6.9: Appearance by Aiman Zenn on Unsplash

Differences in power and status may be seen in the size and location of an office. Even the presence or absence of a window might influence perceptions. Think about your reactions to someone with a spacious office with expensive-looking furniture and wall-hangings and a huge window overlooking a great view versus someone in a tiny, cramped cubicle with cheap particle-board furniture and no windows. Even classrooms are designed in different ways that may encourage group interactions or keep the students' focus on the front of the room and the instructor.

Olfactics

The sense of smell communicates messages. The term **olfactics** refers to the influence of scent on perceptions. Does the smell of gingerbread bring back fond, positive memories of holidays when the kitchen was full of those delicious cookies that you used to make (and eat!) when you visited your grandparents? Have you ever purchased a candle or a particular type of bubble bath because of its scent, which perhaps reminded you of something positive?

Scent can draw others in or repel them, and the same scent can have different affects on different people. The United States places a lot of emphasis on smell. Consider the impact of failing to manage one's natural scent in the workplace. Countless articles in the popular media address how to deal with a "smelly coworker." Thus, it is crucial to be aware of one's scent, including the ones we wear in an effort not to offend those around us. Although smelling "bad" may end a relationship or at least create distance, an attractive scent may help individuals begin a new relationship. Have you ever purchased a new scent before a first date? If so, you are aware of the power of scent to attract a mate.

Although we regularly try to cover our scent, we also attempt to control the scent of our environments. The air freshener market in 2016 was valued at $1.62 billion US dollars. Go to your local grocery store and investigate the number of products available to enhance environmental scents. Be prepared to spend a significant amount of time taking in the many products to keep our environments "fresh." Remember that what is considered "pleasant" or "smelly" is culturally based.

Chronemics

Chronemics refers to the study of how time affects communication. Time can be classified into several different categories, including biological, personal, and cultural time (Andersen, 1999).

Biological Time

The rhythms of living things are referred to as **biological time**. When our natural rhythms are disturbed, by all-nighters or jet lag, our physical and mental health and our communication competence and personal relationships can suffer. Keep biological time in mind as you communicate with others. Early morning conversations and speeches may require more preparation to get yourself

awake enough to communicate well. A more energetic delivery may be needed to accommodate others who may still be getting warmed up for their day.

Personal Time

The way we experience time is referred to as **personal time**. This varies based on our mood, interest level, and other factors. Think about how quickly time passes when you are engaged in something that really interests you. People with past-time orientations may want to reminisce about the past, reunite with old friends, and put considerable time into preserving memories in scrapbooks, photo albums and on Instagram. People with future-time orientations may spend their time making career and personal plans, writing to-do lists, researching future vacation spots or deciding what program they're going to binge-watch next month.

Cultural Time

How a large group of people view time is called **cultural time**. There are cultures that tend to value **polychronic time**. There are other cultures that operate on **monochronic time**. The term **polychronic** contains the idea of "many" (poly) and refers to the idea of many things happening in a fluid, flexible fashion. Polychronic people tend to engage in multiple activities at the same time and do not create specific time frames to work on particular tasks. We might view such people as "simultaneous multitaskers" who juggle multiple activities and people at the same time. Time is not seen as linear, and schedules may be regarded as only suggestions. For example, polychronic people tend to "go with the flow." They would never think of telling someone when a party is scheduled to end. Why? They would say that it is because a party ends when it is over.

Monochronic people tend to schedule their time more rigidly and focus on one task at a time. They make schedules and stick to them as much as possible. Events begin at a specific time and they end at a specific time. An invitation to a party hosted by a monochronic person might even announce an ending time as well as a start time for the festivities. A monochronic person might interpret the behavior of a polychronic person as rude or uncaring because they did not bother to show up on time. A polychronic person may perceive a monochronic person as uptight or harsh because they seem to care more about time than about people. As you can see, our concepts about time influences our social realities and how we perceive and interact with others.

Our status may influence the way that we view and use time. For example, doctors can make their patients wait, and executives and celebrities may run consistently behind schedule, making others wait for them. Promptness and the amount of time that is socially acceptable for lateness and waiting varies among individuals and contexts. One of the authors is an English as a second language teacher-trainer who has traveled all over the globe, and can share the following: "The sense of time definitely differs from culture to culture. I learned to be flexible about the start time for my workshop sessions in Nicaragua. When I was in Germany, a train conductor apologized to the whole trainload of passengers for arriving one minute late to a stop."\

What instances of time differences have you experienced that may have been influenced by culture?

Nonverbal Communication in Different Settings

Nonverbal communication covers a lot of territory. It's important to consider our nonverbal communication in different contexts: from the classroom to the grocery store to the courtroom to the job interview. Think about the different situations that you find yourself in and how you might need to adjust your nonverbal communication to fit the circumstances. How would you characterize the role of nonverbal communication with friends and family? How is that the same or different from the nonverbal communication appropriate in a professional setting? Let's take a quick look at recommendations to healthcare professionals in interacting with their patients for a context-specific example.



Figure 3.3.6.10: A doctor looking forward and thinking by Usman Yousaf on Unsplash.

Example of nonverbal communication in a specific context: Healthcare settings

There is great interest in the study and teaching of confirming nonverbal behaviors in interpersonal communication in healthcare contexts.

> In addition to effective verbal communication, nonverbal behavior is critically important for achieving patient satisfaction, adherence to treatment, and shared medical decisions. Patients are calling for more compassionate care, and the government and third-party payers are now basing hospital reimbursement on patient satisfaction ratings. (Reiss & Kraft-Todd, 2014)

For example, a doctor will focus on a patient's facial expressions and tone of voice to tap into their concerns while a patient relies on a doctor's nonverbal behavior to figure out what the doctor means (Ishikawa, et al., 2006). Patients have identified eye contact as being significant in their interactions with their doctors. According to Timmermann, Uhrenfeldt, and Birkelund, "Eye contact substantiated the patients' experience of being confirmed. Simultaneously, it became apparent that eye contact alone was not enough for the patients to feel confirmed. It was the body language as a whole that the patients interpreted" (2017).

There are two acronyms that address how nonverbal communication might be used effectively in healthcare settings: EMPATHY is one; SOFTEN is the other. As suggested by Reiss and Kraft-Todd (2014), a healthcare professional should show empathy by paying attention and listening to the nonverbal communication of their patients:

- **E** = Eye contact
- **M** =Muscles of facial expression
- **P**= Posture
- **A** = Affect
- **T** = Tone of voice
- **H** = Hearing the whole patient
- **Y** = Your response).

Roger (2002) shared a framework proposed by Joan Damsey for making patients feel more comfortable through positive nonverbal communication behavior. The acronym SOFTEN captures the key suggestions:

- **S** = Smile. This can create a positive interactional climate that can lead to more open communication between the healthcare professional and the patient.
- **O** = Open posture. An open posture (no crossed arms or legs) indicates a willingness to listen to what the patient has to share.
- **F** = Forward lean. This may suggest to the patient that you want to listen to them.

- **T** = Touch. A touch can signal a positive nonverbal message and provide some information about how the patient is feeling.
- **E** = Eye contact. Maintaining eye contact for about 80% of the time may make the patient feel as if you are focusing your attention and efforts on them.
- **N** = Nod. Nodding occasionally tells the patients that the healthcare professional is listening to them and what they have to say.

These specific suggested nonverbal cues tend to be confirming communication behaviors and can actually lead to a faster, more productive exchange of information.

So, as you can see, nonverbal communication is important in establishing a positive communication climate between patients and healthcare professionals. Would you like to learn more about this topic? Then check out this resource on "Basic Non-verbal Communication Skills" in a healthcare setting.



Figure 3.3.6.11: Healthcare professional with a patient by the National Cancer Institute on Unsplash.

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3.4: Foundations of Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Describe the various types of interpersonal relationships
- Distinguish between voluntary and involuntary relationships
- Examine the role boundaries play in various interpersonal relationships
- Evaluate the importance of roles and norms in relationships
- Define dialectical tensions and describe the various elements of them
- Explain how culture impacts interpersonal relationships

Introduction

Yasmeen is visiting with her in-law's family for Thanksgiving. Her partner is currently deployed in the armed forces, so she is there for the first time on her own. Yasmeen and her husband do not practice any religion at home, as they come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. As the family sits down for the meal, everyone holds hands and Yasmeen is asked to say a prayer. She is unsure what to do. She does not want to alienate or offend her husband's family. At the same time, she does not want to say something disingenuous, or that goes against her own practices.

Questions

1. What options would you offer to Yasmeen in this situation, in order to both maintain her relationship with her in-laws and stay true to herself?
2. In this situation, how does the context (Thanksgiving at her in-laws, while her husband is deployed) contribute to her interpersonal considerations?
3. Have you ever had a situation like this, where differences in cultural or religious backgrounds led to challenges with interpersonal communication?

The vignette you just read exemplifies how challenging interpersonal communication can be, even within close relationships. Interpersonal relationships vary from surface conversations to friendships to romantic partnerships. The same issues we find in this example are applicable in many different situations. Can you remember meeting your best friend for the first time? Do you think about how you are presenting yourself when you interview for a job or go on a first date? These are the complexities we all have to navigate in new relationships. Interpersonal Communication is vital to building, maintaining, and even ending our relationships. In this chapter, we will discuss the foundations of relationships, relational stages, and the tools and strategies we have to achieve the relational outcomes we desire. This chapter introduces couples' communication and weaves in how identity and culture affect our interactions and relationships.

Types of Relationships: Personal versus Social

To begin, let's consider all of the relationships you have in your life. You may be surprised by the number of relationships you have. Consider all your friends, acquaintances, family members, classmates, coworkers, teammates, and people with whom you are developing relationships. All of the relationships in our lives fall within two major categories: **personal** and **social**.

Personal Relationships

Personal relationships are those that are very close and provide a deeper level of connection, whether that be emotional, physical, or spiritual. Best friends and close family members belong in the personal category. These are people we share deep levels of information with. If you experience distress about a fight you had with a romantic partner, who would you choose to talk with about it? The likelihood is that you would choose someone you have a personal relationship with, where there is a higher level of trust and history. Not all relationships are personal. In some cases, like with classmates or co-workers, we may have more surface relationships. We call these social relationships.

Social Relationships

Social relationships meet specific needs, yet do not rise to the same level of intimacy as personal relationships. Perhaps you have an acquaintance that you exercise with on a weekly basis. You enjoy the time you share together when you go for your weekly hike, however, you do not feel comfortable talking about problems that come up in your love relationship.

It is important to note that relationships can change over time. While we may start out in a social relationship with our exercise buddy, we may find that we trust this person more, every time we meet. Let's say you are feeling sad about the recent death of a family member, yet choose to go on your weekly hike with Janice. On this particular hike, Janice notices you seem different and asks you what's going on. When you disclose to Janice that you are grieving a family member, she listens and supports you. Perhaps she also tells you about someone she lost recently. In this scenario, the relationship you previously considered social with Janice is quickly developing into a personal relationship.

Types of Relationships: Voluntary versus Involuntary

There are many types of relationships, including titles you are likely familiar with like family, friend, or romantic partner. However, before we unpack some of the nuances between those types of relationships, let's consider another lens that can help us distinguish how these bonds differ more broadly. How did you meet your caregivers, siblings, or other members of your family? Was it the same process you went through when meeting your friends? Probably not. In the traditional sense, we don't choose our family, but we do get some say in who we call a friend.

Voluntary Relationship

We call a relationship **voluntary** when the person has freely chosen, of their own will, to form a connection with another individual. For example, when you are in elementary school, you may bond with another child on the playground because you both like to use the swings. No one forced you to play together or talk. There was a genuine desire to spend time together doing something you both enjoyed.

Involuntary Relationship

Involuntary relationships occur when an interpersonal connection is formed not by choice, but by a situational occurrence. Some examples of involuntary relationships include random seating in school, placement into a work team or committee, or jury selection. Think about the forced relationship between a prisoner and a warden. These two individuals need to interact interpersonally, however, neither person chose the relationship.

Relationship Typology Spectrums

As we have discussed, relationships can exist in a range of ways. Let's go a bit deeper. Figure 3.4.1 refers to **relationship typologies**. We previously discussed the differences between social and personal relationships, as well as voluntary and involuntary. When these two relationship categories are further broken down and combined, they describe four distinct and specific typologies: **voluntary personal, voluntary social, involuntary personal,** and **involuntary social**. Let's take a closer look at each of the four relationship typologies.

undefinedFour-quadrant diagram categorizing relationships as voluntary personal, voluntary social, involuntary personal, or involuntary social, with examples of each type.

Figure 3.4.1 Relationship Typologies. Adapted from C. Arthur VanLear, Ascan Koerner, and Donna M. Allen – CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Voluntary Personal Relationships

An example of a **voluntary personal** relationship could be romantic partners. Typically romantic partners know each other well and self-disclose with intimacy. Additionally, we will assume the individuals in this relationship chose to be with the other. Another example of a voluntary personal relationship would be members of Drama Club. Students choose to join Drama Club voluntarily, based on their interest in watching, reading, and creating and performing plays and musicals. Furthermore, members of the Drama Club can quit at any time, so the relationships they engage in are voluntary.

Voluntary Social Relationships

An example of a **voluntary social** relationship could be the relationship you have with your gym partner, whom you have chosen to work out with, but your conversation lives more on the surface.

Involuntary Personal Relationships

An example of an **involuntary personal** relationship could be the relationship you have with a sibling, with whom you had no choice in being in a family. However, you know your sibling rather intimately.

Involuntary Social Relationships

An example of an **involuntary social** relationship could be the relationship you have with your neighbors. You might have chosen to live in a certain location but it is likely you didn't know your neighbors until after you moved in. You probably don't have an incredibly close relationship with them just because they live next door, and you likely don't share a close bond.

Although these categories can help us better understand how and why communication looks different in relationships, don't get too caught up in the labels. Think of the names of these relationships as tools to help us better understand potential contexts and dynamics. Also note, that a relationship can start off in one quadrant of this table, but over time, shift to another. For example, perhaps on your first day at a new job, you find out you are sharing an office with a peer, and from there you establish an involuntary social relationship. But one day you and this person decide to grab lunch together, and soon you are hanging out on weekends. Now that you are enjoying each other's company outside of professional settings or tasks, your relationship has become more voluntary and personal.

Boundaries

Boundaries are expectations and limitations we define in order to suit our needs and ensure that relationships stay within the appropriate category of personal or social. The main goal in setting boundaries is to create a healthy relationship, where every role and norm within the relationship is agreed upon by all parties. Boundaries don't inherently exist in relationships but need to be mindfully defined through communication, otherwise, relationships can take a shape not everyone consents to. Therefore, it is helpful to clarify boundaries and communicate about them in our relationships, not just at the beginning but in an ongoing way.

Defining relationship boundaries can feel unnecessary in certain relationships. For example, the relationship between a mother and her young child is based on their biological roles. There are some obvious norms, such as the mother being in charge because she is her child's caretaker, which creates an inherent power discrepancy. This suggests that most boundaries will be set by the mother in that relationships. Power dynamics will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 12. One thing to note now is that power can be **symmetrical**, where each person has the same amount of power, or it can be **asymmetrical**, or uneven. Generally speaking, the more symmetrical the power dynamic, the more necessary it is to define relationship boundaries because the roles and norms are less obvious. That is not to say you should assume boundaries in asymmetrical relationships. It is always beneficial to discuss relational boundaries, even if they are more obvious.

Siblings of a similar age, who get along well and try to share responsibilities, are an example of a **symmetrical power relationship**. This is because both siblings have approximately the same amount of power. In an **asymmetrical relationship**, one person has more power than the other, as is the case between a parent and child. (Note: many collectivistic cultures specifically set norms around honoring and respecting elders, including siblings.) At times, a relationship that is initially symmetrical may become asymmetrical, or vice versa. For example, let's say as the two siblings reach adolescence, one child enjoys conversational and decision-making control more than the other. In this case, the relationship might become asymmetrical, with one sibling exhibiting higher control.

Another interesting change that can occur, with respect to control, is when an asymmetrical relationship stays uneven, but the power dynamic shifts. For example, when adopted twins Janice and David were young children, they were cared for by their parents. When their parents became elderly, Janice invited them to move into her home. Janice and her partner now help her parents with food preparation, laundry, and cleaning. David comes to visit twice per week and drives both of his parents to doctors' appointments. In this example, the parents initially had more power than the children. However, as the children matured and took on caretaking roles for their elderly parents, the power in the relationship shifted. When power shifts occur, our relationships inevitably change. Using effective interpersonal communication to clarify or renegotiate boundaries may help to facilitate this

transition to new roles and norms.

Roles and Norms

Roles are the specific parts we play in our relationships. At times, our role is similar or synonymous with our title in that relationship. For example, Grandma Anita enjoys playing the role of a stereotypical "grandparent," perhaps providing love and gifts, but not necessarily engaging in setting rules or providing discipline. However, it is not uncommon for grandparents to take on a major parenting role, either part-time while parents are at work, or full-time if parents are not part of their children's lives. The real key to understanding our roles in relationships is to examine the norms.

Norms are the behaviors and acts we perform in relationships. Some norms are mutual, meaning each person performs them. For example, it might be typical in your love relationship for you and your romantic partner to take turns cooking dinner. Other norms might be more individual, for example perhaps only one of you likes to drive when you go out together. Most norms can change over time, but it is wise to establish norms that feel healthy and agreeable early in your relationships.

You might be thinking to yourself, "I have never discussed boundaries, roles, or norms, and I have great relationships!" That is very fortunate! But remember, communication is not just about what you say, it is about what you do and other nonverbal messages. So, perhaps you have set very clear boundaries through your actions. Or perhaps some of your relationships follow the expected norms and roles we have been socialized to agree upon and perform.

Reflection Questions

Take a moment to reflect on the boundaries, roles, and norms you have established in various relationships.

- Are there relationships where the roles and norms seem unclear?
- Do these need to be renegotiated or clarified?
- How might you use effective interpersonal communication to clarify these roles and norms and improve the relationship moving forward

Dialectical Tensions

When we engage in any type of relationship, it is normal to experience both internal and relational struggles. This is normal, as we are always navigating between our self-concept (or who we are) and how we want to behave in a relational context. We call this push and pull between what feels like opposing forces **dialectical tensions** or **dialectics**. Dialectical tensions occur both in our internal dialogues, as well as in our relational communication patterns. You may be wondering, why we experience these tensions. Baxter (2011) explains that these tensions are due to the many competing discourses that we experience in the world. This interplay of complex goals and desires can lead to interesting communication patterns, which can be characterized by three sets of dialectical tensions: independence and connection, novelty and predictability, and openness and closedness. Dialectics continuously define and redefine our relationships, and it is essential to understand them so we can navigate towards satisfactory and healthy relationships. Let's explore each of the dialectics more closely.

Independence and Connection

One of the main tensions falls in the struggle between **independence and connection**. This refers to our need as multifaceted human beings to have both close connections with others and also independence. For example, two people in a romantic relationship may want to spend time together enjoying opera, while also spending time apart from one another to engage in their individual interests. In every relationship, whether romantic or not, each person must balance how much time to spend with the other and how much time to spend alone. A healthy relationship has a balance of both independence and connection.

Novelty and Predictability

The second dialectic we will discuss is between **novelty and predictability**. This tension refers to our desire for predictability, as well as a bit of spontaneity, in our relationships. In our relationships, we may take comfort in a certain level of routine as a way of knowing when we can count on people for various needs. Such predictability provides a sense of comfort, security, and stability.

For example, it is comforting to know your best friend will always let you know when you have food in your teeth (or at least you hope so). On the flip side, relationships also require a balance of novelty and spontaneity to avoid becoming mundane and routine. For example, romantic couples may plan a date night each Saturday where they take turns choosing new restaurants and interactive experiences around the city to engage in together, versus watching reruns of the same television show while eating takeout from their typical pizza joint.

Openness and Closedness

The final set of tensions we discuss focuses on **openness and closedness**. Openness and closedness refers to the desire to be open and transparent with others, while at the same time maintaining a sense of mystery and privacy. A person's desire for privacy does not necessarily mean they are shutting out others. As humans, we are multifaceted and multilayered, like an onion. When we meet new people, we tend to stay on the surface level (or outer layer of the onion) and wait to self-disclose our most personal information to those with whom we have the closest relationships. However, even our closest friends and loved ones do not know everything about us. We have many lived experiences (and skeletons in our closet), and it's OK to keep some information private. For example, a committed couple promises to communicate openly and honestly. However, they may have difficulty talking about their childhood traumas with one another. Any time we are in a relationship, we manage these dialectical tensions that arise. That is because they cannot be fully resolved.



Figure 3.4.2 Loving Glance by Alex Lujan on Unsplash

Culture and Intercultural Communication in Relationships

As if relationships weren't complicated enough, culture also plays a big role in how we experience interpersonal relationships. **Culture** is a shared set of values, beliefs, and behaviors among a common group of people. In most cases, people enter relationships with at least slight variations in their cultural background, and quite likely they differ from one another based on multiple parts of their identities, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, and age (to name a few). Even when two people in an interpersonal relationship consider themselves similar in terms of their cultural background, there may be elements of intercultural communication at play, because no two people are exactly the same.

Fortunately, there are many theories and strategies that can help us maintain our relationships, not only in spite of these differences but in celebration of these differences. In the next section, we will explore some of the most common relationship types where we experience interpersonal communication frequently, specifically family, friendship, romantic partnerships, and workplace relationships.

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3.4.1: Common Relationship Types



Figure 3.4.1.1 Family by Syuhada Faizal is licensed as CC BY NC 2.0

Learning Objective

- Describe family as an influencer of relationships later in life
- Explain the elements of the Family Communication Pattern Theory
- Describe typical friendship types
- Explain different romantic relationships
- Define a workplace relationships

Family

How do you define family? There is no right or wrong answer! Families are traditionally defined as the people with whom you are connected by blood, however, that is not a required characteristic. How we define family changes over our lifetimes. For many people, the first understanding of family starts off as the people who raised us or those who were raised among us, which could include biological parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings, cousins, foster parents, adoptive parents, extended relatives, close friends, in-laws, and step-family members. As we age, who we identify as a family member continues to evolve as we experience new phases of life. We may move around, grow and mature, live with friends, date, marry, adopt or foster a child, divorce, and remarry. As adults, many people start to look at family membership as less of an involuntary relationship, and more of a voluntary choice.

To begin our discussion, let's frame family as the people who raised you from childhood through adolescence, whether there is a biological connection or not. In either case, the bonds, experiences, and communication patterns you develop with the people who make up this type of relationship lays a foundation for all your relationships thereafter. This is because they model communication for us, and we learn from their example. The communication skills, norms, and expectations we learn from our families of origin become our starting point for interacting with the world. Let's examine some common communication patterns within family relationships.

Think about how often you talk to your family. What do you talk about? Do you feel free to speak your mind? Now consider the table below, which again offers two different categories that intersect along two different spectrums.

In Figure 3.4.1.2 **Family Communication Patterns Theory** and **Baumrind's Parenting Styles**. are synthesized to describe two different communication orientations, as well as the degree to which family members interact and communicate about various topics. . This framework was originally developed by communication scholars **Jack McLeod and Steven Chaffee** in 1972 and

later expanded by **Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and Ascan Koerner** in the late 1990s and 2002. Conformity orientation refers to the degree to which a family expects uniformity of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. Conversation and conformity orientations intersect to create the following family climates: **consensual, pluralistic, protective**, and l**aissez-faire**.

Pluralistic = **High Conversation and Low Conformity**	**Consensual =** **High Conversation and High Conformity**
Laissez-Faire = Low Conversation and Low Conformity	Protective = Low Conversation and High Conformity

Figure 3.4.1.2 Family Types Based on Conversation and Conformity Orientations by Koerner, A. F. and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick is licensed as CC BY -NC-SA 4.0

Pluralistic

Pluralistic families talk a lot (**high conversation**) but do not expect to agree (**low conformity**). Many families might see themselves fitting into this category in general, or on specific topics. For example, topics like the sports or movie genres you each like could be in the pluralistic quadrant, meaning you all share your thoughts on films and games, but disagreement doesn't ruffle anyone's feathers.

Consensual

Consensual families talk a lot (**high conversation**) and expect to agree (**high conformity**). One topic that might fit here is how a family celebrates any fun family holidays that the entire family looks forward to and enjoys. Other topics might be what religion is observed in the home, or children's plans after college— and in this type of family, despite your personal feelings, you are expected to do what your parents say, with little room for negotiation.

Laissez-Faire

Laissez-faire families talk less (**low conversation**) and do not expect to agree (**low conformity**). A common topic here could be what you like to order from your family's favorite take-out spot. It only comes up when it's time to order, and everyone gets what they want.

Protective

In the **protective** quadrant families talk less (**low conversation**) and do expect to agree (**high conformity**). A possible topic here could be going to your younger siblings' dance recital. You are just expected to show up, right?

Friendships

How do you define friendship? There is no right or wrong answer. Friendship, like family, is in the eye of the beholder. In essence, friendship is often thought of as a close relationship with a person with whom you have a common interest or connection. Friendship is often considered a voluntary social relationship, but it can become voluntary personal if there is a large amount of contact and self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is when you purposefully share personal information with another individual. It

includes the expression of your observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs.

Chosen Family



Figure 3.4.1.3 Just Chillin' by Michael Poley licensed by AllGo

The term **chosen families** (Weston, 1991) originally referred to families that members of the LGBTQIA+ community formed with friends, community members, and others, when their families of origin excluded them, due to their sexuality or gender expression. In modern times, many of us have formed small groups of intimate friends and neighbors who act as our most trusted companions, essentially like family. The term **friendsgiving** has become commonplace, indicating that we are sharing Thanksgiving with non-family members, whom we consider close friends (Fetters, 2018).

Reflection Questions

1. Do you have a group of close friends you consider to be your chosen family?
2. What are the advantages of having non-family members in your intimate group for celebrations, discussions of difficult issues, and support?
3. If you do not have a "chosen family," who would you include in this group?

Common Friendship Types

As with all relationships, friendships look different over time, and as we get older. For adults, in particular, there are three common types of friendships: **reciprocal**, **associative**, and **receptive**.

Reciprocal Friendships

Reciprocal friendships involve people who are equally invested in the relationship. They share a similar appreciation for each other's company, and a desire to maintain a connection throughout changing circumstances. Perhaps you have a friend whom you have known for a long time, maybe since childhood, to whom you are still connected despite having grown in different ways. This person might even be your "best friend"—someone you feel you can talk to about anything without judgment, and vice versa.

Associative Friendships

Associative friendships are a lighter version of reciprocal friendship. They include people who have the same level of respect and fondness for one another, but they connect less frequently with less depth. In these relationships, the two people involved are more like close acquaintances. They may connect over specific shared interests. For example, maybe you volunteer somewhere and work with the same community of people every week or month. You have likely bonded and grown relatively close within a

specific area; however, it is not clear that this relationship extends beyond the boundaries of your specific common interest area.

Receptive Friendships

Receptive friendships tend to have some imbalance of power. Common examples include when you have a friendly relationship with your boss or yoga instructor. These relationships can be very meaningful, however, they can be tricky if the power imbalance gets in the way. When participating in a receptive friendship, it is important to be aware of the possibility that the person who is the supervisor or mentor could take advantage of the power differential in the relationship. This would be an abuse of power.

Reflecting on Friendships

After reading the section on different types of friendships, could you think of examples from your own life that fit within the three categories?

1. Take a moment to name a reciprocal friend. How long have you known this person? What is special about this relationship?
2. Can you discuss an associative friend? Where did you meet? Do you ever hang out or talk outside of the place where you have a common interest?
3. Is there anyone in your life with whom you have a large power differential, but you would still consider this person your friend? Discuss this receptive friendship and whether you have ever been in a situation where someone with power abused their position within your relationship.
4. When you think of these different types of friendships, what norms come to mind? What communication tactics work best to sustain them? Would you call them voluntary, or involuntary? Social, or personal?
5. Are friendships free from structure and rules? If not, what rules or norms have you set with your friends?

No matter the circumstance, friendships are a valuable part of our lives. Friendships are often safe spaces for us to be ourselves, to practice having healthy boundaries and experiment with other parts of our personalities. Another type of relationship that can also feel both fulfilling and challenging is a romantic partnership. Let's examine some nuances and dynamics that may be in place when someone becomes more than a friend.

Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships, like families and friendships, come in different combinations, shapes, and sizes. They may involve two people, or more for **polyamorous** relationships (which involve multiple partners). Romantic partners spend time in various ways, depending on the people involved. Often, romantic partners share deep conversations, affection and sexual intimacy, mutual interests, tenderness, and caring. In romantic relationships, there are many different arrangements.

Two people who engage in an interpersonal (or two-person) romantic relationship may identify as any gender or sexuality. For example, one individual in a romantic relationship may identify as **gender-fluid** (gender identity may change over time and in different situations) and **pansexual** (attraction to people regardless of their gender or sexual identity), while another may identify as **nonbinary** and **queer**. Each of us determines our own gender identity and sexuality. Our sexual identity indicates who we are romantically and sexually drawn to. Discovering your own sexuality is often considered a journey, and you may experience many different types of romantic relationships along that journey.



Figure 3.4.1.4 LGBT Pride Parade San Francisco 2009 by davidyuweb licensed as CC BY 2.0

Every romantic relationship has its own unique communication style based on the people involved. There is no one size fits all relationship. However, there are some common stages experienced in romantic partnerships. Later in this chapter, you will learn about some of the ways in which communication looks differently as romantic partnerships evolve. You will also learn more about communication red flags that might indicate the relationship is no longer serving a healthy purpose in your life.

Before we discuss those various components, let's unpack one last type of relationship that can have a deep impact on your life: relationships at work. Interestingly, these types of relationships are often underestimated or taken for granted, even though as adults we often spend the majority of our time at work.

Workplace Relationships

Relationships at work are very unique and nuanced. Perhaps you have friends or formed a love interest at the place you are employed or where you serve as a volunteer or intern. All these circumstances impact your interactions differently, but keep in mind that at work we are communicating first and foremost from our professional identity. We will cover more information on relationships at work in Chapter 12.



Figure 3.4.1.5 Women of Color in Tech by Mike Ngo licensed as CC BY 2.0

As you can see, between the four main types of relationships (family, friends, romantic partners, and at work) some overlap

exists, as well as key differences. But don't forget, in these relationships you are the common denominator. With your new deeper understanding of interpersonal communication, you have the ability to shape these relationships to increase the fulfillment for everyone involved. You may also start to notice positive differences and perhaps some disappointments. Remember to practice clear, authentic, and kind verbal and nonverbal messaging, and effective listening. Perhaps most importantly, aim to be empathetic, in all contexts!

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3.4.2: Cycle of Abuse and Coming Apart

Example 3.4.2.1

- Distinguish between healthy conflict and abuse in relationships
- Describe the cycle of abuse
- Explain the various ways a relationship might end

Healthy Conflict versus Abuse and Domestic Violence

Although most of us do our best to have healthy and supportive relationships, there are unfortunately relationships that turn abusive, and sometimes violent. According to a CDC publication that included the results of the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (Chen, et al., 2018), about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience intimate partner violence. Therefore, it is important to recognize the cycle of abuse and violence, both for our own safety in relationships, and to support our friends and loved ones. Let's take a closer look at the cycle of abuse, as displayed in Figure 3.4.2.1 (an accessible text version is linked in the figure caption).

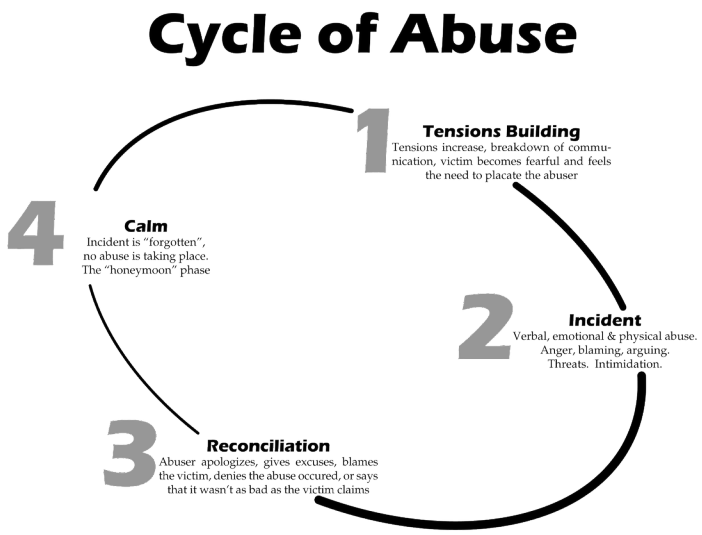


Figure 3.4.2.1The Four Phases of the Cycle of Abuse by Avanduyn on Wikipedia is in the Public Domain.A longer description of the Cycle of Abuse

Cycle of Abuse

Phase 1: Tension Building

Phase 1, the **tension building** phase, sets the stage for the abuser's anger and control over the victim. Any stressful event, whether geopolitical like war or hunger, or personal like getting fired from a job, can increase tension in the abuser. The victim will notice an increase in controlling behaviors, such as keeping the victim close, stalking, or attempts to isolate the victim from friends and family.

Phase 2: The Incident

Phase 2 is the abuse itself, otherwise known as the **incident**. This is where the violence occurs. Sometimes the violence does not

result in the victim getting physically harmed, especially at first. The abuser may destroy property, throw items towards the victim, punch a wall or mirror near the victim's body, or threaten to hurt the victim or a beloved family member or pet. Violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal name-calling or threats.

Phase 3: Reconciliation

Phase 3, **reconciliation,** generally involves apologies from the abuser, who may genuinely feel remorse for the behavior they exhibited. The abuser may even cry and berate themselves for their behavior and will likely state that it will never happen again. During this stage abusers typically tell their victims that they cannot live without them and may even threaten to kill themselves if the victim leaves. They may also offer gifts and seem incredibly gentle and kind, in the phase after the incident. Not surprisingly, Stage 3 is also known as the **honeymoon phase**, as it is the least likely time for violence to reoccur.

Phase 4: Calm

During the final stage, Phase 4, or **calm**, the abuser starts to back away from taking responsibility for the violence. Abusers may blame the victim or external circumstances for their actions. For example "I was just so stressed about losing my job. That's why I broke the window." They may also downplay the violence in this phase. For example, "So I broke a window. No big deal." This phase sets the stage for the full cycle to repeat, which means tension building and controlling behavior will return next. Over time, the calm period can become shorter or disappear altogether.

Whether or not you, or someone you know, experience all four phases of the cycle of abuse in a relationship, it is essential to recognize that patterns of control and violence in a romantic partner are dangerous and tend to escalate over time. If children are present in the home, they may or may not be victims of the violence, but overhearing and witnessing violence against a caretaker leads to long-term trauma, and in some cases guilt. There are many ways to reach out for help if you or someone you know experiences intimate partner violence. The National Domestic Violence Hotline has 24-hour phone (1-800-799-SAFE), text (88788), and chat lines, with information for victims as well as those who want to support others.

Relationship Endings

No matter the reason, some relationships just don't last. In this next section, we will address some ways relationships break apart, as well as how to cope with a relationship ending.

Ghosting

When relationships start to come apart, it is difficult to find the words to express how we feel. Some people are so averse or uncomfortable discussing the end of relationships, that they skip this step altogether. **Ghosting** is a term used to describe when one relational partner suddenly stops communicating with the other, signaling the end of the relationship. Ghosting is obviously easier to do when two people do not physically run into each other on a regular basis. In relationships that are fully online or via phone or text, ghosting another person is relatively easy.

Getting ghosted by someone else can leave the remaining person feeling confused and emotionally upset. Due to the nature of ghosting, the person who has been ghosted may not know whether the relationship has ended when communication initially stops. Without the ability to talk things through, regarding the dissolution of a relationship, the ghosted individual does not have a sense of closure. Ghosting is relatively common in romantic relationships in the United States. Most surveys show between 13% and 25% of people in dating relationships experience ghosting, either as the purveyor or the receiver.

Breaking Up/Divorce

Not every relationship will be happy, healthy, and long. Sometimes, relationships end for good reasons: for example, friends who grow apart or romantic partners who realize they are not right for each other. In other cases, these relationships initially seem to be going well, but one partner or friend is unhappy or unsatisfied. In this section, we will briefly address relationship dissolution.

In the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent heightened political and social unrest, it has become more common for people to "unfriend," dismiss, or disown former friends or family members with whom they disagree. Regardless of the reasons, it can be painful and lonely to lose a friend, family member, or romantic partner. Since many people name

their significant other as their best friend or a close friend, a breakup or divorce is an especially difficult transition. When the relationship ends, an individual may feel depressed and lost, as normal routines get thrown off and other couples may not invite single people to gather with them for social get-togethers. These feelings can be especially strong with divorce, which may also lead to a sense of failure. With any relational breakup, It is helpful to communicate openly with the other person, in a kind and respectful manner. This helps in several ways, including supporting a healthy transition when children are involved and keeping good feelings about each other intact, so that future communication is possible and positive memories remain. Other reasons to communicate respectfully with a former partner include interacting with mutual friends, family, sharing custody of kids, and working through legal matters.

Healthy versus Unhealthy Coming Apart

If you have experienced a breakup, either from the perspective of a relationship partner or as a child of parents who divorced, you likely have a very personalized story about what happened and why. Even in the most well-meaning breakups, emotions run high. After marriage, when couples share children or property, breaking up gets more complicated. It can seem inevitable for couples to fight and say hurtful things to each other in the process of divorcing. Children are traumatized when they hear their parents attacking each other verbally and arguing over who will “get them” in the divorce. If couples are able to communicate without attacking each other, to work through a viable plan that works for both people (and the children), this is the healthiest approach.

Given the emotional upheaval and stressors that come with breaking up, it can be helpful to have someone mediate divorce conversations and agreements. Professional mediators, lawyers, and even therapists can work with couples and families to help them come to agreed-upon solutions for how to move forward. Children do better when they are not exposed to high conflict, which in some cases favors parents separating physically.

Grieving/Healing from Relationship Dissolution

Grief is a normal emotional state after a divorce or breakup. In many cases, romantic partners are also good friends, spend time sharing hobbies and meals, and enjoy visits to extended family. When these relationships end, the members of the former couple may experience a loss of happiness, friendship, shared experiences, and extended family. The additional stress of selling a home and/or moving, working through co-parenting, and renegotiating financial issues. Furthermore, there is a great deal of stress that comes with a breakup/divorce where the couple shares children, property, or pets. Research by Leopold and Kalmijn (2016) found that divorced parents with children suffer both a more intense decline in well-being, as well as more difficulty bouncing back to their pre-divorce levels of well-being when compared with divorced parents without children.

As with any form of grief or depression, people who experience sadness due to a breakup or divorce may benefit from therapy, socializing with others who care about them, and other forms of self-care. It is normal to grieve a relationship. At the same time, it is important to take care of physical, emotional, and mental health, to create a path toward healing.

When an individual dies and leaves a living partner behind, the grieving process may be more complicated. Complicated grief is a particularly debilitating phase of life that occurs for some survivors who lose a beloved partner. There is no "normal" limit for the grieving period, however if someone is unable to function after a year or more of grieving, it is recommended that they seek support through a mental health expert. Therapists regularly run grief groups, which are safe spaces for surviving partners to discuss the pain of their loss, and take steps together towards moving forward with their lives.

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3.5: INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Learning Objectives

- Define interpersonal conflict, conflict goals, and conflict outcomes.
- Describe unproductive approaches to conflict management.
- Compare and contrast conflict management styles.
- Recognize interpersonal communication skills that contribute to peaceful conflict resolution.

Communication and conflict are interwoven and affect most interpersonal relationships at some time, including, but not limited to, romantic partnerships, family, friends, and co-workers. Communication is a key component of interpersonal conflict in that communication behaviors can create conflict, reflect conflict, and serve as the instrument that delivers productive and unproductive conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018).

3.5.1: Introduction to Interpersonal Conflict

3.5.2: Interpersonal Conflict Defined

3.5.3: Conflict Goals and Outcomes

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3.5.1: Introduction to Interpersonal Conflict

Introduction

In 2021, news stories were dominated by the “Free Britney” movement and the battles between Britney Spears and her family. In November 2021, a judge terminated the conservatorship that had controlled the last 15 years of her life. She publicly blamed her family, saying “they hurt me deeper than you will ever know,” and severed her ties with her parents and sister. This case, which held the attention of fans around the world, is an example of both interpersonal and family conflict, centering on issues of power and control. Most of us, hopefully, will never experience conflict that is so severe and so public. But the underlying themes of conflict in this family dilemma are more common than one might expect.

When was the last time you had a disagreement, argument, or conflict with someone you cared about? Whether a conflict is minor, such as whether the dishwasher has been loaded properly, or major, such as dealing with issues of money, child-rearing, and relationship expectations, chances are you recently experienced interpersonal conflict. Communication and conflict are interwoven and affect most interpersonal relationships at some time, including, but not limited to, romantic partnerships, family, friends, and co-workers. Communication is a key component of interpersonal conflict in that communication behaviors can create conflict, reflect conflict, and serve as the instrument that delivers productive and unproductive conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018). This chapter will call on you to reflect on your conflict patterns and to develop communication skills to help you navigate conflict more effectively in the future.

Benefits of Studying Interpersonal Conflict

The pervasiveness of conflict in everyday life provides a strong justification for studying interpersonal conflict. There are several personal benefits you may receive from studying interpersonal conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018).

- Conflict management skills are not inborn, rather they are learned. By studying interpersonal conflict, you can learn helpful relational skills for peaceful conflict resolution.
- Mental health may be improved as constructive approaches to conflict are practiced.
- Family relationships and overall well-being are linked to constructive conflict management.
- Long-term marital satisfaction may depend on effective conflict management.
- Romantic partners who practice positive conflict management are more likely to have happy relationships (Cramer, 2000).
- Workplace relationships are characterized by conflict by almost 85% of employees surveyed (1995). Learning effective conflict negotiation skills can help improve the quality of your work life.
- Victims of abuse benefit from examining alternative constructive models of conflict.

The next section of this chapter addresses various aspects of conflict including interpersonal matters, cultural differences, gender differences, and the digital divide.

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3.5.2: Interpersonal Conflict Defined

Key Concepts in Interpersonal Conflict

Chris and Michelle are a married couple with young children. Chris would like to move from California to Texas to raise their children, for job opportunities, and to afford a home. Michelle does not want to leave Southern California, her family and close friends, and her rewarding job. To add to the stress, Michelle's parents are pressuring her to stay in California. Chris and Michelle are experiencing what is known as interpersonal conflict. **Interpersonal conflict** occurs when two or more interdependent parties perceive and experience a struggle over incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018). Here is a breakdown of some of the key concepts in the definition.

- **Interdependence**: Interpersonal conflict occurs in part because individuals are connected and depend on one another. In the example, as a married couple with children, Chris and Michelle are very invested in their relationship, with very integrated lives.
- **Incompatible goals**: Each of us has goals for our relationships, our identity, and ourselves. Sometimes our goals do not match up with the goals of others, and this can create a conflict. In the example, Chris's goal was to move to Texas, whereas Michelle's goal was to stay in California.
- **Scarce resources**: Resources are commodities such as money, time, relationships, and affection. If we believe there are not enough resources available (such as money), this can create conflict. In the case of Michelle and Chris, there are a variety of resources at stake, such as relationships with families and friends, future employment, and housing.
- **Interference from others**: Interference from others can come from any outsider who gets in the way of your relationship. Marriage and family therapists have long noted that in-laws are among the top sources of conflict and divorce for couples. Whether it is a mother-in-law interfering with your decision-making, or a brother-in-law who is constantly borrowing money, it can create stress and frustration for a relationship. In the example, Michelle's parents are pressuring her to stay in California.

Now that we have identified some common causes of conflict, can you recognize some of the conflicts you have experienced with friends, family, and romantic partners? In addition to causes of conflict, factors such as culture, gender, and even social media add a layer to how we experience and negotiate conflict.

Conflict and Culture

Laura, who is Japanese Hawaiian, and Steve, who is Italian, have been married for more than 40 years. They often reflect on how bringing their diverse cultures together has enriched their lives, but not without a few bumps in the road along the way. Over the years, they have observed that their cultural differences shape how they negotiate issues ranging from food (Italian vs. Japanese Hawaiian), child-rearing, religion, and family expectations. They are not alone. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2019, roughly 1 in 5 marriages in the United States were interracial (Parker & Barroso, 2021). With the increasing diversity in our society, you will likely have friends, neighbors, co-workers, romantic partners, and family members from culturally different groups. While increasing interaction between diverse individuals enhances our lives in many ways, it can add an important layer to conflict exchanges, and that is how our culture shapes the way we negotiate conflict. In this section, we will look at how culture plays a part in our conflict experiences, by examining face negotiation theory, cultural background, and situational factors.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I need to save face?" In the United States, face-saving generally refers to an individual recovering from embarrassment, a put-down, or a public disappointment. However, the concept of face takes on a different meaning when we examine it from a lens of conflict and culture. **Face** refers to the favorable social impression we would like to present during social interactions (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). For example, you might want the people in your life to see you as a caring family member, a trusting friend, a good student, and as funny and adventurous. The concept of face is at the heart of **face-negotiation theory**, which provides a useful way to understand the relationships between culture and conflict (Ting-Toomey, 1988). The theory suggests that we use communication to maintain and negotiate our face and that culture influences the way we handle conflict because of our face concerns, cultural background, and situational factors. These three factors interact to shape how we communicate about conflict.

Take a moment to pause and reflect: How do you want other people to see you? The impression you would like to make on others is known as our face concerns. **Face concerns** are the social impression you would like to make on others and are tied into your identity. Take for example when you meet a romantic partner's family for the first time. It is likely that you would like to make a

positive impression on the family and hope that they will like you for who you are. We have two face concerns: self-face and other-face. Self-face is when we focus on maintaining the image we project to others, and other-face is when we focus on protecting the image and feelings of others. Your face concerns are in turn shaped by your cultural background.

Your cultural background is shaped by your family's cultural heritage, ethnic identity, and cultural values, such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high- and low-context communication styles (Hofstede, 2001). In individualistic, low-context cultures like that of the United States, where people tend to prefer individuality, autonomy, and care for themselves and their immediate family, people are more likely to feel comfortable disagreeing openly and communicating directly about conflict. In collectivistic, high-context cultures like those in China and Mexico, where people tend to put group needs before individual needs in exchange for loyalty, and expect their in-groups will take care of them, people may be more likely to use indirect messages, avoidance, and accommodation. Low- and high-context communication, which is covered in detail in Chapter 8, Section 8.3, refers to the degree to which cultures prefer direct, explicit messages or indirect, implicit messages (Hall, 1976). For example, research across different cultures, including those in China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, and the United States, found that participants' levels of individualism/collectivism directly impacted their conflict styles, with collectivists preferring integrating and compromising approaches and individualists relying on more competing and dominating styles (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Situational factors include the roles you play (daughter/son, boyfriend/girlfriend, employee/boss), your status, your communication preferences, and cultural norms and rules that guide your behavior. To illustrate, cultures have different beliefs about how power should be shared amongst the people in the culture, known as **power distance** (Hofstede, 2001). In low-power-distance cultures, such as the United States, power is supposed to be distributed equally, meaning that the culture tries to diminish the differences between low- and high-status individuals. In high-power-distance cultures, it is accepted that power is distributed unequally, thus people in high-status positions are afforded special treatment and privilege. For example, in the United States, it is considered appropriate for college students to question and at times challenge their professors. In high-power-distance cultures, such as in China, it is considered inappropriate and disrespectful for a student to question a professor, even if the professor has made an error. Differences in perceptions of status and power will influence how, why, and with whom we choose to initiate conflict.

Saving Face in Conflict

It is important to understand that conflict is viewed differently across cultures. Consider what you recall from Chapter 8 on how low- and high-context cultures and communication shape our interpersonal relationships. See for example this YouTube video on "The Importance of Face in China," which explores the idea that winning a conflict isn't seen as positive in all cultures. In the video, Rupert Munton talks about a situation that involved two British engineers who were based in Beijing and their interaction with a local engineer. In this video, you will come to find out that sometimes winning an argument or being "right" will cost you.

Creative Commons Video: The Importance of 'Face' in China - Rupert Munton - ClarkMorgan Insights - YouTube – accessible with closed-captioning and transcript included.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflecting on your culture, how do you view conflict? Is conflict good? Is it bad?
2. When you are in conflict, what is your main goal?
3. What does "saving face" mean to you?
4. Do you try to save face during the conflict, or save the group's face?
5. Do you adjust your conflict management style when working cross-culturally?
6. What is one main takeaway from the video that you can apply in school, at work, or in your social life?

Gender Communication and Conflict

In 1992, psychologist John Gray published the book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. This runaway bestseller was based on the idea that not only are people different genders, but we are from completely different planets in terms of our problem-solving communication. The truth of the matter is a little more nuanced, with research showing that while there may be some differences, there are likely more similarities in how people handle conflict (Cupach et al., 2010). In fact, most of the research on gender differences and conflict management has shown weak or inconsistent results.

Researchers have long tried to establish a link between biological sex, gender roles, and approaches to managing conflict. One large study of more than 6,000 men and women in the workplace, spanning 40 years, demonstrated that women were more likely to use other-face conflict management strategies in order to maintain relationships, and men were more likely to use self-face strategies that are competitive in nature (Rahim & Katz, 2019). Other researchers have argued that gender identity roles (the degree to which one identifies as stereotypically feminine or masculine) are a better predictor than biological sex of conflict approaches. One study of gender role identity and conflict found that individuals who identified as masculine showed a preference for a dominating approach, whereas individuals who identified as feminine were highest on avoiding, and individuals who identified as androgynous preferred an integrating style (Brewer et al., 2002). What is clear is that more research is needed to examine some of the subtle variations in conflict style that are related to gender roles and identity.

Most observations regarding interpersonal conflict and gender differences are likely due to our cultural beliefs and stereotypes, not differences based on gender or sex. Although early research on gender differences in conflict tried to draw conclusions based on biological sex, recent research shows that how you communicate during conflict is more likely a result of factors such as your family upbringing, societal expectations, and cultural background. To illustrate, in Nila's family, she and her sister are constantly told to be nice and play fair when they have arguments, but their brothers are told to take their problems outside and that "boys will be boys." If you grew up in a family with other children, you may have witnessed firsthand that your family expected different behavior from your siblings based on their gender. Yet, in other families, children may have been raised without strict gender norms. These expectations set us up to communicate with people based on our stereotypes of their sex or gender, which can influence how we handle conflict. Contrary to sex-role stereotypes about conflict within interpersonal relationships, women have been shown to be more assertive and openly address conflict, whereas men have been shown to be more likely to withdraw. However, as our knowledge about gender and sex-role identities continues to evolve, it is clear that it is difficult to draw conclusions about conflict behavior based solely on gender.

As we can see, the research findings on conflict and gender are mixed, and likely other factors shape how you handle conflicts, such as your age, unique family dynamics, cultural background, stereotypes, and the topic of conflict. It is important to be aware of sex-role stereotypes and how they shape our responses to other people. We need to take the time to get to know people so that we can adjust our communication to the individual, and not just the stereotypes we hold regarding their gender, culture, age, and other traits. Take some time to reflect on how gender stereotypes regarding conflict play out in your life. Have you ever been in a situation where you made judgments about someone's ability to manage conflict based on their biological sex or gender identity? Have you ever been in a situation where you felt someone else stereotyped you due to culturally based gender role expectations?

Digital Communication and Conflict

With the invention of the internet, cell phones, and social media, the world experienced a revolution through the creation of new computer-mediated communication channels. These technological innovations have had a profound impact on communication, changing how we date (Match.com, Plenty of Fish, Bumble), how we communicate with our friends (Snapchat), how we share hobbies (i.e. Twitch for gaming), and how we communicate at work (Zoom). It was inevitable that these innovations would also impact how we experience and negotiate interpersonal conflict. Digital forms of communication, whether e-mail, texting, or using an app like Snapchat, have become sources of conflict, changed how we handle conflict, and contributed to problematic conflict behaviors.

Digital mediated communication has become a source of conflict for people. To illustrate, the Pew Research Center (Lenhart et al., 2020) found that among coupled adults in the United States (married, cohabiting, or in a committed relationship), approximately half (51%) say that cell phones can be a cause of conflict because their partners are distracted by their cell phone while they are trying to have a conversation with them. Not only can the amount of time spent on cell phones be a source of conflict, but also can social media. "Teens, technology, and friendships" (ibid.) reports that 31% of social media users have fought with a friend over something that occurred online or through a text message. Social media has been shown to promote conflict in romantic relationships by increasing jealousy, suspicion, negative social comparisons, and online opportunities for infidelity (Clayton et al., 2013). Part of the challenge is that the use of computer-mediated communication, whether texting, emailing, or tweeting, is accompanied by a loss of important communication cues, such as tone of voice and micro-facial expressions. "Seeing a frown, a shaking head, a sigh, a bored expression, and many other subtle and not so subtle signs of disapproval or indifference can inhibit what people are willing to express" (Suler, 2004, p. 322). When negotiating conflict online, whether through email or social media, there is often a loss of immediate feedback. In addition, media platforms promote negative social comparisons and can serve as a distraction in face-to-face interactions.

Have you ever tried to settle an argument on social media? Or have you ever tried to negotiate a conflict through a text message? If so, you are not alone. Changes in social media and technology dependence have provided people with new options for responding to conflicts. For example, we have witnessed the birth of "call-out culture." Call-out culture refers to using social

media to confront someone publicly. One call-out technique is flaming, a hostile and aggressive online interaction that involves directing insulting messages at another person. Online communication has a **disinhibition effect**, which means that people feel safe saying things online and through digital media that they would rarely say to someone if they were in a face-to-face interaction. For example, in 2013 rapper Meek Mill publicly shamed a lifelong friend for asking for money by posting the entire exchange on Instagram. Airing grievances and making personal attacks such as this in public online settings may make the attacker feel as though there is a veil of protection but, in reality, public shaming can heighten the hurt of the conflict. If you have a conflict that does not go well, you have other options that are not available in face-to-face conversations, such as blocking the other person, leaving their messages unread, or copying and sharing messages for feedback from others. Research has shown that 60% of all teens report taking an action like unfriending, blocking, or deleting photos of a former friend (Lenhart et al., 2020).

Addressing interpersonal conflicts through digital communication media may provide some protection for freely sharing your feelings on difficult issues without facing immediate criticism, nonetheless, as with face-to-face communication, we should make every effort to practice mindful communication skills when negotiating conflict in a digital world.

Before calling someone out through social media, consider these tips:

1. If you are going to send a harshly worded email, text, or post, consider having a trusted friend review the message first.
2. Take some time to pause and cool down before sending critical or combative messages.
3. Ask yourself how you would feel if you were on the receiving end of the message.
4. Regarding personal relationships with friends, family members, or romantic partners, although digital forms of communication provide some protection when delivering critical messages, make every effort to try and resolve relational conflict in a setting that allows for real-time feedback, such as face-to-face, via video calls, or through a phone call.

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3.5.3: Conflict Goals and Outcomes

Conflict Goals

Have you ever been in a conflict or disagreement that ended up feeling like an extended game of tug-o-war? When we experience conflict, it can feel like each person is pulling in a different direction related to our own needs and goals. When we experience conflict in our relationships, the strife is generally related to one of four goals: content, relational, identity, and process. Identifying the underlying source of your conflict can help you understand your own needs as well as help you empathize with others.



Figure 3.5.3.1 Silhouette Relationship Conflict by Mohamed Hassan from Pixabay

Now that you have a better understanding of factors that shape interpersonal conflict, let's take a look at common sources of conflict.

Content Goals

Content or topic goals refer to what we want and need for both our day-to-day and long-term life. These goals tend to feel tangible and concrete, and they can center on issues such as how we spend our money and our time, as well as how we live day-to-day. For example, Julie was really upset with her husband, Todd, because of how he squeezed the toothpaste out of the tube. She liked to squeeze the toothpaste from the end of the tube and her husband squeezed the tube where he grabbed it. This one little conflict turned into a major battle of wills and revealed deeper relational and identity issues.

Relational Goals

Relational goals refer to our preferences for what we would like our relationships to be like. Relational goals center on issues like who we are to each other, what is the power distribution in the relationship, and what our future looks like. Relational goals can become a source of conflict when people have different expectations about the relationship or there is uncertainty about the relationship. For example, the digital world has created many new terms and acronyms for dating and relationships. DTR means "define the relationship." When individuals use this term, it means that they would like to have a conversation about the direction of their relationship. Are we just friends, are we FWB (friends with benefits), or are we a couple? Negotiating who we are to each other can become a major source of conflict in interpersonal interactions.

Identity Goals

Identity goals refer to the image we would like to present to the world. Conflict over identity goals can occur when our public image is threatened and when we do not feel valued in an interaction, relationship, or specific setting. To illustrate, consider Emma's personal story.

> When I was 20 years old, I fell in love with a woman for the first time. Mia, my girlfriend, was so much more confident than me and already proudly out with her family and friends. She encouraged me to tell my family, but honestly, I was scared. My mom is deeply religious, and my father said more than once he would never walk his daughters down the aisle unless it was to marry a man. I wanted Mia and my family to love me for who I am, but I was not ready to come out to my family. I felt like I was either going to lose Mia or be dropped by my family. When I finally came out to my family, I had the love and support of my mom and sisters. My dad first threatened me to get over it or move out, but thankfully my mom stepped helped smooth things over (Emma, student, age 25).

As we consider Emma's example, we can see that how we identify ourselves and how we are perceived by our loved ones can be a source of conflict. In addition to being a common source of family conflict, identity conflicts can also occur with friends, at school, and at work.

Process Goals

Process goals refer to our ideas about how we should communicate about and resolve conflicts. For example, some people believe that it is best to not go to bed angry, but others may believe that if you sleep on it, you will feel better in the morning. In addition to trying to solve conflicts, people in these situations also need to negotiate the best time to try and resolve issues. Process goals can have deeper cultural and social meanings that shape our perceptions of appropriate conflict management. Some cultures may rely on authority rule, while other cultures place value on equal participation. For example, while the US government has been characterized by division and animosity, Native American tribal governments are communal and based on reaching consensus with their membership (Alvarez, 2011).

If you find yourself struggling repeatedly with conflict over the same topic goals, a deeper relational or identity issue is likely at hand. Take the example of the conflict over squeezing the toothpaste tube. On the surface, how one squeezes toothpaste out of the tube seems like a small topic issue. However, the repeated struggles over the toothpaste may indicate that the couple might be engaged in a power struggle (relational goal) or need for validation in the relationship (identity goal).

Now that you understand common sources of conflict, let's turn our attention to three possible conflict outcomes.



Figure 3.5.3.2 Argument by Andrew Malone from Flickr CC BY 2.0

Conflict Outcomes

In most professional sporting events in the United States, we celebrate winners and do what we can to not be a loser. This approach to conflict can translate into our relationships when we attempt to “win at all costs." Conversely, in the Japanese Professional Baseball League games can end in a tie. A tie is considered almost as good as a win and will not hurt a team’s record. These different approaches to winning help illustrate different outcomes to conflict. Conflict outcomes refer to the possible ways a conflict is solved and how the people involved perceive the results. Game Theory uses the metaphor of winning and losing games to help show distinct ways conflict can be resolved (Spangler, 2003). According to Game Theory, when we negotiate conflict there are three potential outcomes: win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose. Understanding the different conflict outcomes can help you to recognize some of your own conflict patterns and give you insight into how you may approach conflict in the future.

- **Win-win:** A win-win outcome occurs when both parties in the conflict are satisfied with the outcome. The win-win approach to conflict usually involves collaboration and problem-solving, in combination with assertive, honest communication.
- **Win-lose:** A win-lose outcome occurs when one party in the conflict gets what they want, and the other party is left to feel they were defeated. This approach to conflict is characterized by competition or a belief that only one side in the conflict can win. While win-lose is appropriate in some situations, the disadvantage to this approach is that if one party in a relationship is always on the losing end, they can become discouraged and dissatisfied in their relationship.
- **Lose-Lose:** A lose-lose outcome occurs when neither party achieves their goals or both parties are unhappy with the conflict outcome. Many examples can be considered lose-lose, such as an employee quitting a job they love, with employers who appreciate them, because they can’t resolve the person's work-from-home request, or a couple who love each other very much but break up because they can’t agree on a timeline for their future. Clearly, these outcomes do not sound ideal (Barwick-Snell & Walker, 2017).

To better understand conflict outcomes, consider the case of Maya, a recent graduate of the California State University system. Before graduation, Maya submitted applications to several different companies. She was thrilled when she was offered her dream job at a gaming company. However, when she sat down to discuss the details with Human Resources, she was offered a lower position with less pay than originally promised. What would you do if you found yourself in a comparable situation? Would you reject the job altogether, feeling like it was a case of bait and switch? This would be a lose-lose outcome, because Maya would lose out on her dream job and the company would lose a talented employee. Would you accept the company’s terms and ask how to move up quickly into the promised position? This would create a win-lose outcome, where Maya would lose out on what the company originally promised, and the company would get a short-term win by saving money. Would you make a counteroffer to the company, reminding them of the position and salary that was originally offered? In this case, Maya made a counteroffer that was accepted by the company, leading to a win-win outcome.

There is not one conflict outcome that will suit all situations. Conflict outcomes depend on the topic, the situation, and the people involved. It is important to consider how much you value the relationship and what is at stake with the conflict. Is it a lifelong relationship? A professional relationship? Casual? Often figuring out how much you value the relationship will inform the conflict outcome. Your style of conflict management can also shape the conflict outcome.

How we negotiate or bring closure to conflicts is a function of one’s conflict management style. This next section speaks to five different approaches to managing conflict.



Figure 3.5.3.3 Argument for a gender non-conforming couple by Zackary Drucker from “The Gender Spectrum Collection” CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

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3.5.4: Conflict Management Style

Five Approaches to Conflict Management

Conflict management is the process of trying to find effective strategies to minimize and solve problems associated with different conflict goals. When we look at how we negotiate the conflict in our relationships, we find that typical patterns of communication occur. Your personal style of conflict management style is shaped by a variety of factors, such as your gender, age, culture, personality, family communication patterns, and goals for the situation. Furthermore, your conflict management style is a mix of factors, such as your nonverbal signals (eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice), the verbal message you use, and your focus on concern for yourself versus concern for the other party.

Your concern for yourself versus your concern for the other person will shape how you approach a conflict, the strategies you use to negotiate, and the outcome you desire (win-win, etc.). **Concern for self** refers to the degree to which you try to meet your own needs and goals in a conflict situation. **Concern for others** refers to the degree to which you try to meet the needs of the other person in the conflict. For example, take Tony, a manager at a large retail store in the mall. He displays high concern for others when making the weekly schedule, respecting his employees' school schedules and family lives. His counterpart, Alyssa, demonstrates high concern for herself in demanding that employees miss school and family events to give herself the best schedule. Various combinations of concern for self versus concern for others result in five conflict management styles, including integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising (Rahim, 2000). In this section, we examine five approaches to conflict management. Take some time to reflect on your approach to conflict and see if you can identify your style.

Integrating

If you display high concern for your own needs, while at the same time honoring the needs of others, you may prefer the **integrating** style of conflict management (Rahim, 1983a). For example, when Sophia and AJ experience a conflict, they tend to view it as an opportunity to understand each other better, and they sit down and try to tackle the issue together. Integrating, also known as **collaborating** (see Kilman & Thomas, 1977), consists of problem-solving, open communication, open confrontation of conflict, assertiveness, and cooperation (Rahim, 2010). Integrating may be the best approach for resolving conflict when two people who live or work closely together need to solve a problem (such as agreement on how to raise children), when buy-in is needed from the other person (such as a couple agreeing on a car purchase), for long-term planning (such as planning to have children), and when dealing with strategies for solving problems. Although research has shown that an integrating approach to conflict is associated with satisfying relationships, it may not be appropriate when dealing with small issues, when quick decisions are needed, when people do not care about the outcomes, and when people lack problem-solving training (Rahim, 2010). If you try to solve every problem with an integrating approach, you may find yourself and the other party exhausted by the constant emphasis on conflict.

Obliging

Do you ever find yourself sacrificing your needs to make someone else happy or to keep the peace in the relationship? Take, for example, Naomi, who has many friends and is considered easy to get along with. She often finds herself going along with the wishes of others, whether it's her parents or her close friends. This is known as the **obliging** or accommodating style of conflict management, which consists of high concern for others and low concern for self (Rahim, 1983a). We use an obliging approach for a variety of reasons, including that we don't find the conflict to be important, we want to keep harmony in the relationship, or we lack the assertive communication skills to advocate for our own needs. Obliging can be an appropriate response to conflict when the conflict is more important to the other person, when you are willing to make a sacrifice now in return for something later, when you have less power in the relationship, or when you are clearly wrong (Rahim, 2001). Obliging can be beneficial to keeping the peace. An interesting study looked at how members in a university medical department resolved their conflicts and found that an obliging style was related to low levels of workplace stress and low levels of perceived conflict (Friedman et al., 2000).

Dominating

Have you ever met someone who needs to always be right? They might be exhibiting the **dominating** style of conflict management, which occurs when we focus on our own needs at the expense of others (Rahim, 1983a). For example, Bella's friend

Damien loves to debate every little topic, from climate change to the best local fast-food burger joint, and he will not let the conversation drop until Bella gives in. This approach is competitive in nature, with a win-lose orientation to conflict. People who practice a dominating approach may ignore the needs of others, be inflexible, try to win at all costs, and use their position of power to impose their will upon others (Rahim et al., 2000). There are times in life when we may need to use a dominating style of conflict management, such as when the outcome to the conflict might be harmful to you, or if you are involved in an inherently competitive situation, such as a job interview where only one person can get the job. Regular use of a dominating approach to a conflict may be harmful to interpersonal relationships in that it may lead the losing party to feel unhappy in the relationship.

Avoiding

Have you ever been in a situation when you chose not to deal with a conflict? This is known as an **avoiding** approach to conflict, which consists of physical and emotional evasion of topics, situations, and people that evoke conflict. For example, Delaney is angry with her two closest friends. Rather than dealing with it, she blocked them on all her social media accounts. This approach consists of a low concern for self and low concern for others, and is sometimes viewed negatively in US culture. However, other cultures might not view avoidance negatively, as this approach may be used to preserve harmony in relationships and contribute to maintaining long-term relationships (Ting-Toomey, 1988). This approach to a conflict may be appropriate if the issue is of little importance to you, if you or the other person need time to cool off, or if the disadvantages outweigh the benefits of confrontation (Rahim, 2001). Avoidance is not appropriate when quick action is needed on your part, when decision making is required, or when parties are "unwilling to wait" (Rahim, 2010, p. 54)

Compromising

In US culture, many of us have been taught to solve our problems by **compromising**, sharing, or splitting the difference. For example, Javier and Jeff tend to argue over what movie they would like to see; rather than battling it out each week, they have decided to take turns choosing the movie of the week. This means that every other week Javier must see a movie that he would not have chosen on his own. The compromising style of conflict management consists of medium concern for self and medium concern for others. This approach involves finding a middle ground in the conflict situation. Compromising can be effective when you and the other person have equal power, when you need a quick and temporary solution, when you can't reach a consensus, and when your conflict goals are mutually exclusive. Although compromising may have many benefits for finding quick solutions, it is not always perfect. Ongoing use of compromising can lead you to feel like your needs are not being met. Furthermore, compromise can be ineffective when there are power imbalances (such as a boss and employee) problems are complex (such as deciding how to pay for college), long-term solutions are needed, or when dealing with value conflicts (such as values of family, commitment, and trust) (Rahim, 2001).

Understanding your conflict management styles can provide insight on how to improve conflict encounters (Conerly & Tripathi, 2004). No one style is better than others, rather we should consider adjusting our style based on our goals, the other person in the conflict, and the needs of the situation. It is important to be aware that styles can be perceived differently (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). There are divergent cultural expectations of conflict, and you may be perceived differently based on your gender, age, race, and situation. For example, there are other cultural variations when it comes to preference for conflict styles, such as emotionally expressive responses, seeking out third parties, or using a passive-aggressive approach to sidestep direct confrontation of the conflict (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). A study of 200 college students working in teams found that the students perceived integrating as the most effective and avoiding as an ineffective and inappropriate response to conflict. Within marriages, satisfied couples report using integrating, compromising, and obliging styles, and less satisfied couples report using dominating and avoiding styles of conflict management (Rahim et al., 2004).

Having an understanding of your conflict management style, as well as the approach used by people in your life, can help you navigate what can sometimes be a frustrating experience. In addition to understanding your conflict management style, it is important to understand responses to conflict that can aggravate the conflict, or worse, lead to the dissolution of the relationship. In the next section, you will learn about the "Four Horsemen of the Relationship Apocalypse" and common unproductive conflict behaviors.

What Is Your Preferred Style of Conflict Management?

Now that you have reviewed the different styles of conflict management, it is time to reflect on your own approach to resolving conflict. Below are five situations involving common relationship conflicts. For each scenario, read the five actions and choose the response that is closest to the way you would like to respond if you were in a similar situation. Your answer should reflect what you think you *would* do, not what you think you *should* do. Keep track of your choices for each item.

Scenario 1: Divorce Dilemma

You are a single parent. Ever since the divorce, you have been trying to better connect with your teenage son, Tamer. You've noticed that they have been a bit distant and have been lying to you about where and who they've been hanging out with. You text Tamer that you'd like to talk over the weekend about their recent behaviors. You look at your phone and the text indicates "read," yet Tamer doesn't text you back nor bring up the text to you when you see them the next day. How do you respond?

1. Skip the conversation; you don't want to ruin the weekend.
2. Gently suggest to Tamer that you would appreciate it if they responded to your text messages.
3. Tell Tamer that as the parent you are responsible for their well-being. Insist that they explain their recent lying and failure to respond to texts or you will take away their phone.
4. Propose a middle ground such that if Tamer will agree to respond to your texts quickly, you will agree to give them more freedom in how they spend their time.
5. Try to empathize and understand how Tamer is feeling, and then propose that you develop some guidelines together for family communication.

Scenario 2: Social Media

Your best friend has a habit of posting unflattering pictures of you on their social media account. You have asked them to stop but the problem has continued. If you let them know an image bothers you, they are quick to remove it. Your friend has now posted a picture that you find embarrassing and you want this practice to stop. How do you respond?

1. Say nothing and suffer in silence. They haven't stopped and you doubt they ever will.
2. Try to get over it and not be so self-conscious.
3. Threaten your friend that if they don't stop you will start posting embarrassing pictures of them.
4. Try to find a middle ground and ask your friend to agree that you will both share pictures with each other before posting.
5. Wait until a suitable time to sit down with your friend and talk about the situation. Listen to their side of the story and then disclose how this is making you feel. Work towards a solid solution you can both agree with.

Scenario 3: Money Matters

Your closest friend always seems to be short of cash. Recently, their dog got sick and as a result of the vet bills they asked you to spot them $50 so they could pay for their gas. They promised to pay you back on Friday, but a week later they still have not paid you. How do you respond?

1. Put off talking about it. It just doesn't seem like a good time.
2. Let it go since your friendship is worth more to you than $50.
3. Threaten your friend that if they do not pay you back you are going to cut off the relationship.
4. Instead of paying you back, ask them to complete some repairs around your house in exchange.
5. Sit down and talk to your friend. Try to understand the problem, then propose a repayment plan.

Scenario 4: Helicopter Parent

Your parents have been extremely hands-on and supportive throughout your childhood, coaching sports, volunteering in your classes, and helping you prepare for college. Now that you have entered college, your parents are insisting on choosing your major and it is a field you are not interested in. Your parents have told you that if you do not major in their chosen field, they will not pay for your college expenses. How do you respond?

1. Do nothing. You are afraid of your parents' response.
2. Accept your parent's decision, as they are paying for your college expenses and you want to make them happy.

3. Tell your parents that they are being unreasonable. If that is how they feel, you will move out and pay for your own education.
4. Propose taking a class in each field and then reporting back to your parents.
5. Listen to your parents to try and understand their point of view, and then share with them the career opportunities for your major to see if you can reach an agreement.

Scenario 5: Holiday Drama

You and your significant other are looking forward to celebrating the holidays together—until you realize that both your families celebrate on the same day and at the same time. This conflict is creating a lot of frustration for you and your partner. How do you respond?

1. Say nothing and celebrate with your family. It's not worth the trouble at this time to change.
2. Agree to spend the holidays with your partner's family. It seems like your partner cares more about the issue than you do.
3. Demand that if your partner really cares about you and your future together, they will make the effort to spend this holiday with your family.
4. Propose that you and your partner spend half of the day with your family and half of the day with their family.
5. Set aside a good time to talk and empathize with your partner. Discuss developing a plan for how and where you will spend the holidays together.

Scenario 6: Extroverts and Introverts

Your significant other likes to go out to clubs and parties, and have friends over, but you are much more introverted. You would rather stay in, study for school, play video games, or watch movies. One day your partner tells you that they feel like they are missing out on their social life and they want to talk about how you spend time together. You are afraid they will break up with you. How do you respond?

1. Avoid your partner so you don't have to deal with the problem in the middle of the semester.
2. Give in and agree to start going to parties and clubs to keep them happy.
3. Tell your partner they are being selfish for trying to change you and refuse to socialize with their friends.
4. Agree to start going out more if your partner is also willing to learn about your favorite video game.
5. Ask your partner to talk to see if you can work together to make some adjustments and find some activities outside of the house that you can enjoy together.

Results

Tally up the number of As, Bs, Cs, Ds, and Es you selected. Your answers indicate your preference for managing conflict.

- Majority of A answers: indicates a preference for avoidance
- Majority of B answers: indicates a preference for obliging
- Majority of C answers: indicates a preference for competition
- Majority of D answers: indicates a preference for compromising
- Majority of E answers: indicates a preference for integrating
- Mixed answers: If you have a tie or two close scores, it may indicate that you are skilled in more than one style and adapt based on the needs of the situation.

Discussion and Reflection

As we can see from these scenarios, there are many different ways to respond to conflict. Having an understanding of your own and others' conflict styles can help you choose the best approach to achieving peaceful and meaningful conflict resolution. Take a moment to reflect on your conflict preferences.

1. What are the potential strengths of your style preference?
2. What are the potential weaknesses of your style preference?
3. Explain which of the five styles you would like to work on developing.

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3.5.5: Unproductive Conflict

Learned Communication Responses to Conflict

Have you ever walked away from a conflict feeling bad about your behavior? You are not alone, as conflict can be a frustrating emotional experience that can bring out the worst in us. Unproductive conflict behaviors consist of learned communication responses to conflict that can damage relationships, escalate a conflict, stifle conflict resolution, and contribute to dysfunction in relationships. Unproductive conflict behaviors are often used to set up attacks in conflict. They may lead to short-term wins, but they sacrifice the health of the relationship and the self-concept of the other people in the conflict. In this section, you will first learn about the Four Horsemen of the Relationship Apocalypse, which are broad patterns of responses to conflict that harm relationships. Second, you will be introduced to unproductive communication behaviors that are ineffective for conflict resolution.

Four Horsemen of the Relationship Apocalypse

Imagine that you are about to get married, and a family member comes to you and tells you that they can predict whether or not you will be divorced in five years. Would you like to know their prediction? While much of interpersonal research has focused on what we can do with our communication to have happy relationships, researcher John Gottman has made a career of studying communication behaviors that sabotage our closest relationships and what we can do to change these negative patterns. He has identified four communication styles that can predict the end of a relationship due to their unproductive and dysfunctional nature (Gottman & Driver, 2005; Gottman, 2014). He calls them the Four Horsemen of the Relational Apocalypse: criticism, contempt, stonewalling, and defensiveness. These four forms of communication can sabotage your successful management of conflict.

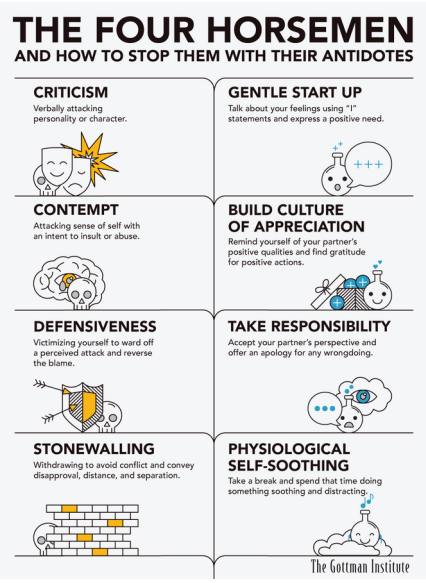


Figure 3.5.5.1 The Four Horsemen are used by permission from The Gottman Institute. Image by Julie Schwartz Gottman, John Gottman, and The Gottman Institute. Source: The Four Horsemen: The Antidotes.

Criticism

This occurs when we publicly or privately call out someone's faults in a negative manner. In Figure 9.5.1, criticism is described as verbally attacking someone's character or personality. In relationships, it can be necessary to offer feedback, share complaints, or offer a critique. However, criticism is different in that in addition to the issues being discussed, it relies on making a personal attack on the other person's self-concept. Criticism can be private, such as between two people, or public, such as when someone criticizes their partner in front of other people. Public criticism can feel more damaging because it is shared in front of other people, causing the recipient to lose face or experience shame. Ongoing criticism can lead to conflict.

Complaint: "I feel frustrated because you keep buying candy for the kids. I thought we agreed that we are going to try to

limit how much candy they eat."

Criticism: "You are a horrible partner and parent. Not only do you not honor our agreement, but you are also encouraging unhealthy eating habits in our kids by loading them up with sugar."

Contempt

This refers to the extreme dislike of another person and may include negative verbal and nonverbal expressions towards another person. Figure 9.5.1 captures that contempt leads to attacks, insults, and abuse. Specific communication messages that fall under contempt include insults, mockery, sarcasm, disapproval, judgment, name-calling, and negative labels (Gottman, 1994). Nonverbal indicators of contempt include eye-rolling, facial expressions indicating disgust and anger (such as the nose wrinkle), and aggressive hand gestures. Contempt is considered to be one of the most corrosive behaviors for relationships.

Consider this exchange between David and Stephanie, where Stephanie's response indicates she is feeling contempt for David.

David: "I would like us to take another look at our family budget. I am worried that our family is making too many materialistic purchases that are not in our family's best interest."

Stephanie: "Hah! Are you suggesting I'm materialistic? Give me a break (rolling eyes)! If you learned to manage your money better and figure out a simple budget, I wouldn't have to break my back trying to support this family. I should have listened to my family when they told me you were going to bleed me dry financially."

Defensiveness

This is a common response to feedback and criticism. Figure 9.5.1 identifies that when people are defensive, they assume the role of the victim and try to reverse the blame. Rather than listening and considering the feedback, the recipient tries to protect themselves by making excuses, denying responsibility, blaming and or accusing the other person, justifying their behavior, or offering a counter-criticism. The problem is that deflecting criticism with defensiveness leaves conflict issues unresolved. Gottman found that there are specific communication behaviors that trigger defensiveness, including negative mind-reading and the speaker's tone of voice. Negative mind-reading occurs when someone makes negative attributions about our thoughts, motives, and behavior, such as "You always put yourself first and you never think about how I feel." Negative mind-reading is further exacerbated by a negative tone of voice, which can receive a different response than if the message was delivered with a neutral or positive tone of voice.

Stonewalling

This occurs when the receiver emotionally or physically withdraws from the interaction, closing themselves off from the other person because they feel overwhelmed. Stonewalling is a form of avoidance that is often a response to criticism and contempt. As Figure 9.5.1 indicates, stonewalling is used to create distance, indicate disapproval, and create separation. According to Gottman, it is common for people to become physiologically flooded during conflict exchanges (in other words, overcome with negative emotions), which leaves them needing a break from the interaction. When we use stonewalling as a response, we tend to stop listening, try to change or avoid the subject, and physically turn away from the other person. Nonverbal indicators of stonewalling include a lack of eye contact, minimal facial expressions, head movement, and vocalizations.

For example, consider the situation of Rebecca and Javier, the happy new parents of a baby boy. Javier's mother lives just five minutes away from the new parents and has taken to dropping in daily to visit her grandson. Rebecca is frustrated by the unannounced visits and would like Javier to intervene with his mother. Javier believes his mom just wants to help and feels trapped between his wife and mother. The next time that Rebecca brings up the issue, Javier is overwhelmed with feelings of guilt. Rather than dealing with the problem, he tells Rebecca that he does not have time to discuss the issue and he leaves for a walk. Continued unresolved conflict may lead to defensiveness.



Figure 3.5.5.2 Four horsemen of the apocalypse by Humber Museums Partnership from Flickr is licensed CC BY NC SA

Communication Barriers to Conflict Management

Now that you understand the Four Horsemen of the Relationship Apocalypse and the negative communication patterns that can harm relationships, let's examine some specific unproductive responses to conflict. Increasing your awareness of unproductive conflict can help you recognize how these behaviors can create negative conflict spirals, identify these behaviors in your interactions with others, and promote awareness of alternative, more collaborative and peaceful, responses.

Gunnysacking

A gunnysack is a large burlap sack. In the world of conflict, gunnysacking refers to storing up one's grievances and unloading them all at once at a later date on the other party. For example, consider the couple Erin and Gavin who have been dating for two years. Erin would like to discuss the future of their relationship, but Gavin, in a defensive response, uses gunnysacking and starts to unload all sorts of grievances, such as Erin's money and time management, and lack of cooking skills, as reasons he is not ready to discuss the future of their relationship. Erin is caught off guard and is curious why she hasn't been made aware of these issues before this time. Another conflict behavior that is closely related to gunnysacking is known as kitchen sinking.

Kitchen Sinking

Whereas with gunnysacking people store up their grievances to unload them at a later date, kitchen sinking refers to bringing up past conflicts, even those resolved, to gain leverage in the conflict. The challenge created by kitchen sinking is that it can distract from the conflict at hand by bringing up the past.

Blame

Some conflicts have a clearly identifiable source, but often there are multiple causes for the conflicts we experience. Blame, or trying to place responsibility for the conflict on another person, is primarily only effective in making the other party feel defensive. In the landmark book *Getting to yes* the authors recommend separating people from the issues. In other words, rather than blaming the other person, recognize that we all play a part in the conflict process and that we must isolate the conflict as the source of the problem, not the other party (Fisher et al., 2011).

Beltlining

This refers to a boxing move that means to hit below the belt. In terms of conflict, this metaphor refers to using intimate information against each other to cause hurt and anger. For example, Annabelle and Ariana are having a conflict over their

friendship and Ariana beltlines Annabelle with this comment: “You have often wondered why you don’t have more friends. Based on how you are acting right now, I don’t need to wonder anymore.”

Force

In January of 2021, Kanye West made headlines when he dropped a new song with the lyrics “God saved me from that crash / just so I can beat Pete Davidson’s a**.” We live in a society where images of force are often glorified not only in song lyrics, but also in movies, gaming, and professional fighting. Unfortunately, the use of force to control conflict is too common in interpersonal relationships. Force refers to using physical pressure to exert control in conflict exchanges and can include both exertions directed at inanimate objects, such as throwing and breaking a vase, or physical assault against another person. Of all the unproductive conflict behaviors listed here, this one is the most harmful and dangerous. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Statistics (2015), 21% of college students report dating violence by a current partner, and 32% of college students have experienced dating violence from a previous romantic partner.

Manipulation

This unproductive conflict strategy includes one party being extremely charming and even generous to help sway the conflict outcome in their direction. For example, Ian wants to buy a new surfboard. To soften up his wife, Lily, for the big purchase, he makes favorite dinner and brings home a bouquet of roses, thinking that she won’t say no after he was so “considerate.” However, if Lily finds out that Ian was merely being nice to gain an advantage, this may harm the trust in their relationship over the long run.

Personal Rejection

This occurs when one party in the conflict withholds love, affection, and attention from the other party. The strategy is designed to reject the other person in hopes that they will give in to the other person and come back to reconcile. For example, after a family conflict with his parents, Darren refuses to accept holiday gifts from his parents for his kids and sends them back, unopened.

Counterpunch

This is a defensive response to conflict whereby rather than responding to the initial topic of conflict, the other person reacts by sharing their own, often unrelated criticism. For example, Sara asks Ethan to make a better effort cleaning up after himself in the kitchen. Rather than responding to Sara’s request, Ethan responds with, “If you were a better cook, it might motivate me to clean up my dishes.”

Labeling

This occurs when you assign negative terms to the other person’s behavior. We can do this internally by just thinking about it in our heads, or externally by sharing our labels with others, or by labeling the other person during our interaction. Not only can labels be extremely hurtful, but when we use labels to assign meaning to the behavior of other people, we begin to view those people through the labels. For example, Mason works up the courage to tell their father that they do not want to go into the family business, but instead would like to go to college. His father, who is extremely disappointed, responds by telling Mason that they are “ungrateful,” “selfish,” and a “bad son.”

Silencers

These behaviors can stifle and silence the conflict, such as crying, yelling, and heavy breathing. When conflict escalates quickly, parties may use silencers to deflect attention away from the conflict issue and instead make the conflict about the silencers. For example, let’s say that friends Jasmine and Sam are having a conflict over money. Jasmine assertively tells Sam that she expects to be repaid for the money she lent them. Rather than responding to Jasmine’s request, Sam begins crying and suggests that Jasmine is a bully for bringing up the topic. The conflict now becomes about Jasmine’s approach and Sam’s crying; the money problem is left without being addressed.

As we can see, there are a variety of ways we can worsen conflict, hurt the other person, and hurt our relationships. It is now time to turn our attention to positive communication behaviors that you can use to resolve your differences.

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3.5.6: Conflict Resolution

Using Conflict as an Opportunity



Figure 3.5.6.1 This fortune says, “The purpose of argument should not be victory, but progress.”

The Purpose of Argument is Progress by Jon Collier from Flickr CC BY-SA 2.0

As we have learned so far, interpersonal conflict can be a complicated, emotional, and frustrating experience. It is equally important to recognize that conflict is normal and can be an opportunity to bring people together. Thankfully, there are several helpful communication strategies available to you for conflict resolution. In this section, you will review communication skills that help promote peaceful conflict resolution, learn a model of conflict resolution, and learn about alternative options for conflict management.

Communication Skills for Effective Conflict Resolution

As previously noted, communication and conflict are closely woven together. Thus, communication behaviors can both serve as a source of conflict and as the key to resolving interpersonal conflict. Throughout this text, you have learned a variety of interpersonal communication skills that will come in handy when trying to resolve conflict. This section will provide an overview of key communication skills for effective conflict resolution and provide additional tips to help in the process.

Mindfulness

Approach conflict with mindfulness. Mindfulness refers to being present in the moment, with increased awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and communication behaviors. To approach conflict mindfully, consider your conflict opening, including your tone of voice and tone of the message. For example, Liana is aware that she is an assertive communicator who at times can be very passionate about her views. When addressing conflicts with her friends or family she makes a conscious effort to use a considerate tone and to find the right words to start the discussion. A gentle start to the conflict can help make the other person more willing to listen.

Perception Checking

When negotiating conflict, it is important to understand the source of the conflict and the perspective of the other parties. Take the time to check your perceptions about the cause of the conflict and how the other person is feeling.

Being Unconditionally Constructive

Regardless of the approach used by the other party in the conflict, commit to being unconditionally constructive, which means adhering to the principles of ethical communication by honoring yourself, the other person, and the relationship, and not engaging in communication behaviors that will harm the other party or the relationship. We cannot change how others will respond to us, but we can choose to control our own communication behaviors (Fisher et al., 2011).

The 5 to 1 Rule

People in satisfying and stable relationships share more positive than negative messages about their relationships and each other. Even during an argument, it is worthwhile to take the time to appreciate the other person. This phenomenon, which is called the 5 to 1 Rule, is particularly important when trying to resolve conflicts (Gottman, 1994). To practice the 5 to 1 Rule, include positive communication behaviors such as empathy, making respectful jokes, expressing appreciation for the other person (even for trivial things like taking out the trash), apologizing, trying to find areas of agreement, expressing both physical and verbal affection, and demonstrating that you are interested in the other person.

Bracketing

This refers to breaking down the conflict into smaller and more manageable parts. Sometimes during a conflict, individuals will bring a large variety of topics to the table, including old issues. It can be helpful to say “What is the most pressing issue for you (or us) right now? We can deal with the other issues, but let’s try to focus on one right now.” Separating conflict issues into smaller parts increases the chances of successfully resolving problems.

Active Listening

Family therapists stress that active listening is one of the most important communication skills to use to promote harmonious relationships and to help manage conflicts. When you find yourself in a conflict situation, whenever possible, be the first to listen by encouraging the other party to speak and then take time to paraphrase their messages. This helps to slow the pace of conflicts and encourages mutual understanding. Now, in some situations, you may find yourself initiating a discussion of the conflict. If that is the case, you will likely speak first, and then request feedback from the other party.

Assertiveness

In terms of conflict management, being assertive with our communication helps us stand up for ourselves while at the same time respecting the needs of the other person. If you decide to address a conflict with another party, review tips for assertive communication, such as relying on communication that is respectful, honest, and maintains a focus on the needs of both parties.

Empathy

To take a collaborative approach to conflict, actively try to put yourself in the other party's position to understand the conflict from their point of view. How would you feel if you were in their shoes? Empathy is essential to achieving a collaborative outcome to the conflict. Taking the time to verbally express that you empathize with the other person can encourage them to also empathize with you, building a connection that may help lead to resolution.

Emotional Intelligence

This is a key component of successful conflict negotiation. When preparing to engage in conflict, check in with your emotional intelligence. How are you and the other party feeling emotionally and physically? Is it the right time to discuss a conflict? Are you able to empathize with the other party? Are you in control of your communication behavior? Practicing emotional intelligence while engaging in conflict resolution will contribute to maintaining and strengthening the relationship rather than solely focusing on winning the argument.

You have now reviewed several communication tools that can help you improve your conflict negotiation experiences. In the next section, let’s examine a step-by-step model for creating a collaborative and peaceful conflict negotiation.

Conflict Letter

Now that you have familiarized yourself with conflict management styles, unproductive conflict, and communication strategies for conflict resolution, it is time to reflect on what you have learned.

Think about an important relationship you have with a friend, family member, romantic partner, or co-worker, and how you would like to improve problem-solving in the relationship. Take a few minutes to write this person a letter or email that reflects on what you have learned about your approach to conflict. Your letter should be about addressing *your* conflict style, not the other person's.

- In the letter, identify your preferred conflict management style and explain what it means. Briefly discuss how your conflict style may impact the other person. You can begin with: "I hope this letter finds you doing well. I am currently taking an interpersonal communication class and have been learning about my communication style when trying to solve problems. I find that I approach conflict as an avoider/obliger/compromiser/etc." Take the time to mention a strength and a drawback of your approach.
- Review the list of unproductive conflict management strategies, and identify at least one unproductive strategy you use that you would like to try to minimize.
- Review tips throughout the book and explain how you will try to improve how you manage conflicts in your relationship. You can share at least two new communication tools you plan to try to use the next time you encounter a conflict with this person.
- Talk about your role and what *you* plan to do, not focusing on what the other person should be doing. You can make one request, but the focus should be on improving your own conflict communication.
- You can share this letter with the person you wrote it to, or keep it for yourself as motivation to work towards peaceful conflict resolution.

Integrative Conflict Resolution Model

Conflict negotiation refers to a formal or informal process that individuals use to find a mutually agreeable solution to a problem. When sorting through the complexity of conflict, it can help to have a model to guide the process. Before you choose to try and solve a problem, it can be helpful to ask yourself a few guiding questions first:

- Will this subject bother me tomorrow, next week, next month, etc.? If the answer is yes, give yourself some time to cool off and plan to address the issue. If the answer is no, you may choose not to deal with the situation.
- Is this the right time to address the problem? Do you and the other person have the time and emotional bandwidth to tackle the conflict? If not now, schedule a time to talk later.
- Are you addressing the conflict with the correct person? All too often, we complain to friends and family members about a problem we have experienced with someone else. This allows us to release a little emotional frustration, but if the problem continues you will need to address it with the involved parties.

The integrative conflict resolution model presented below is appropriate to use for issues that are important to you and/or the other person, ongoing conflicts, or conflicts that may significantly impact you.

1. **Define the conflict:** To successfully negotiate conflict, all parties in the conflict must identify the issues. You can begin by describing the central concerns and identifying different conflict goals (content, relational, identity, process). There may be multiple issues at play, and this is a good time to practice bracketing, or breaking the conflict into smaller parts, to determine what issues you would like to focus on.
2. **Use "I" statements:** Use "I" statements instead of "you" language to avoid triggering defensiveness and to demonstrate that you are taking responsibility for your own feelings.
3. **Empathize with the other person:** When possible and appropriate, take the time to acknowledge how the other person is feeling and their perspective on the conflict.
4. **Brainstorm solutions:** Once both parties have identified the conflict and shared their personal perspectives, jointly brainstorm solutions to the problem. Brainstorm multiple solutions together. Refrain from judging solutions during this step.
5. **Test a solution:** Jointly select a solution to the conflict that you are willing to put into practice. Agree to a timeline to test the solution, whether it be in days, weeks, or months.
6. **Adopt or reject the solution:** After the agreed-upon time has passed, meet up to discuss the solution to the conflict. Did the solution solve the problem? Did it make it worse? You may need to revisit the conflict and test a new solution.

Using the integrative conflict resolution model can take time and practice. When you first use the model, it can feel a bit stiff and artificial, as though you are following a script for a play. However, over time, using an approach like this can help you slow down and think through the best options for conflict resolution. If you are facing a significant area of conflict with a friend, family member, or co-worker, it may help to sit down and think through in advance what you would like to say and accomplish.

Some conflicts can be too big for individuals to resolve on their own. In these cases, it can help to seek out a third party. There are many options available. Conflict mediation is where individuals seek help resolving a conflict with the aid of a trained mediator. Many cities offer free or low-cost conflict mediation services for families, couples, and communities. In other situations, particularly when conflict is creating a painful emotional experience, or is multi-layered, therapy or counseling may be a beneficial option. Therapy or counseling can provide individuals and families with training, problem-solving, and coping strategies for managing conflict. Colleges frequently offer free therapy sessions and/or referrals for low-cost options within the community. If you experience conflict at work, you may want to turn to your Human Resources department for help in resolving the issue. It is worthwhile to develop skills in peaceful conflict resolution, but it is also helpful to recognize times when you may need professional assistance to aid you in solving your conflict.

Building Bridges Through Apology and Forgiveness



Figure 3.5.6.2 Forgiveness by scem.info from Flickr CC-BY-SA-2.0.

As we have learned throughout this book, our personal relationships with family, friends and romantic partners are essential for our physical and psychological well-being. However, despite our best intentions, conflict can arise in these relationships, creating emotionally charged situations and often resulting in hurt feelings and misunderstandings.

Offering an **apology** to another is a signal that you recognize the impact of your actions and that you would like to make amends. Granting **forgiveness** is the process of fostering personal healing by offering grace to the party who has hurt us. To forgive does not mean to excuse or forget that you have been harmed. Rather, the aim of forgiveness is to bring peace that allows both parties to move forward.

Learning to apologize effectively may be one of the most powerful communication tools we can use to respond when things go wrong in our relationships. In the book *A good apology: Four steps to make things right* (2020), psychologist Molly Howes outlines four steps for a meaningful apology:

1. First, you must come to understand the other person's injury, including the effects of your actions. This usually involves asking questions and listening.
2. Second, you must articulate a sincere statement of regret. You must acknowledge what you did and how it affected the other person. This is no small feat for most of us, especially when we didn't intend to hurt someone.
3. Third, you must make reparations. This can include material restitution, although in relationships that's less likely to occur.
4. Fourth, you must make a convincing plan to prevent the problem from happening again (Howes, 2020, p. 73).

As with the other communication skills you have learned throughout this book, apology and forgiveness take practice and patience.

When should you forgive? One of my favorite sayings is from 18th-century poet Alexander Pope, who wrote, “To err is human, to forgive is divine.” This line reminds us that it is human nature to make mistakes, and it is a gracious act to grant forgiveness. Granting forgiveness does not mean releasing the other person from responsibility, but can allow us to move forward with our lives by releasing us from pain and from any control that a situation or other person may have over us.

Consider This: To Apologize and Forgive, That Is the Question

Jake and Dana have been friends since elementary school. After high school, Jake became heavily involved in the drug scene. Unfortunately, Jake developed a drug addiction. As a result of the addiction, Jake alienated friends and family, stole money from Dana, and as a breaking point, endangered Dana’s life. As a result, Dana cut off all contact with Jake. After hitting rock bottom, Jake completed two rounds of rehab. Upon completion of the last round of treatment, Jake reached out to Dana through text, and apologized for their previous behavior, acknowledging the theft and the danger caused as a result of the addiction.

1. Based on Howes’ (2020) four steps for a meaningful apology (understand, articulate, repair, and prevention, how would you apologize to Dana if you were in Jake’s position?
2. If you were in Dana’s position, would you be able to forgive Jake? Why or why not? Explain how you might respond to a sincere apology from Jake.

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3.5.7: Summary and Review

Summary

In this chapter, we explored conflict and communication in personal relationships. We learned that conflict is based on interdependent relationships, competing goals, limited resources, and interference from others, and that culture can add a significant dimension to how we perceive and resolve conflict.

It is important to recognize that we approach conflict situations with distinctive styles, including integrating, dominating, avoiding, competing, and obliging preferences. These styles will in turn impact how the conflict is resolved, including win-win, win-lose, and lose-lose outcomes. Conflict can be further complicated by the use of unproductive conflict behaviors, such as gunnysacking, kitchen sinking, blame, beltlining, force, manipulation, personal rejection, counterpunch, labels, and silencers. The use of unproductive conflict behaviors may lead to short-term win-lose outcomes, but over time they can cause conflict to spiral out of control, hurt the relationship, and hurt the self-concepts of the people on the receiving end.

To close the chapter, we explored specific communication tools to help enhance successful conflict management, as well as an integrative model of conflict negotiation. There are a variety of communication tools that can encourage the peaceful resolution of conflict, including mindfulness, being unconditionally constructive, practicing the 5 to 1 Rule, bracketing, perception checking, active listening and mirroring, assertiveness, empathy, and emotional intelligence. For conflicts that are ongoing and have a significant impact, practicing the integrative conflict resolution model may help to solve the conflict. Last, it is important to recognize when conflict may benefit from the help of a third party, such as a conflict mediator or therapist.

Interpersonal conflict, when managed with empathy and grace, can lead to a variety of benefits. It is important to remember to commit to honoring yourself, the other person, and the relationship. In doing so, you may experience greater personal awareness, understanding of the other person, and relationship growth.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a recent situation in which you experienced a conflict or a problem in a relationship with a friend, family member, romantic partner, or co-worker. What type of conflict goal is at the heart of the problem? If you could go back and renegotiate the conflict, what are three conflict management skills you learned in this chapter that you would apply for peaceful problem resolution? How might the context of the situation influence your choice of conflict management style?
2. Reflect on your own style of conflict management (avoidance, dominating, integrating, obliging, compromising). Do you try to jump right in and solve the problem, or would you rather not deal with issues? Do you try and protect the relationship first, or do you try to win and get your way? What is the benefit of your approach? What is the downside to your approach? Based on what you have learned in this chapter, how might you adapt your conflict management approach in the future?
3. In your family, what are the expectations for handling conflict? (Consider cultural factors such as race and ethnicity, gender, age, individualism/collectivism, and sexual orientation.) How do these expectations impact your relationships with others?

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3.6: Interpersonal Communication and the Workplace

Learning Objectives

- Define organizational communication
- Describe the reasons why being an effective interpersonal communicator at work is important
- Explain why we seek out workplace relationships

Organizational Communication

Imagine an office full of robots. It would be almost silent, besides the buzzing of machines. There would be little to no errors and no sick days. There would be no wasted time on birthday celebrations in the lunchroom or checking in on coworkers' weekend plans. The environment would be sterile, uninterrupted, and remote. Now, imagine you are a customer. You call into this office for assistance. You are given pre-determined prompts to choose from, consistently frustrated because you are not receiving the help you need. Over the years, you notice the company continues to pump out the same, traditional products, with no upgrades, modifications, or accommodations to current technology. You realize that, though perhaps seemingly easier and more advantageous to daily flow, the lack of the human element also eliminates innovation, diversity, ingenuity, and personality. Fortunately, for those of us who are employed or looking for work, most industries still hire real people with personalities—and yes, flaws. Therefore, we will look at how humans interact in the workplace. We will examine the basics of interpersonal communication at work, organizational culture, types of workplace relationships, how power and emotions show up in the workplace and explore boundaries and professionalism. By the end of this chapter, we hope to give you tools that empower you to become more successful and effective communicators at work.

Organizational communication is studied extensively in the field of Communication Studies; some universities even offer it as an independent degree. As a field of study and practice, **organizational communication** usually pertains to internal communications within an organization, such as messaging regarding an organization's mission or any kind of employee training. It can also include the various types of interpersonal communication that occurs between management and employees, as well as professional communication such as emails, announcements, and company documentation. Organizational communication can also include messaging that is more external-focused, such as public relations/public release documents, marketing materials, or branding. Interpersonal communication intersects with organizational communication in many ways. However, in this chapter, we will focus specifically on the types of relationships you will encounter in the workplace and the workplace dynamics you need to be aware of as you navigate those relationships. First, to get you acquainted with this chapter, in the next section we will talk about why it is to your advantage to understand the nuances of interpersonal communication as it relates to the workplace.

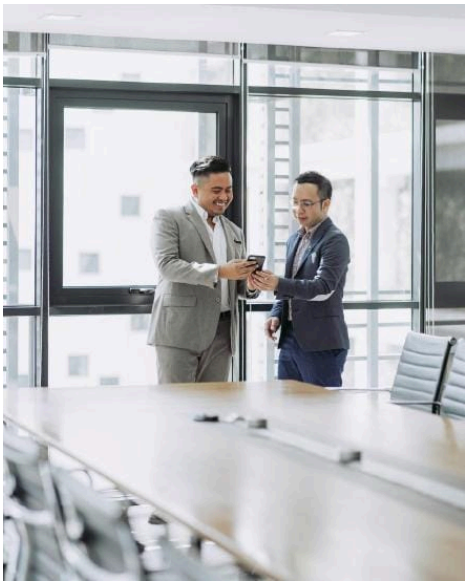


Figure 3.6.1: Businessmen Talking in a Boardroom by Muhammad Faiz Zulkeflee on Unsplash

Reflection Questions

1. What strengths does the human element bring to communication in the workplace?
2. What weaknesses does the human element bring to the workplace?
3. Can you connect any of the concepts shared in your previous chapters to an interpersonal relationship at work?

Making the Connection

People do not always associate interpersonal communication and organizational communication. However, we do not live in silos, nor are we robots. The workplace is full of interpersonal interactions. According to McKeown & Ayoko:

> Often it is the people who make or break a job for us—getting on with those we work with impacts on our happiness is not just work but in our wider life as well as on our physical and mental health. Some help us grow personally and professionally. Some serve our need for social interaction in our daily lives. Some can be harmful and inappropriate, for which we should be empowered to stand up against. So let's look at the basics of why we are inclined to engage in interpersonal communication at work. (2020, para. 1)

Why Learn Professional Interpersonal Communication Skills?

In the pie chart in Figure 3.6.2 shows that work and work-related activities take up the bulk of most Americans' days with 8.9 hours or 37% of our total day. Sleeping and personal care follow closely at 8.64 hours or 35%. Leisure and sports account for 3.01 hours or 13%. We spend about 1 hour each day in the following activities, which each account for about 4% of our day: eating and drinking, household activities, and a category labeled "Other." Caring for others came in at 0.59 hours, or 2%. of our time.

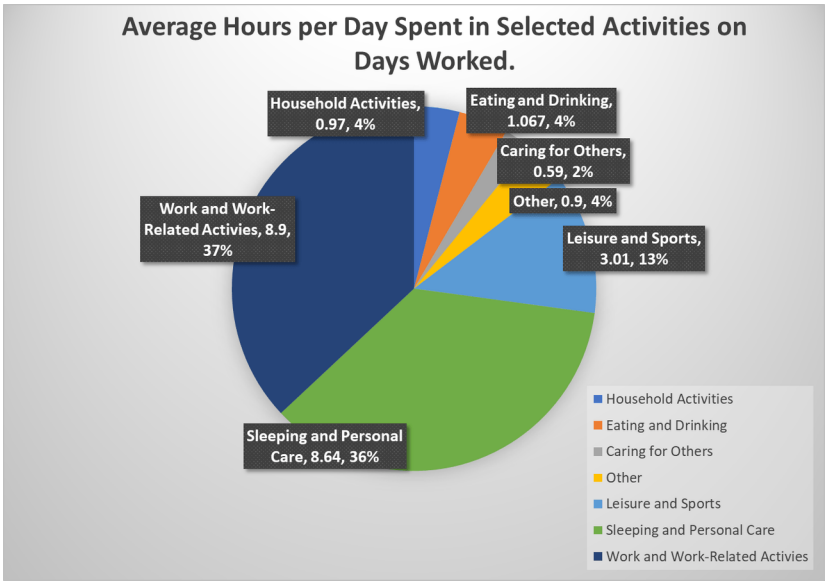


Figure 3.6.2: Average Hours per Day Spent in Selected Activities on Days Worked by Alex Mata is licensed as CC-BY 4.0.Data Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, 2017.

A survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that most people spend more time working and/or spending time with people from work than they do on any other activity on a weekday, even more than time spent sleeping. In fact, given this information, consider the time spent with family, friends, children, or any other person with which you have an interpersonal relationship. You might see that those working relationships take up a significant amount of your day.

However, learning about effective interpersonal communication skills is more than just a numbers game of hours spent in a day. If you recall from Chapter 1, many researchers have pointed to how interpersonal communication can help meet our needs as humans (Maslow, 1987; Schutz, 1958). Being that many of us spend so much of our time at our workplace, it could be advantageous to utilize this working time to help meet more of our interpersonal needs. In addition, if you remember our previous chapters on the self, verbal and nonverbal communication, and perception (Chapters 2 through 5), the way we communicate with

others has an impact on how we view ourselves and those around us. Practicing our interpersonal communication skills at work further reinforces things like our identity, our observations, and our relationships. Let's review these concepts and discuss some specific examples present in the workplace.

Interpersonal Communication Meets Our Basic Needs

In Chapter 1 you learned that communication helps to meet our basic needs. When it comes to the workplace, research from Cheung (as cited in Morgan, 2020) shows us that many people gain a sense of belonging from their jobs, and that even employee happiness is related to their social interactions at work. Psychologists have cited interpersonal relationships having a considerable impact on our health, to include mental, behavioral, and physical health (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Probably best related to interpersonal communication are **esteem needs**, for which reputation recognition, attention, or appreciation (as defined by others) (Maslow, 1943) are met. Our workplace is a common venue through which we gain a reputation, attention, appreciation or recognition. Therefore, our workspaces often serve as a significant source for meeting our esteem needs.

Interpersonal Communication Influences Your Thinking about Yourself

As you learned in Chapter 2, research by George Herbert Mead (1934) shows that our understanding of ourselves is shaped by interacting with others. Because we learn, grow, and develop at our places of work, our interactions with our co-workers help to shape how we see ourselves through theories like Reflective Appraisal (Mead, 1934; Cooley, 1902; Sullivan, 1947) and Social Comparison (Festinger, 1954). From how you dress to the praise or criticism you receive on a project, our interpersonal interactions in the workplace continuously shape our self-concept. And since we have already reviewed the data about the amount of waking hours spent at our workplace, consider just how much impact your workplace relationships have on your self-concept.

Interpersonal Communication Influences Your Thinking about Others

As we learned in Chapter 3, our understanding of others is highly influenced by our perceptions (Knudsen, et al., 202). At the workplace, this may look like past experiences with bosses, colleagues, customers, and meeting dynamics, which could have shaped how we expect others to interact or behave. Perhaps by starting a new job or working with a new colleague, you might notice that your understanding of others' roles at work is contextual, or learned through past experiences. The competent communicator could recognize how perception can create biases in the workplace that could influence pay, opportunities, leadership roles, and even harassment in the workplace. For example, say that your last employer was very strict regarding punctuality. Being late was frowned upon and happened rarely. At your new place of work, your colleagues seem to be very relaxed in their approach to punctuality. Arriving to a meeting with a coffee in hand, 5–10 minutes late, is not uncommon. However, you find yourself judging those who are late, perhaps even labeling them as unprofessional or disrespectful. Your past working norms have influenced your understanding of what is, and is not, an appropriate way to interact with others.



Figure 3.6.3: Networking by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash.

Employers Look for Interpersonal Communication Skills

Have you ever been interested in a job as a brand strategist, social media manager, content marketing manager, web producer, social media planner, or public relations specialist? If so, these were reported as some of the top Communications degree jobs in 2021 (Keiling, 2021). But it is not just for Communication-specific titles that employers look for strong communication skills. In Figure 3.6.4 we show the communication-specific skills that were cited in the *Job Outlook 2021 Spring Update* by the National Association of Colleges and Employers—skills in which communication, working with others, and/or the combination of the two, essentially dominate the attributes employers report seeking out in candidates.

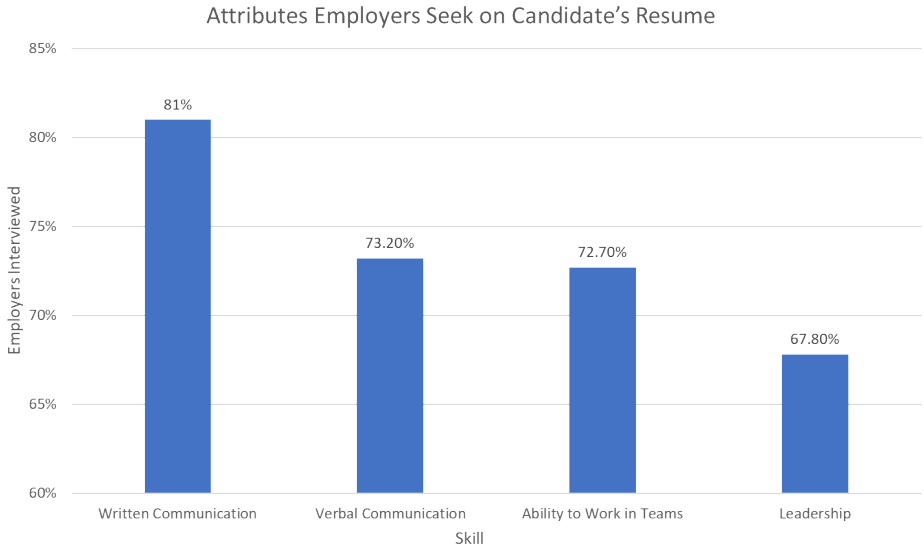


Figure 3.6.4: Communication Attributes Employers Seek on a Candidate's Resume by Alex Mata is licensed as CC-BY 4.0, Data Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers (2021)

When you look at the various jobs you've had throughout your life, whether they be typical nine-to-five office positions, part-time work, or chores around your living space, what made your work more effective and enjoyable? Did you have a co-worker that would make you laugh to get you through a long shift? A boss that was especially kind when giving praise? Did you have a parent or roommate that set clear expectations about when things needed to be done or offered help when you could not carry your own weight? It may seem obvious now that you look back, but those interpersonal communication dynamics in a workspace are particularly impactful to how effective and enjoyable our work is. In fact, they could be the difference between loving or hating the work, and motivation to get the work done and at what quality.

Reflect

Read this article: Interpersonal Skills: Definitions and Examples.

Reflection Questions

1. Out of the nine interpersonal skills listed, which do you think are your strengths?
2. The article mentions using your interpersonal skills from the job interview to the daily interactions at work. How have you seen these show up effectively in your own experience?
3. The video embedded in the article talks about EQ. What is EQ and how is it related to workplace communication?

Why Do We Seek Out Relationships at Work?

If you take stock of your own workplace experiences, or those of people you know, you might notice co-workers at children's birthday parties, receiving invites to a colleague's wedding, or meeting work-friends for drinks. You may know past or present co-workers who are dating, or even getting married themselves. Perhaps you have a boss who routinely texts you "happy birthday" or a subordinate whose baby shower you attended. Essentially, if you pay attention to workplace relationships around you, you may

just realize how prevalent they are.

We know from interpersonal communication research that we seek out relationships with others based on proximity, similarity, and physical attractiveness. When you consider how physically close a co-worker is to us for much of our waking hours, along with all we might have in common with that person (we work on the same industry, we possibly have the same boss and co-workers, we may have a similar commute, and we might be close in socioeconomic class, etc.), you could see similarities emerging quickly. Therefore, relationships at work are very convenient for us.

In addition to ease and accessibility of relationships, there are emotional and physical benefits to workplace relationships, as many researchers point out. An article from the *Harvard Business Review* cites studies showing that “teams of friends perform better; that people with supportive co-workers have more work/life balance and are less stressed; that strong personal ties increase information- and idea-sharing, self-confidence” (Beard, 2020, para. 3). Furthermore, this article cites a book written by former US surgeon general Vivek Murthy, who refers to friendship as “fundamental to successful professional relationships” and says that by just having a friend around significantly impacts our blood pressure and immune cells" (para. 4).

In most workplaces, the most basic level of communication that we will have is in our interpersonal interactions—in the form of interactions with co-workers or customers/clients, organizational leaders, or subordinates. Therefore, most communication will flow either vertically or horizontally. Communication amongst superiors and subordinates is considered **vertical communication**, which flows either upward or downward, while communication with our colleagues and customers or clients is considered **horizontal communication**. Communication across these channels can be structured formally, due to organizational processes such as with job instructions or contracts or performance reviews, or can occur more informally through networks that are created by the types of relationships established in the workplace. In the next section, we describe some of the types of workplace relationships where dyadic interpersonal communication plays an important role.

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3.6.1: Types of Workplace Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Describe the different types of workplace relationships
- Explain how the workplace can react and interact with these various dynamics
- Evaluate the benefits and the risks of engaging in each of these relationships

Friendships, Romance, and Mentors/Supervisors

As we learned with uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), perceived similarity and self-disclosure play important roles in the formation of workplace relationships. Most co-workers are in close proximity, often working mere feet from one another for eight or more hours a day, but they may create smaller cliques based on department, age, parental status, or interests (Sias, 2005). These subgroups can create a sense of belonging or happiness for workers, who are able to connect with their co-workers on an interpersonal level. In research by Gallup, when employees were asked to consider their workplace relationship with their managers, there was a strong correlation between employee engagement and a positive working relationship (Crabtree, 2004).

> A lot of us derive most of our social needs from those work relationships. They're what give people a sense of belonging in their job. Sometimes, there's an idea that when you're spending time with friends at work you won't get anything done, but the research says that employee happiness depends on social interactions.

In that same poll, of the engaged employees, 49% strongly agree that "A strong positive relationship with [my boss] is crucial to my success at work" (Crabtree, 2004, para. 14). Further research points to the support that can be gained from positive connections like receiving help, guidance, advice, feedback, and recommendations from colleagues like bosses, friends, and cubemates (Hamilton, 2007). Therefore, this section will help us explore why we seek out relationships at work, what influences our relationships with those we work with, and how friendships and romantic relationships can add value—and cause harm—to our workspace.

Friendships

Friends can bring us so much joy. You can laugh, commiserate, and feel supported with a friend. Interestingly, many sources show us that work is the number-one place people make friends (Morgan, 2020). When you combine the joy of friendship with the necessity for many of us to maintain a job, having a friend at work can make a workplace more intrinsically rewarding, helping to alleviate job-related stress. Friendships at work can be incredibly beneficial for us, and for our employers. Research from King (2020) tells us that "those who have close friends at work are more efficient in and satisfied with their jobs," later pointing to research that states "that if one of your colleagues is a 'best' friend, you're seven times more engaged at work than the average person" (Beard, 2020, para. 4).



Figure 3.6.1: Two People Laughing At Work by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash.

We have talked about the benefits of workplace friendships. But we would be remiss to not mention the research about the downfalls of friendship in the workplace. We know that through self-disclosure (as discussed in Chapter 10) we gain access to others' personal lives and emotions. In the moment, it may serve both members to have access to such intimate information. However, if the friendship changes—either because of conflict or because one friend changes roles at the company, such as moving up the corporate ladder—this interpersonal shift can not only be a distraction, but it can also change how open and authentic we are with our friends (Markman, 2018). The reputation of the company you keep, the change of subordinate/managerial roles, and competition for future jobs can all be cause for friction among friends at work (Kirmayer as cited in Vasel, 2018; Hakim as cited in Vasel, 2018).

In sum, the research overwhelmingly supports workplace friendships as a positive interpersonal relationship at work. Having a friend at work can help with your job satisfaction and work performance. The key advice from the experts seems to be setting appropriate boundaries. Amy Cooper Hakim, an industrial-organizational psychology practitioner and workplace expert, says you don't' always need to fully disclose with people at work (cited in Vasel, 2018). Instead, she encourages people to "be kind, professional and nice. But we don't need to tell every person at work our deep dark secrets, and long-term goals and dreams" (Hakim as cited in Vasel, 2018).

Romantic Relationships



Figure 3.6.2: Hands of Two People Having Coffee by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

Have you ever dated someone at work? Do you know if your company has a formal policy regarding romance in the workplace? If you have ever been exposed to workplace romance, whether knowing of one in your company, or by engaging in a relationship with a co-worker yourself, you might already know that romantic relationships at work can be controversial. Romance between colleagues has been examined and debated by scholars and academics from as early in the 1970s. In this section, we will take a quick look at romance in the workspace.

Workplace Romance Defined

Pierce and Aguinis (2001) defines **workplace romances** as "mutually desired relationships involving sexual attraction between two employees of the same organization" (p. 206). (Please note that this does not include unwanted intimate interactions or sexual harassment of any kind; that will be covered later in this chapter.) Romantic relationships begin for much of the same reasons most interpersonal relationships begin: proximity, similarity, and physical attraction. A 2020 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that more than 50% of American workers report having had a crush on a co-worker. In fact, almost 30% have had a workplace romance—and nearly the same amount report dating a boss or higher-up (Society for Human Resource Management, 2020). Therefore, we can deduce that workplace relationships are common, they are easy to access, and they happen both **laterally** (among colleagues) and **vertically** (subordinate to boss).



Figure 3.6.3: Two Women Working on a Laptop by Christina @ wocintechchat.com on Unsplash

Though there is no consensus on why romantic relationships start, researchers have identified factors and progressions for how these relationships can evolve (Pierce & Aguinis, 2003). In their study of romantic workplace relationships, Pierce, Byrne, and Aguinis (1996) propose a model for understanding workplace relationships that begins with the physical closeness of two people; requires interpersonal and romantic attraction, and a desire for a workplace relationship; and finally results in active engagement in that relationship. Workplace romances can progress and evolve like any other romantic relationship, with ups and downs, from emotional intimacy to the casual hook-ups (Wilson, 2015). Interestingly, experts in the fields of Communication Studies, Psychology, Sociology, and Business have advocated against any kind of intimate relationship at work and also broadly encouraged sexuality and eroticism as natural components of workplace culture (Wilson, 2015).

Personal and Professional Ramifications

What may be of even more interest to those who have debated whether to engage in a workplace romance is the eventual outcome. To generalize some very complicated and intricate research, romantic relationships can foster two types of outcomes: personal and professional. Let's examine the positive side first. On the personal side, workplace romances can positively impact an employee's job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation at work. Employees engaged in romantic workplace relationships will work longer hours so they can spend more time with their romantic partners (Romantic Relationships at Work, 2020). On the professional side, research by Robert Quinn (1977) cites job advancement, security, increased power, financial rewards, easier work, and job efficiency as possible professional benefits of a workplace relationship with someone of higher status—which makes workplace romance well worth the risk for some.



Figure 3.6.4: Two men working on computers side-by-side by Tim van der Kuip on Unsplash

However, as with any romantic relationship, the romance can dwindle or be terminated for a multitude of reasons, resulting in minor to significant impacts both personally and professionally. As you might have guessed, when a relationship sours in the workplace, one or both parties could see their career advancement stifled, experience less job security, and suffer a reduction in power at work (Romantic Relationships at Work, 2020). In addition, other interpersonal workplace relationships could be damaged by the romance. From disapproval and hostility for the romantic partners, to the perception of favoritism (assumptions that there will be extra benefits or opportunities for the romantic partner over other employees), the reaction of co-workers can result in cynicism and hostility (Anderson & Fisher, 1991; Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985). Research also shows that after a failed workplace romance, there can be a decrease in job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and lowered employee motivation (Romantic Relationships at Work, 2020). Swartz, Warfield, and Wood (1987) concluded that sex and work do not mix, arguing that workplace romances hurt both the parties involved as well as their co-workers and thus the organization at large.

Company Policies on Workplace Romance

As we mentioned at the start of this section, workplace romances are complicated—as well as being common and easily accessible. Rules on workplace romance are company-specific. Some employers ban interoffice dating altogether, while others allow dating so long as there is not a power dynamic at play, such as a manager dating a subordinate for example (Noguchi, 2020). In addition, employees should be aware that even if their employer does not have a strict ban on co-worker romance, they still must follow general HR guidelines for the workspace. It is important to consider the threat of a perceived quid pro quo, where one employee asks for something in return for a favor. Mirande Valbrune, a Miami employment attorney, suggests always being explicit that it is safe for another to say “no” to any advances, like grabbing coffee or going out to dinner (Noguchi, 2020).

Moving forward, it is important for you to understand your workplace policies on relationships between co-workers, set very clear boundaries with those whom you work with, and assess your risk/reward factor before engaging in any kind of romantic relationship at work.

Mentors and/or Supervisors



Figure 3.6.5: Two employees giving a high-five by krakenimages on Unsplash

In addition to friendships and romantic relationships, we can also build relationships with mentors and/or supervisors. These workplace relationships can help us grow, achieve upward mobility, and provide us with some emotional support in our careers (University of California, Davis, 2019; Kram & Isabella, 1985). To frame and focus this section of our chapter, we will define mentors and supervisors as follows:

- A **mentor** is a more experienced colleague who provides guidance, knowledge, and support for the purpose of the advancement of a less experienced colleague (Bauer, 1999).
- A **supervisor** is charged with managing others' performance, including conducting performance evaluations, while also serving as an educator, sponsor, coach, counselor, and director (UHR Employee Development, n.d.).

Let's begin by talking about why we would want to build interpersonal relationships with mentors and/or supervisors at work. First, we know that trust is important to creating and maintaining relationships. Studies show that organizations with trusting relationships between management and employees gain advantages that organizations without these relationships do not (Hosmer, 1995; Argyris, 1964). For example, in the restaurant industry, trust between supervisors and employees is related to success in sales, profits, and lower employee turnover (Davis, et al., 2000). Furthermore, managers whose employees trust them were perceived more favorably in terms of their abilities, goodwill, and integrity (Davis, et al., 2000). A supervisor can act as a mentor by providing both professional guidance and emotional support (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Though not all supervisors serve as mentors, Bell (1996) argues that when supervisors act as mentors, the beneficiaries include the mentor, mentee, and the organization itself.



Figure 3.6.6: Two women working together at a computer by Christina @ wocintechchat.com from Unsplash

Why would someone want to engage in a mentoring relationship? According to Kathy Kram in her groundbreaking book *Mentoring at Work*, mentoring provides two basic functions for mentees: career and psychosocial. **Career functions** are what come to mind for most people when they think about mentoring, because career functions are associated with helping the mentee "learn the ropes" in an organization (or a field), with the goal of helping the mentee to climb the corporate ladder.

Mentors can engage in a number of different behaviors to help a mentee advance their career. For example, a mentor can coach the mentee; a mentor can sponsor the mentee's advancement by placing them on interesting and challenging projects; a mentor can help mentee receive recognition and/or ensure the mentee is widely visible; and a mentor can provide the mentee certain protections from organizational or field-based politics.

To explain how mentor–mentee relationships function from a communication perspective, Pamela Kalbfleisch developed the **mentoring enactment theory**. In Kalbfleisch's theory, the mentor–mentee relationship centers on two people who are joined together either formally or informally for the explicit purpose of achieving success. While mentees desire mentoring relationships because of the known value of mentoring on one's career trajectory, mentors experience inherent costs.

For mentors, there are costs associated with "loss of time spent coaching a protégé, vulnerability through sharing hard-earned techniques and secrets, and potentially developing difficulties in one's personal and professional life because of a relationship with a protégé" (Kalbfleisch, 2002, p. 64). So, why then do mentors opt to enter into mentoring relationships? Mentors have a variety reasons depending on their own organizational and personal perceptions of mentoring itself. According to Kalbfleisch (2002) there are four common reasons why people decide to become a mentor: altruism, pay-it-forward, organizational expectations, or self-interest.

1. **Altruism**: The mentor may feel some kind of deeply held obligation to help others, so they seek out and enter into mentoring relationships out of a simple desire to see others grow.
2. **Pay-it-forward:** The notion of paying-it-forward is based on the idea that the mentor was at one point a mentee, and they feel a sense of obligation to their own mentor. To pay this debt, they opt to take on mentees. In this sense, the mentor is paying-it-forward to a new generation of mentees.
3. **Organizational expectations:** Many organizations have formal mentoring requirements for individuals who reach a certain seniority stage. Often in these formal mentoring situations, the mentor may not have a choice of mentees. These mentoring relationships may not be the most effective because the mentor may feel strong-armed into the relationship.
4. **Self-interest**. Some mentors want a mentee for no other reason than they want someone can help "accomplish outcomes or for an entourage to follow in one's wake" (Kalbfleisch, 2002, p. 64).

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3.6.2: A Guide to Communicating Professionally in Workplace Relationships

Learning Objectives

- Define professionalism
- Explain how ethics and respect are related to professionalism
- Discuss how language is vital to communication in the workplace
- Evaluate the ERROR message as it relates to workplace communication

Defining Professionalism

For the rest of this chapter, we will discuss how to communicate professionally, as a means for effective interpersonal communication in the workplace. We define **professionalism** in this context as "conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive" (US Department of Labor, n.d., p. 114). In this section, we will talk about some ways you can maintain professional interpersonal relationships through ethics, respect, language, and personal responsibility.

Ethics

Have you ever lied to your boss about being sick so that you didn't have to go into work? Has a coworker ever taken your ideas and presented them as their own in a meeting? These are some examples of where interpersonal ethics would come into play at work. And though ethics is a huge topic, we will share some specific ways that you can practice ethical communication within your working relationships.

In an empirical survey analysis, Reinsch asserts that a person's ethical values, beliefs, and behavior may be associated with variables such as gender, age, and perceptions (Reinsch, 1990, as cited in An Introduction to Organizational Communication, n.d.). So, how do we see ethical interpersonal communication showing up at work? The "father" of organizational communication, W. Charles Redding (1996), has prototypes for common behaviors that people frequently view as unethical. We have compiled some of these common behaviors into Table 3.6.2.1

Table 3.6.2.1: Common Behaviors Found to Be Unethical

Type of Behavior	Characteristics
Coercive	• Abuses power or authority • Stigmatizes dissentors • Restricts freedom of speech
Destructive	• Attacks others' self-esteem, reputations, or feelings • Uses put-downs, backstabbing, and character assassination • Employs so-called truth as a weapon
Deceptive	• Willfully perverts the truth to deceive, cheat, or defraud • Sends evasive or deliberately misleading or ambiguous messages • Employs bureaucratic euphemisms to cover up the truth

Type of Behavior	Characteristics
Intrusive	• Abuses power or authority • Uses hidden cameras • Employs computer technologies to monitor employee behavior
Secretive	• Uses silence and unresponsiveness • Hoards information • Hides wrongdoing or ineptness
Manipulative/Exploitive	• Uses demagoguery • Gains compliance by exploiting fear, prejudice, or ignorance • Patronizes or is condescending toward others

Source: By Alex Mata, licensed as CC-BY 4.0. Adapted from W. Charles Redding's typology of unethical behaviors (1996).

To implore ethical communication strategies at work, we would not only want to avoid the unethical behaviors listed in the table above, but recognize and address them if used by others. Maintaining a high ethical standard communicates professionalism. Additionally, setting boundaries that ensure others treat you ethically can help you maintain healthy and respectful interpersonal relationships with your colleagues.

Showing Respect

When you hear the word *respect* does Aretha Franklin's song ring in your ears? Perhaps you remember an exasperated parent saying, "You don't have to *love* my rules, but you do have to *respect* them." Interestingly, if you search the Cambridge Dictionary, you will find several definitions for the word *respect*. For the purposes of this section, we will use the following: "to accept the importance of someone's rights or customs and to do nothing that would harm them or cause offense" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Now, because the concept of respect casts such a wide net, we will cover some general principles for respect, as well as some very general behaviors you can implement when communicating with those at work.

In his award-winning book, *The Speed of Trust,* Stephen M. R. Covey (2008) identifies **showing respect for others** as a core behavior for building trust in workplace relationships. What is so impactful about his outlook on respect is that it stems from genuine care for others in the form of love, fairness, kindness, and civility for all, even if that person can do nothing for you in return, and even if the act of respect is small, like genuinely giving a compliment to a colleague (Covey, 2008).

Using Language Appropriately

As you may recall from Chapter 4, **symbols** are arbitrary representations of thoughts, ideas, emotions, objects, or actions used to encode and decode meaning (Nelson & Shaw, 2002). The language you use at work can be a reflection of who you are, and how you feel about others—and it can make lasting impressions on those you communicate with. In the workplace, our language can reflect professionalism if we use it appropriately. As we look at the use of language in workplace relationships, we will focus on informal versus formal language and avoiding sexist or biased language.

Informal versus Formal Language

Have you ever received an email without a subject, full of spelling and grammatical errors, and packed with run-on sentences? If so, you may have made a judgment call about the sender. What if you overheard cursing, or someone in the break room recounting a wild weekend? Although you may communicate this way with your friends, hearing it at work might catch your attention in an unfavorable way. Knowing how to formally communicate with colleagues and management is beneficial to your career, as it clearly defines and establishes authority, improves overall efficiency, reduces the likelihood of mistakes and errors, and tends to be more credible when sending important messages (Birt, 2021). Although informal language absolutely has its advantages in particular contexts, formal language is often a safer bet when communicating via email, in meetings, and in our workspaces.

Table 3.6.2.2: Using Verbal Language Professionally at Work

Characteristics	Example of Informal Language	Example of Formal Language
Slang/ colloquialisms	"The new HR system is not going to fly at this time, so we are putting it on the back burner."	"The new HR system is not up to par with industry standards at this time. Therefore, we will have to wait a bit longer to use it."
First-person pronouns	"I worked this chart for my records and then I shared it with my team."	"After this chart was modified and uploaded to the server, it was shared in an email with the Sales Team."
Contractions	"I won't be on our Zoom call because I can't get out of a previous scheduled meeting."	"I will not be able to attend our scheduled Zoom call because I am unable to get out of another meeting."

Source: By Alex Mata, licensed as CC-BY 4.0

Sexist or Biased Language

In addition to using formal language, you can communicate professionalism at work by avoiding **sexist** or **biased** language. Though much work has been done to reduce the use of once-common terms that communicated things like sexism, racism, and ageism, we still hear colloquialisms like *businessman, handicapped, cake walk,* and *manpower*. (Review Section 8.2: Confirming and Disconfirming Climates for a discussion of people-first language.) To maintain a sense of professionalism at work, it is important to examine our language and ensure that we do not offend others or show bias. Though we all have work to do, being aware and actively trying to get better is of great value to your workplace.

Personal Responsibility

Nobody is perfect. We all make mistakes—and the sooner we can all admit to those mistakes, the easier it might be for us to move forward after mistakes happen. Additionally, showing grace is a great way to build an interpersonal relationship. Stephen M. R. Covey (2008) explains two behaviors that can help build trust: practicing accountability and righting wrongs. Essentially, to build and maintain healthy relationships, you take responsibility for your mistakes, you don't point fingers or try to blame others, you apologize quickly, and you make restitution whenever possible.

There are many ways to take personal responsibility, but to help give us some context about how to get started here are some suggestions.

Table 3.6.2.3 How to Take Responsibility

Step	Examples
Acknowledge	You make your own choices and take your own actions Your feelings are yours, nobody else's Your behaviors at work are your responsibility

Step	Examples
Accept	You cannot control how others respond to you, only how you respond Others may not see things the way you do You may never get the answer or response you hope for
Decide	Where to invest your time and energy When to respond How you want to show up at work

Table 3.6.2.3 by Alex Mata is licensed as CC-BY 4.0. adapted from Stephen M. R. Covey (2008).

Related to taking responsibility is making excuses. According to Amy Nordrum (2014) in a *Psychology Today* article, making excuses after making a mistake is common, but not always well-received. However, she notes that in some cases, making excuses—if done correctly—can help convey empathy and show your colleagues that you are listening to their concerns (Nordrum, 2014). She developed the ERROR method as a guide to formulating excuses.

The ERROR Method

Empathy: "I can see how that would have been bothersome and I would have felt the same way."

Responsibility: "I did say that and I apologize for the impact it had on you."

Reason: "I wrote this quickly and should have taken the time to review it's potential impact."

Offer **R**eassurance: "I will work to be better."

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3.6.3: Boundaries at Work

Learning Objectives

- Explore how setting and crossing boundaries at work can impact interpersonal relationships
- Describe harassment and bias in the workplace
- Evaluate the pervasive nature of harassment and bias, as well as the impact of both in workplace culture

Setting—and Crossing—Boundaries

Boundaries can be used as "gateways" into different domains of our lives (Matthews, et al., 2010) that create "physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits" (Ashforth, et al., 2000, p. 474). That is, we create boundaries to funnel behaviors and/or actions that we allow in or not, based on the person, location, context, and more in our relationships with others. Setting boundaries can be challenging, as boundaries are defined as "the never-ending, hands-on, largely visible process through which boundaries are negotiated, placed, maintained, and transformed by individuals over time" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, xiii). Trefalt (2013) argues that boundaries are a fundamentally relational process, and that you cannot neglect the relational context of boundaries, as the past, consequences, and experiences as those involved must be factored into the equation. In this section, we will briefly cover examples where boundaries were crossed in the workplace.

Interpersonal relationships at work sometimes cross boundaries. We want to acknowledge that building mutual interpersonal relationships at your workplace does not include taking part in harassment of any kind, stereotyping others, or otherwise violating the explicit boundaries of others. We also would like to provide some context as to how common some harmful interpersonal communication exchanges are in our workspaces, hoping to shed light on how to sight and identify and then, hopefully, eliminate them from your interpersonal exchanges (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021).

Harassment and Biases

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, mutual workplace relationships are common. However, there are instances when workplace relationships occur that are very much one-sided, unwelcome, and unwanted by the receiving party. Here, we will focus on interpersonal communication patterns of harassment and biases in the workplace.

How to Overcome Our Biases

To learn more about biases, check out diversity advocate Vernā Myers' TED Talk: *How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them.* You may also read the transcript. According to Myers, we can learn how to examine our subconscious attitudes toward out-groups and then move toward, not away from, those that make us feel uncomfortable.



Figure 3.6.3.1 Brain Crying by Gaspar Uhas on Unsplash

It is helpful to understand the definitions of harassment and bias. For our purposes. **harassment** is defined by Cornell Law School as

> offensive, unwelcome conduct based on the victim's protected characteristic, that is so severe or pervasive that it affects the terms and conditions of the victim's employment. Harassment may take the form of words, actions, gestures, demands, or visual displays, such as photographs or cartoons. (Legal Information Institute, 2021, para. 1)

This can be present across interpersonal relationships at work. According to the U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission (2021) the harasser can be "the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, an agent of the employer, a co-worker, or a non-employee" and "the victim does not have to be the person harassed but can be anyone affected by the offensive conduct" (para. 6).

Bias has more nuanced definitions: **explicit bases** are understood as overt prejudices and attitudes about a group, like racism or misogyny, while **unconscious** and **implicit biases** are deeply held beliefs about others that may unconsciously drive attitudes and behavior (Rimnac, 2020). These exchanges can manifest in the form of verbal and nonverbal actions directed towards others (Bouckenooghe, et al. 2015).

Harassment and biases can take many forms; in this section we just scratch the surface of some of the most reported and researched facets of these areas.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The US Equal Employment Opportunities Commission defines **sexual harassment** as

> unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. (2021)

Given this definition, have you ever felt harassed at work? Did you say something? Did you ignore it? Did you make an official report?

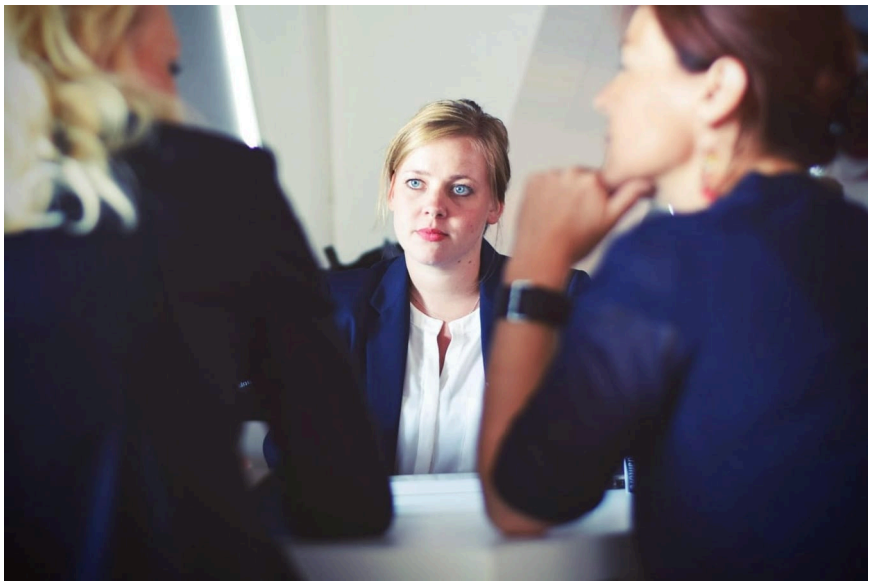


Figure 3.6.3.2 Women talking in a Boardroom by Tim Gouw on Unsplash

In 2020 the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 6,587 sexual harassment claims. Of those claims, 16.8% were made by men (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). Research finds that men are the most common perpetrators of sexual harassment. Although men do harass other men, women are the most common targets (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008). Further research reveals that Black women are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual violence, over any other group (Barlow, 2020; Shaw, et al., 2018). Brassel (2020) found that this pattern may be caused by the masculine structures and hierarchy present in Western culture.

Sexual harassment causes problems within an organization by lowering the quality of the organizational lives of female employees and creating obstacles that prevent employees from fully engaging with their organization (McDonald et al., 2011). Additionally, studies argue that sexual harassment creates professional, psychological, and physical health problems for those involved (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Statistics also suggest that “only a small number of those who experience harassment (one in ten) ever formally report”—and the most common reason for this silence is for fear of retaliation (Shaw, et al., 2018, p. 2).

Racial and Gender Biases

Although biases are not as obvious as harassment, we know that they are rampant across the workspace, from large to small organizations, from executives to entry-level employees, and in both private and public sectors (Bielby, 2000). Athough biases can target any facet of another’s identity, we will focus on **racial** and **gender bias**. Researchers have struggled to determine how harmful or costly biases are because they are hard to measure. Though some gender bias, like harassment, has been measured and studied, more subtle gender bias barriers, like the "glass cliff," when women are placed in positions of power while things are going poorly, other biases may not be recognized, obvious, or even called out (Stuart, 2018). We know from surveying the research that biases in the workplace impact the way we communicate with others.

In gender-bias research by Glass and Cook (2016) 97% of respondents said they worry about how they come off to others when exercising authority, 87% downplay their accomplishments to others, and 66% make less money than their male counterparts. Research has found that companies without women in top leadership roles can hurt their sales and profitability (Glass & Cook, 2016).

So how can we help combat interpersonal communication patterns of harassment and bias? First, we need to recognize them and acknowledge them in our place of work. Next, we can report them through the proper channels. Per most HR policy violations, sexual harassment can be reported by those who are not the victim of the harassment (EEOC, 2021). And lastly, we can help prevent or mitigate them from happening in the first place.

Note



Figure 3.6.3.3 Student Biting a Pencil in Frustration Looking at Laptop by JESHOOTS.COM on Unsplash

An individual can become more self-aware of our own implicit biases through tools like the Harvard IATs. We can also sign up for and engage in professional development opportunities that talk about such matters. Many HR Departments offer some regular training on sexual harassment. And with implicit and unconscious bias gaining some traction, many organizations are bringing in guest speakers, or even consultants, to address common issues in our workplace.

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4: SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

4.1: Introduction

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4.8: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

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- 1: Defining Communication and Communication Study by Kerry Osborne is licensed CC BY 4.0.

4.1: Introduction

When you think of small groups, you probably think of the much dreaded “group assignment” that you’ve endured in high school and college. You are less likely to think of the numerous other groups to which you belong that bring more positive experiences, such as your family and friendship groups or shared-interest groups. Group communication scholars are so aware of this common negative sentiment toward group communication that they coined the term **grouphate** to describe it. Susan M. Sorensen, “Group-Hate: A Negative Reaction to Group Work” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Minneapolis, MN, May, 1981). Small groups, however, aren’t just entities meant to torture students; they have served a central purpose in human history and evolution. Groups make it easier for us to complete a wide variety of tasks; help us establish meaningful social bonds; and help us create, maintain, and change our sense of self. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 433. Negative group experiences are often exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about group communication processes. We are just expected to know how to work in groups without much instruction or practice. This lack of knowledge about group communication can lead to negative group interactions, which creates a negative cycle that perpetuates further negative experiences. Fortunately, as with other areas of communication, instruction in group communication can improve people’s skills and increase people’s satisfaction with their group experiences.

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4.2: Understanding Small Groups

Learning Objectives

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

Most of the communication skills discussed in this book are directed toward dyadic communication, meaning that they are applied in two-person interactions. While many of these skills can be transferred to and used in small group contexts, the more complex nature of group interaction necessitates some adaptation and some additional skills. Small group communication refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. In this section, we will learn about the characteristics, functions, and types of small groups.

Characteristics of Small Groups

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

Size of Small Groups

There is no set number of members for the ideal small group. A small group requires a minimum of three people (because two people would be a pair or dyad), but the upper range of group size is contingent on the purpose of the group. When groups grow beyond fifteen to twenty members, it becomes difficult to consider them a small group based on the previous definition. An analysis of the number of unique connections between members of small groups shows that they are deceptively complex. For example, within a six-person group, there are fifteen separate potential dyadic connections, and a twelve-person group would have sixty-six potential dyadic connections. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 452–53. As you can see, when we double the number of group members, we more than double the number of connections, which shows that network connection points in small groups grow exponentially as membership increases. So, while there is no set upper limit on the number of group members, it makes sense that the number of group members should be limited to those necessary to accomplish the goal or serve the purpose of the group. Small groups that add too many members increase the potential for group members to feel overwhelmed or disconnected.

Structure of Small Groups

Internal and external influences affect a group's structure. In terms of internal influences, member characteristics play a role in initial group formation. For instance, a person who is well informed about the group's task and/or highly motivated as a group member may emerge as a leader and set into motion internal decision-making processes, such as recruiting new members or assigning group roles, that affect the structure of a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 57.Different members will also gravitate toward different roles within the group and will advocate for certain procedures and courses of action over others. External factors such as group size, task, and resources also affect group structure. Some groups will have more control over these external factors through decision making than others. For example, a commission that is put together by a legislative body to look into ethical violations in athletic organizations will likely have less control over its external factors than a self-created weekly book club.



Figure 4.2.1 A self-formed study group likely has a more flexible structure than a city council committee. The image is in the Public Domain.

Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections. In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. This type of formal network is especially important in groups that have to report to external stakeholders. These external stakeholders may influence the group's formal network, leaving the group little or no control over its structure. Conversely, groups have more control over their informal networks, which are connections among individuals within the group and among group members and people outside of the group that aren't official. For example, a group member's friend or relative may be able to secure a space to hold a fundraiser at a discounted rate, which helps the group achieve its task. Both types of networks are important because they may help facilitate information exchange within a group and extend a group's reach in order to access other resources.

Size and structure also affect communication within a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 66–74. In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. Reachability refers to the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in Figure 4.2.2 "Small Group Structures" shows that each group member is connected to two other members. This can make coordination easy when only one or two people need to be brought in for a decision. In this case, Erik and Callie are very reachable by Winston, who could easily coordinate with them. However, if Winston needed to coordinate with Bill or Stephanie, he would have to wait on Erik or Callie to reach that person, which could create delays. The circle can be a good structure for groups who are passing along a task and in which each member is expected to progressively build on the others' work. A group of scholars coauthoring a research paper may work in such a manner, with each person adding to the paper and then passing it on to the next person in the circle. In this case, they can ask the previous person questions and write with the next person's area of expertise in mind. The "Wheel" group structure in Figure 4.2.2 "Small Group Structures" shows an alternative organization pattern. In this structure, Tara is very reachable by all members of the group. This can be a useful structure when Tara is the person with the most expertise in the task or the leader who needs to review and approve work at each step before it is passed along to other group members. But Phillip and Shadow, for example, wouldn't likely work together without Tara being involved.

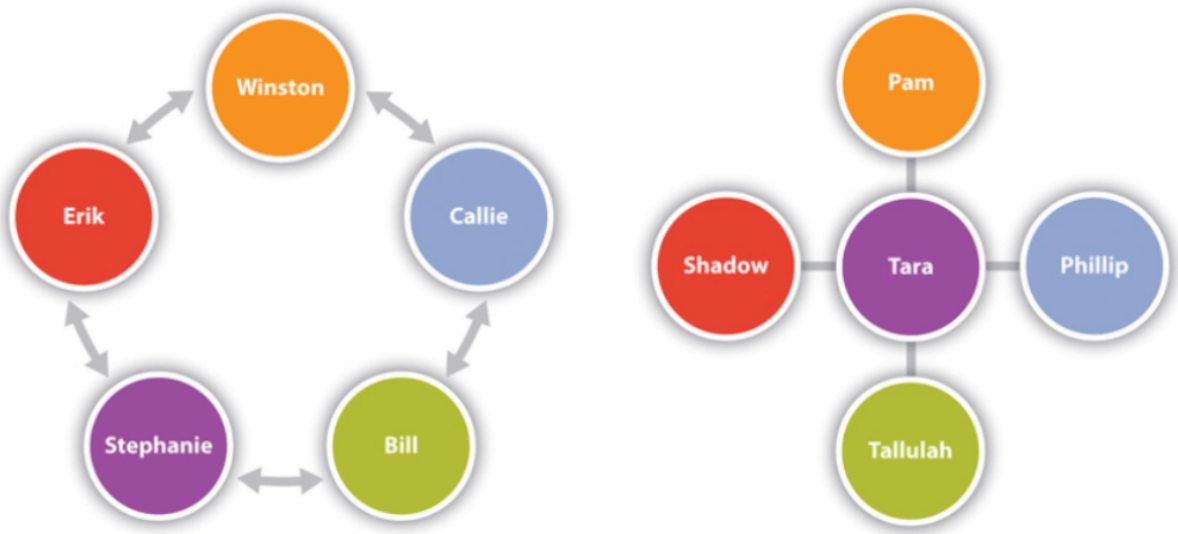


Figure 4.2.2 Small Group Structures

Looking at the group structures, we can make some assumptions about the communication that takes place in them. The wheel is an example of a centralized structure, while the circle is decentralized. Research has shown that centralized groups are better than decentralized groups in terms of speed and efficiency. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 68. But decentralized groups are more effective at solving complex problems. In centralized groups like the wheel, the person with the most connections, person C, is also more likely to be the leader of the group or at least have more status among group members, largely because that person has a broad perspective of what's going on in the group. The most central person can also act as a gatekeeper. Since this person has access to the most information, which is usually a sign of leadership or status, he or she could consciously decide to limit the flow of information. But in complex tasks, that person could become overwhelmed by the burden of processing and sharing information with all the other group members. The circle structure is more likely to emerge in groups where collaboration is the goal and a specific task and course of action isn't required under time constraints. While the person who initiated the group or has the most expertise in regards to the task may emerge as a leader in a decentralized group, the equal access to information lessens the hierarchy and potential for gatekeeping that is present in the more centralized groups.

Interdependence

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

Shared Identity

The shared identity of a group manifests in several ways. Groups may have official charters or mission and vision statements that lay out the identity of a group. For example, the Girl Scout mission states that "Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place." Girl Scouts, "Facts," accessed July 15, 2012, http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/facts. The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds dynamism to the group as it

looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

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

Functions of Small Groups

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

Groups Meet Instrumental Needs

Groups have long served the instrumental needs of humans, helping with the most basic elements of survival since ancient humans first evolved. Groups helped humans survive by providing security and protection through increased numbers and access to resources. Today, groups are rarely such a matter of life and death, but they still serve important instrumental functions. Labor unions, for example, pool efforts and resources to attain material security in the form of pay increases and health benefits for their members, which protects them by providing a stable and dependable livelihood. Individual group members must also work to secure the instrumental needs of the group, creating a reciprocal relationship. Members of labor unions pay dues that help support the group's efforts. Some groups also meet our informational needs. Although they may not provide material resources, they enrich our knowledge or provide information that we can use to then meet our own instrumental needs. Many groups provide referrals to resources or offer advice. For example, several consumer protection and advocacy groups have been formed to offer referrals for people who have been the victim of fraudulent business practices. Whether a group forms to provide services to members that they couldn't get otherwise, advocate for changes that will affect members' lives, or provide information, many groups meet some type of instrumental need.

Groups Meet Interpersonal Needs

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

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

Groups Meet Identity Needs

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

identities. For example, people may join the National Organization for Women because they want to affiliate with others who support women's rights or a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because they want to affiliate with African Americans, people concerned with civil rights, or a combination of the two. Group memberships vary in terms of how much they affect our identity, as some are more prominent than others at various times in our lives. While religious groups as a whole are too large to be considered small groups, the work that people do as a part of a religious community—as a lay leader, deacon, member of a prayer group, or committee—may have deep ties to a person's identity.



Figure 4.2.3 Group membership helps meet our interpersonal needs by providing an opportunity for affection and inclusion. Group by Perry Grone on Unsplash.

The prestige of a group can initially attract us because we want that group's identity to "rub off" on our own identity. Likewise, the achievements we make as a group member can enhance our self-esteem, add to our reputation, and allow us to create or project certain identity characteristics to engage in impression management. For example, a person may take numerous tests to become a part of Mensa, which is an organization for people with high IQs, for no material gain but for the recognition or sense of achievement that the affiliation may bring. Likewise, people may join sports teams, professional organizations, and honor societies for the sense of achievement and affiliation. Such groups allow us opportunities to better ourselves by encouraging further development of skills or knowledge. For example, a person who used to play the oboe in high school may join the community band to continue to improve on his or her ability.

Types of Small Groups

There are many types of small groups, but the most common distinction made between types of small groups is that of task-oriented and relational-oriented groups. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 434. Task-oriented groups are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 254. In such groups, like a committee or study group, interactions and decisions are primarily evaluated based on the quality of the final product or output. The three main types of tasks are production, discussion, and problem-solving tasks. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 44. Groups faced with production tasks are asked to produce something tangible from their group interactions such as a report, design for a playground, musical performance, or fundraiser event. Groups faced with discussion tasks are asked to talk through something without trying to come up with a right or wrong answer. Examples of this type of group include a support group for people with HIV/AIDS, a book club, or a group for new fathers. Groups faced with problem-solving tasks have to devise a course of action to meet a specific need. These groups also usually include a production and discussion component, but the end goal isn't necessarily a tangible product or a shared social reality through discussion. Instead, the end goal is a well-thought-out idea. Task-oriented groups require honed problem-solving skills to accomplish goals, and the structure of these groups is more rigid than that of relational-oriented groups.

Relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections and are more focused on quality interactions that contribute to the well-being of group members. Decision making is directed at strengthening or repairing relationships rather

than completing discrete tasks or debating specific ideas or courses of action. All groups include task and relational elements, so it's best to think of these orientations as two ends of a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive. For example, although a family unit works together daily to accomplish tasks like getting the kids ready for school and friendship groups may plan a surprise party for one of the members, their primary and most meaningful interactions are still relational. This chapter focuses on task-oriented groups and the dynamics that operate within these groups.

To more specifically look at the types of small groups that exist, we can examine why groups form. Some groups are formed based on interpersonal relationships. Our family and friends are considered primary groups, or long-lasting groups that are formed based on relationships and include significant others. These are the small groups in which we interact most frequently. They form the basis of our society and our individual social realities. Kinship networks provide important support early in life and meet physiological and safety needs, which are essential for survival. They also meet higher-order needs such as social and self-esteem needs. When people do not interact with their biological family, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they can establish fictive kinship networks, which are composed of people who are not biologically related but fulfill family roles and help provide the same support.

We also interact in many secondary groups, which are characterized by less frequent face-to-face interactions, less emotional and relational communication, and more task-related communication than primary groups. David B. Barker, "The Behavioral Analysis of Interpersonal Intimacy in Group Development," Small Group Research 22, no. 1 (1991): 79. While we are more likely to participate in secondary groups based on self-interest, our primary-group interactions are often more reciprocal or other oriented. For example, we may join groups because of a shared interest or need.

Groups formed based on shared interest include social groups and leisure groups such as a group of independent film buffs, science fiction fans, or bird watchers. Some groups form to meet the needs of individuals or of a particular group of people. Examples of groups that meet the needs of individuals include study groups or support groups like a weight loss group. These groups are focused on individual needs, even though they meet as a group, and they are also often discussion oriented. Service groups, on the other hand, work to meet the needs of individuals but are task oriented. Service groups include Habitat for Humanity and Rotary Club chapters, among others. Still other groups form around a shared need, and their primary task is advocacy. For example, the Gay Men's Health Crisis is a group that was formed by a small group of eight people in the early 1980s to advocate for resources and support for the still relatively unknown disease that would later be known as AIDS. Similar groups form to advocate for everything from a stop sign at a neighborhood intersection to the end of human trafficking.

As we already learned, other groups are formed primarily to accomplish a task. Teams are task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members. Carl E. Larson and Frank M. J. LaFasto, TeamWork: What Must Go Right/What Must Go Wrong (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 73. In professional and civic contexts, the word team has become popularized as a means of drawing on the positive connotations of the term—connotations such as "high-spirited," "cooperative," and "hardworking." Scholars who have spent years studying highly effective teams have identified several common factors related to their success.

Successful teams have:

- clear and inspiring shared goals,
- a results-driven structure,
- competent team members,
- a collaborative climate,
- high standards for performance,
- external support and recognition, and
- ethical and accountable leadership.

Increasingly, small groups and teams are engaging in more virtual interaction. Virtual groups take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal. Some virtual groups may complete their task without ever being physically face-to-face. Virtual groups bring with them distinct advantages and disadvantages that you can read more about in the "Getting Plugged In" feature next.

"Getting Plugged In"- Virtual Groups

Virtual groups are now common in academic, professional, and personal contexts, as classes meet entirely online, work teams interface using webinar or video-conferencing programs, and people connect around shared interests in a variety of online settings. Virtual groups are popular in professional contexts because they can bring together people who are geographically

dispersed. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 163. Virtual groups also increase the possibility for the inclusion of diverse members. The ability to transcend distance means that people with diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives are more easily accessed than in many offline groups.

One disadvantage of virtual groups stems from the difficulties that technological mediation presents for the relational and social dimensions of group interactions. Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 830. As we will learn later in this chapter, an important part of coming together as a group is the socialization of group members into the desired norms of the group. Since norms are implicit, much of this information is learned through observation or conveyed informally from one group member to another. In fact, in traditional groups, group members passively acquire 50 percent or more of their knowledge about group norms and procedures, meaning they observe rather than directly ask. Debra R. Comer, "Organizational Newcomers' Acquisition of Information from Peers," Management Communication Quarterly 5, no. 1 (1991): 64–89. Virtual groups experience more difficulty with this part of socialization than co-present traditional groups do, since any form of electronic mediation takes away some of the richness present in face-to-face interaction.

To help overcome these challenges, members of virtual groups should be prepared to put more time and effort into building the relational dimensions of their group. Members of virtual groups need to make the social cues that guide new members' socialization more explicit than they would in an offline group. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 164–65. Group members should also contribute often, even if just supporting someone else's contribution, because increased participation has been shown to increase liking among members of virtual groups. Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 831–32. Virtual group members should also make an effort to put relational content that might otherwise be conveyed through nonverbal or contextual means into the verbal part of a message, as members who include little social content in their messages or only communicate about the group's task are more negatively evaluated. Virtual groups who do not overcome these challenges will likely struggle to meet deadlines, interact less frequently, and experience more absenteeism. What follows are some guidelines to help optimize virtual groups:

- Get started interacting as a group as early as possible, since it takes longer to build social cohesion.
- Interact frequently to stay on task and avoid having work build up.
- Start working toward completing the task while initial communication about setup, organization, and procedures are taking place.
- Respond overtly to other people's messages and contributions.
- Be explicit about your reactions and thoughts since typical nonverbal expressions may not be received as easily in virtual groups as they would be in co-located groups.

- Set deadlines and stick to them.

1. Make a list of some virtual groups to which you currently belong or have belonged to in the past. What are some differences between your experiences in virtual groups versus traditional co-located groups?

2. What are some group tasks or purposes that you think lend themselves to being accomplished in a virtual setting? What are some group tasks or purposes that you think would be best handled in a traditional co-located setting? Explain your answers for each.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Small Groups

As with anything, small groups have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of small groups include shared decision making, shared resources, synergy, and exposure to diversity. It is within small groups that most of the decisions that guide our country, introduce local laws, and influence our family interactions are made. In a democratic society, participation in decision making is a key part of citizenship. Groups also help in making decisions involving judgment calls that have ethical implications or the potential to negatively affect people. Individuals making such high-stakes decisions in a vacuum could have negative consequences given the lack of feedback, input, questioning, and proposals for alternatives that would come from group interaction. Group members also help expand our social networks, which provide access to more resources. A local community-theater group may be able to put on a production with a limited budget by drawing on these connections to get set-building supplies, props, costumes, actors, and publicity in ways that an individual could not. The increased knowledge, diverse perspectives, and access to resources that groups possess relates to another advantage of small groups—synergy.

Synergy refers to the potential for gains in performance or heightened quality of interactions when complementary members or

member characteristics are added to existing ones. James R. Larson Jr., In Search of Synergy in Small Group Performance (New York: Psychology Press, 2010). Because of synergy, the final group product can be better than what any individual could have produced alone. When I worked in housing and residence life, I helped coordinate a "World Cup Soccer Tournament" for the international students that lived in my residence hall. As a group, we created teams representing different countries around the world, made brackets for people to track progress and predict winners, got sponsors, gathered prizes, and ended up with a very successful event that would not have been possible without the synergy created by our collective group membership. The members of this group were also exposed to international diversity that enriched our experiences, which is also an advantage of group communication.

Participating in groups can also increase our exposure to diversity and broaden our perspectives. Although groups vary in the diversity of their members, we can strategically choose groups that expand our diversity, or we can unintentionally end up in a diverse group. When we participate in small groups, we expand our social networks, which increase the possibility to interact with people who have different cultural identities than ourselves. Since group members work together toward a common goal, shared identification with the task or group can give people with diverse backgrounds a sense of commonality that they might not have otherwise. Even when group members share cultural identities, the diversity of experience and opinion within a group can lead to broadened perspectives as alternative ideas are presented and opinions are challenged and defended. One of my favorite parts of facilitating class discussion is when students with different identities and/or perspectives teach one another things in ways that I could not on my own. This example brings together the potential of synergy and diversity. People who are more introverted or just avoid group communication and voluntarily distance themselves from groups—or are rejected from groups—risk losing opportunities to learn more about others and themselves.



Figure 4.2.4 Each group member has a different personality and this contributes to the overall group dynamic. Puppies by Cyrin Lookin is under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

There are also disadvantages to small group interaction. In some cases, one person can be just as or more effective than a group of people. Think about a situation in which a highly specialized skill or knowledge is needed to get something done. In this situation, one very knowledgeable person is probably a better fit for the task than a group of less knowledgeable people. Group interaction also has a tendency to slow down the decision-making process. Individuals connected through a hierarchy or chain of command often work better in situations where decisions must be made under time constraints. When group interaction does occur under time constraints, having one "point person" or leader who coordinates action and gives final approval or disapproval on ideas or suggestions for actions is best.

Group communication also presents interpersonal challenges. A common problem is coordinating and planning group meetings due to busy and conflicting schedules. Some people also have difficulty with the other-centeredness and self-sacrifice that some groups require. The interdependence of group members that we discussed earlier can also create some disadvantages. Group members may take advantage of the anonymity of a group and engage in social loafing, meaning they contribute less to the group than other members or than they would if working alone. Steven J. Karau and Kipling D. Williams, "Social Loafing: A Meta-Analytic Review and Theoretical Integration," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 65, no. 4 (1993): 681. Social loafers expect that no one will notice their behaviors or that others will pick up their slack. It is this potential for social loafing that makes many students and professionals dread group work, especially those who have a tendency to cover for other group members to prevent

the social loafer from diminishing the group's productivity or output.

"Getting Competent"- Improving Your Group Experiences

Like many of you, I also had some negative group experiences in college that made me think similarly to a student who posted the following on a teaching blog: "Group work is code for 'work as a group for a grade less than what you can get if you work alone.'" Maryellen Weimer, "Why Students Hate Groups," The Teaching Professor, July 1, 2008, accessed July 15, 2012, www.teachingprofessor.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/why-students-hate-groups.But then I took a course called "Small Group and Team Communication" with an amazing teacher who later became one of my most influential mentors. She emphasized the fact that we all needed to increase our knowledge about group communication and group dynamics in order to better our group communication experiences—and she was right. So the first piece of advice to help you start improving your group experiences is to closely study the group communication chapters in this textbook and to apply what you learn to your group interactions. Neither students nor faculty are born knowing how to function as a group, yet students and faculty often think we're supposed to learn as we go, which increases the likelihood of a negative experience.

A second piece of advice is to meet often with your group. Scott A. Myers and Alan K. Goodboy, "A Study of Grouphate in a Course on Small Group Communication," Psychological Reports 97, no. 2 (2005): 385. Of course, to do this you have to overcome some scheduling and coordination difficulties, but putting other things aside to work as a group helps set up a norm that group work is important and worthwhile. Regular meetings also allow members to interact with each other, which can increase social bonds, build a sense of interdependence that can help diminish social loafing, and establish other important rules and norms that will guide future group interaction. Instead of committing to frequent meetings, many student groups use their first meeting to equally divide up the group's tasks so they can then go off and work alone (not as a group). While some group work can definitely be done independently, dividing up the work and assigning someone to put it all together doesn't allow group members to take advantage of one of the most powerful advantages of group work—synergy.

Last, establish group expectations and follow through with them. I recommend that my students come up with a group name and create a contract of group guidelines during their first meeting (both of which I learned from my group communication teacher whom I referenced earlier). The group name helps begin to establish a shared identity, which then contributes to interdependence and improves performance. The contract of group guidelines helps make explicit the group norms that might have otherwise been left implicit. Each group member contributes to the contract and then they all sign it. Groups often make guidelines about how meetings will be run, what to do about lateness and attendance, the type of climate they'd like for discussion, and other relevant expectations. If group members end up falling short of these expectations, the other group members can remind the straying member of the contact and the fact that he or she signed it. If the group encounters further issues, they can use the contract as a basis for evaluating the other group member or for communicating with the instructor.

1. Do you agree with the student's quote about group work that was included at the beginning? Why or why not?

2. The second recommendation is to meet more with your group. Acknowledging that schedules are difficult to coordinate and that that is not really going to change, what are some strategies that you could use to overcome that challenge in order to get time together as a group?

3. What are some guidelines that you think you'd like to include in your contract with a future group?

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Small group communication refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. Small groups are important communication units in academic, professional, civic, and personal contexts.
- Several characteristics influence small groups, including size, structure, interdependence, and shared identity.
  - In terms of size, small groups must consist of at least three people, but there is no set upper limit on the number of group members. The ideal number of group members is the smallest number needed to competently complete the group's task or achieve the group's purpose.
  - Internal influences such as member characteristics and external factors such as the group's size, task, and access to resources affect a group's structure. A group's structure also affects how group members communicate, as some structures are more centralized and hierarchical and other structures are more decentralized and equal.
  - Groups are interdependent in that they have a shared purpose and a shared fate, meaning that each group member's actions affect every other group member.

- Groups develop a shared identity based on their task or purpose, previous accomplishments, future goals, and an identity that sets their members apart from other groups.
- Small groups serve several functions as they meet instrumental, interpersonal, and identity needs
  - Groups meet instrumental needs, as they allow us to pool resources and provide access to information to better help us survive and succeed.
  - Groups meet interpersonal needs, as they provide a sense of belonging (inclusion), an opportunity to participate in decision making and influence others (control), and emotional support.
  - Groups meet identity needs, as they offer us a chance to affiliate ourselves with others whom we perceive to be like us or whom we admire and would like to be associated with.
- There are various types of groups, including task-oriented, relational-oriented, primary, and secondary groups, as well as teams.
  - Task-oriented groups are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information, while relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections. While there are elements of both in every group, the overall purpose of a group can usually be categorized as primarily task or relational oriented.
  - Primary groups are long-lasting groups that are formed based on interpersonal relationships and include family and friendship groups, and secondary groups are characterized by less frequent interaction and less emotional and relational communication than in primary groups. Our communication in primary groups is more frequently other oriented than our communication in secondary groups, which is often self-oriented.
  - Teams are similar to task-oriented groups, but they are characterized by a high degree of loyalty and dedication to the group's task and to other group members.
- Advantages of group communication include shared decision making, shared resources, synergy, and exposure to diversity. Disadvantages of group communication include unnecessary group formation (when the task would be better performed by one person), difficulty coordinating schedules, and difficulty with accountability and social loafing.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: For each of the follow examples of a small group context, indicate what you think would be the ideal size of the group and why. Also indicate who the ideal group members would be (in terms of their occupation/major, role, level of expertise, or other characteristics) and what structure would work best.
   a. A study group for this class
   b. A committee to decide on library renovation plans
   c. An upper-level college class in your major
   d. A group to advocate for more awareness of and support for abandoned animals
2. List some groups to which you have belonged that focused primarily on tasks and then list some that focused primarily on relationships. Compare and contrast your experiences in these groups.
3. Synergy is one of the main advantages of small group communication. Explain a time when a group you were in benefited from or failed to achieve synergy. What contributed to your success/failure?

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4.3: Small Group Development

Learning Objectives

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

Small groups have to start somewhere. Even established groups go through changes as members come and go, as tasks are started and completed, and as relationships change. In this section, we will learn about the stages of group development, which are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Bruce W. Tuckman and Mary Ann C. Jensen, "Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited," *Group and Organizational Studies 2*, no. 4 (1977): 419–27. As with most models of communication phenomena, although we order the stages and discuss them separately, they are not always experienced in a linear fashion. Additionally, some groups don't experience all five stages, may experience stages multiple times, or may experience more than one stage at a time.

Forming

During the forming stage, group members begin to reduce uncertainty associated with new relationships and/or new tasks through initial interactions that lay the foundation for later group dynamics. Groups return to the forming stage as group members come and go over the life span of a group. Although there may not be as much uncertainty when one or two new people join a group as there is when a group first forms, groups spend some time in the forming stage every time group membership changes.

Given that interpersonal bonds are likely not yet formed and people are unfamiliar with the purpose of the group or task at hand, there are high levels of uncertainty. Early stages of role negotiation begin and members begin to determine goals for the group and establish rules and norms. Group cohesion also begins to form during this stage. Group cohesion refers to the commitment of members to the purpose of the group and the degree of attraction among individuals within the group. Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 445. The cohesion that begins in this stage sets the group on a trajectory influenced by group members' feelings about one another and their purpose or task. Groups with voluntary membership may exhibit high levels of optimism about what the group can accomplish. Although the optimism can be motivating, unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointment, making it important for group members to balance optimism with realism. Groups with assigned or mandatory membership may include members that carry some degree of resentment toward the group itself or the goals of the group. These members can start the group off on a negative trajectory that will lessen or make difficult group cohesiveness. Groups can still be successful if these members are balanced out by others who are more committed to and positive in regards to the purpose of the group.

Many factors influence how the forming stage of group development plays out. The personalities of the individuals in the group, the skills that members bring, the resources available to the group, the group's size, and the group's charge all contribute to the creation of the early tone of and climate within a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 14. For example, more dominant personalities may take early leadership roles in the group that can affect subsequent decisions. Group members' diverse skill sets and access to resources can also influence the early stages of role differentiation. In terms of size, the bonding that begins in the forming stage becomes difficult when the number of people within the group prevents every person from having a one-on-one connection with every other member of the group. Also, in larger groups, more dominant members tend to assert themselves as leaders and build smaller coalitions within the group, which can start the group on a trajectory toward more conflict during the upcoming storming stage. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 15.

When a group receives an external charge, meaning that the goal or purpose of the group is decided by people outside the group, there may be less uncertainty related to the task dimensions of the group. Additionally, decisions about what roles people will play including group leaders and other decisions about the workings of the group may come from the outside, which reduces some of the uncertainty inherent in the forming stage. Relational uncertainty can also be diminished when group members have preexisting relationships or familiarity with each other. Although the decreased uncertainty may be beneficial at this stage, too much imposed structure from the outside can create resentment or a feeling of powerlessness among group members. So a manageable amount of uncertainty is actually a good thing for group cohesion and productivity.

Storming

During the storming stage of group development, conflict emerges as people begin to perform their various roles, have their ideas heard, and negotiate where they fit in the group's structure. The uncertainty present in the forming stage begins to give way as people begin to occupy specific roles and the purpose, rules, and norms of a group become clearer. Conflict develops when some group members aren't satisfied with the role that they or others are playing or the decisions regarding the purpose or procedures of the group. For example, if a leader begins to emerge or is assigned during the forming stage, some members may feel that the leader is imposing his or her will on other members of the group. As we will learn in our section on group leadership, leaders should expect some degree of resentment from others who wanted to be the leader, have interpersonal conflicts with the leader, or just have general issues with being led.

Although the word storming and the concept of conflict have negative connotations, conflict can be positive and productive. Just like storms can replenish water supplies and make crops grow, storming can lead to group growth. While conflict is inevitable and should be experienced by every group, a group that gets stuck at the storming stage will likely not have much success in completing its task or achieving its purpose. Influences from outside the group can also affect the conflict in the storming stage. Interpersonal conflicts that predate the formation of the group may distract the group from the more productive idea- or task-oriented conflict that can be healthy for the group and increase the quality of ideas, decision making, and output.



Figure 4.3.1 Although we often have negative connotations of storming and conflict, the group conflict that happens in this stage is necessary and productive. Lightening on the Beach by Jeremy Bishop on Unsplash.

Norming

During the norming stage of group development, the practices and expectations of the group are solidified, which leads to more stability, productivity, and cohesion within the group. Group norms are behaviors that become routine but are not explicitly taught or stated. In short, group norms help set the tone for what group members ought to do and how they ought to behave. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 129. Many implicit norms are derived from social norms that people follow in their everyday life. Norms within the group about politeness, lateness, and communication patterns are typically similar to those in other contexts. Sometimes a norm needs to be challenged because it is not working for the group, which could lead a group back to the storming stage. Other times, group members challenge norms for no good reason, which can lead to punishment for the group member or create conflict within the group.

At this stage, there is a growing consensus among group members as to the roles that each person will play, the way group interactions will typically play out, and the direction of the group. Leaders that began to emerge have typically gained the support of other group members, and group identity begins to solidify. The group may now be recognizable by those on the outside, as slogans, branding, or patterns of interaction become associated with the group. This stage of group development is key for the smooth operation of the group. Norms bring a sense of predictability and stability that can allow a group to move on to the

performing stage of group development. Norms can also bring with them conformity pressures that can be positive or negative. In general, people go along with a certain amount of pressure to conform out of a drive to avoid being abnormal that is a natural part of our social interaction. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 128. Too much pressure, however, can lead people to feel isolated and can create a negative group climate. We will learn more about pressure as a group dynamic later in this chapter.

Explicit rules may also guide group interaction. Rules are explicitly stated guidelines for members and may refer to things like expected performance levels or output, attitudes, or dress codes. Rules may be communicated through verbal instructions, employee handbooks, membership policies, or codes of conduct. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 440. Groups can even use procedures like Robert's Rules of Order to manage the flow of conversations and decision-making procedures. Group members can contest or subvert group rules just as they can norms. Violations of group rules, however, typically result in more explicit punishments than do violations of norms.

Performing

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

Adjourning

The adjourning stage of group development occurs when a group dissolves because it has completed its purpose or goal, membership is declining and support for the group no longer exists, or it is dissolved because of some other internal or external cause. Some groups may live on indefinitely and not experience the adjourning stage. Other groups may experience so much conflict in the storming stage that they skip norming and performing and dissolve before they can complete their task. For groups with high social cohesion, adjourning may be a difficult emotional experience. However, group members may continue interpersonal relationships that formed even after the group dissolves. In reality, many bonds, even those that were very close, end up fading after the group disbands. This doesn't mean the relationship wasn't genuine; interpersonal relationships often form because of proximity and shared task interaction. Once that force is gone, it becomes difficult to maintain friendships, and many fade away. For groups that had negative experiences, the adjourning stage may be welcomed.

To make the most out of the adjourning stage, it is important that there be some guided and purposeful reflection. Many groups celebrate their accomplishments with a party or ceremony. Even groups that had negative experiences or failed to achieve their purpose can still learn something through reflection in the adjourning stage that may be beneficial for future group interactions. Often, group members leave a group experience with new or more developed skills that can be usefully applied in future group or individual contexts. Even groups that are relational rather than task focused can increase members' interpersonal, listening, or empathetic skills or increase cultural knowledge and introduce new perspectives.

Key Takeaways

- Small groups have to start somewhere, but their course of development varies after forming based on many factors. Some groups go through each stage of development in a progressive and linear fashion, while other groups may get stuck in a stage, skip a stage, or experience a stage multiple times.
- The five stages of group development include forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

1. During the forming stage, group members engage in socially polite exchanges to help reduce uncertainty and gain familiarity with new members. Even though their early interactions may seem unproductive, they lay the groundwork for cohesion and other group dynamics that will play out more prominently in later stages.

2. During the storming stage, conflict emerges as group members begin to perform their various roles, have their ideas heard, and negotiate where they fit in the group's structure. Conflict is inevitable and important as a part of group development and can be productive if it is managed properly.

3. During the norming stage, the practices and expectations (norms and rules) of the group are solidified, which leads to more stability, productivity, and cohesion within the group.

4. During the performing stage, group members work relatively smoothly toward the completion of a task or the achievement of their purpose, ideally capitalizing on the synergy that comes from the diverse experiences group members bring to the decision-making process.

5. During the adjourning stage, a group dissolves because its purpose has been met, because membership has declined or the group has lost support, or due to some other internal or external cause. It is important that groups reflect on the life of the group to learn any relevant lessons and celebrate accomplishments.

Exercises

1. Recall a previous or current small group to which you belonged/belong. Trace the group's development using the five stages discussed in this section. Did you experience all the stages? In what order? Did you stay in some stages more than others?

2. During the norming stage of group development, interaction patterns and group expectations solidify. Recall a current or former group. What were some of the norms for the group? What were some rules? How did you become aware of each?

3. Many people don't think about the importance of the adjourning stage. What do you think is the best way to complete the adjourning stage for a group that was successful and cohesive? What about for a group that was unsuccessful and not cohesive?

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4.4: Small Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

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

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

Group Cohesion and Climate

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

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

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 445.

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

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. Following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale: Peter J. Marston and Michael L. Hecht, "Group Satisfaction," in Small Group Communication, 5th ed., eds. Robert Cathcart and Larry Samovar (Dubuque, IA: Brown, 1988), 236–46.

- **Participation**. Group members feel better when they feel included in discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages**. Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant

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



Figure 4.4.1 Cohesion and shared identity help create symbolic convergence as group members develop a group identity and shared social reality. Pride by David Yu is under a CC BY-NC 2.0

Group cohesion and climate is also demonstrated through symbolic convergence. Ernest G. Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation," Journal of Communication, 35, no. 4 (1985): 128–38. Symbolic convergence refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. Fantasy, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, group fantasies are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group. Em Griffin, A First Look at Communication Theory, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 28. For example, as a graduate student, I spent a lot of time talking with others in our small group about research, writing, and other things related to our classes and academia in general. Most of this communication wouldn't lead to symbolic convergence or help establish the strong social bonds that we developed as a group. Instead, it was our grad student "war stories" about excessive reading loads and unreasonable paper requirements we had experienced in earlier years of grad school, horror stories about absent or vindictive thesis advisors, and "you won't believe this" stories from the classes that we were teaching that brought us together.

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

"Getting Real" - Working in Teams

Although most college students hate working in groups, in the "real world" working in teams has become a regular part of professional expectations. Following Japan's lead, corporations in the United States began adopting a more team-based approach for project management decades ago. Anshu K. Jain, Jon M. Thompson, Joseph Chaudry, Shaun McKenzie, and Richard W. Schwartz, "High-Performance Teams for Current and Future Physician Leaders: An Introduction," Journal of Surgical

Education 65 (2008): 145. This model has become increasingly popular in various organizational settings since then as means to increase productivity and reduce bureaucracy. Teams in the workplace have horizontally expanded the traditional vertical hierarchy of organizations, as the aim of creating these teams was to produce smaller units within an organization that are small enough to be efficient and self-manageable but large enough to create the synergy that we discussed in the earlier part of the chapter.

Aside from efficiency, teams are also valued for the potential for innovation. The strategic pooling of people with diverse knowledge, experience, and skills can lead to synergistic collaborative thinking that produces new knowledge. Elisa du Chatenier, Jos A. A. M. Verstegen, Harm J. A. Biemans, Martin Mulder, and Onno S. W. F. Omta, "Identification of Competencies in Open Innovation Teams," *Research and Development Management* 40, no. 3 (2010): 271. This potential for innovation makes teams ideal in high-stakes situations where money, contracts, or lives are at stake. Large corporations are now putting together what has been termed ***inter-organizational*** high-performance research and development teams consisting of highly trained technical and scientific experts from diverse backgrounds to work collectively and simultaneously on complex projects under very challenging conditions. Lisa J. Daniel and Charles R. Davis, "What Makes High-Performance Teams Excel?" Research Technology Management 52, no. 4 (2009): 40–41. In markets where companies race to find the next generation of technological improvement, such research and development teams are critical for an organization's success. Research on such teams in real-world contexts has found that in order to be successful, high-performance teams should have a clear base such as a project mission, a leader who strategically assigns various tasks to members based on their specialized expertise, and shared leadership in which individual experts are trusted to make decisions relevant to their purview within the group. Although these high-performance teams are very task oriented, research has also found that the social element cannot be ignored, even under extreme internal and external pressures. In fact, cohesion and interdependence help create a shared reality that in turn improves productivity, because team members feel a sense of shared ownership over their charge. Stephanie T. Solansky, "Team Identification: A Determining Factor of Performance," Journal of Managerial Psychology 26, no. 3 (2011): 250.

Some challenges associated with working in teams include the potential for uncertainty or conflict due to the absence of traditional hierarchy, pressures that become overwhelming, lack of shared history since such teams are usually future oriented, and high expectations without resources necessary to complete the task.Elisa du Chatenier, Jos A. A. M. Verstegen, Harm J. A. Biemans, Martin Mulder, and Onno S. W. F. Omta, "Identification of Competencies in Open Innovation Teams," Research and Development Management 40, no. 3 (2010): 275–77. To overcome these challenges, team members can think positively but realistically about the team's end goal, exhibit trust in the expertise of other team members, be reliable and approachable to help build a good team spirit, take initiative with actions and ideas, ask critical questions, and provide critical but constructive feedback.

1. Given your career goals, what sorts of teamwork do you think you might engage in?
2. Would you welcome the opportunity to work on a high-performance team? Why or why not?
3. Members of teams are often under intense pressures to produce or perform at high levels. What is the line at which the pressure becomes too much? Ethically, how far should companies push teams and how far should team members go to complete a task?

Socializing Group Members

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 only be created and maintained through socialization. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 163. It is also through socialization that a shared identity and social reality develops 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 that "buy into" rules and norms, which aids in socialization. The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's life span. 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 totally 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.

The information exchanged during socialization can be broken down into two general categories: technical and social knowledge. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 164. Technical knowledge focuses on skills and information needed to complete a task, and social knowledge focuses on behavioral norms that guide interaction. Each type of information is usually conveyed through a combination of formal and informal means. Technical knowledge can be fairly easily passed along through orientations, trainings, manuals, and documents, because this content is often fairly straightforward. Social knowledge is more ambiguous and is usually conveyed through informal means or passively learned by new members through observation. To return to our earlier terminology, technical knowledge relates more to group

rules and social knowledge relates more to group norms.

Companies and social organizations socialize new members in different ways. A new training cohort at an established company may be given technical rule-based information in the form of a manual and a history of the organization and an overview of the organizational culture to help convey social knowledge about group norms. Members of some small groups like fraternities or professional organizations have to take pledges or oaths that may convey a mixture of technical and social knowledge. Social knowledge may be conveyed in interactions that are separate from official group time. For example, literally socializing as a group is a good way to socialize group members. Many large and successful businesses encourage small groups within the company to socialize outside of work time in order to build cohesion and group solidarity.

Socialization continues after initial membership through the enforcement of rules and norms. When someone deviates from the rules and norms and is corrected, it serves as a reminder for all other members and performs a follow-up socializing function. Since rules are explicitly stated and documented, deviation from the rules can have consequences ranging from verbal warnings, to temporary or permanent separation from the group, to fines or other sanctions. And although norms are implicit, deviating from them can still have consequences. Even though someone may not actually verbally correct the deviation, the self-consciousness, embarrassment, or awkwardness that can result from such deviations is often enough to initiate corrective actions. Group norms can be so implicit that they are taken for granted and operate under group members' awareness.

Group rules and norms provide members with a sense of predictability that helps reduce uncertainty and increase a sense of security for one's place within the group. They also guide group members' involvement with the group, help create a shared social reality, and allow the group to function in particular ways without having actual people constantly educating, monitoring, and then correcting member behaviors. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 441. Of course, the degree to which this is successful depends on the buy-in from group members.

Group Pressures

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



Figure 4.4.2 Even though group members are different, failure to conform to the group's identity could create problems. One of these things is not like the others by Dave Morris is under a CC BY 2.0 license.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule

with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 133. 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. In terms of group policies, groups that have an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on them conforming to group expectations. Deviation from expectations during this "trial period" could lead to expulsion from the group. Supervisors, mentors, and other types of group leaders are also agents that can impose external pressures toward conformity. These group members often have the ability to provide positive or negative reinforcement in the form of praise or punishment, which are clear attempts to influence behavior.

Conformity pressure can also stem from external forces when the whole group stands to receive a reward or punishment based on its performance, which ties back to the small group characteristic of interdependence. Although these pressures may seem negative, they also have positive results. Groups that exert an appropriate and ethical amount of conformity pressure typically have higher levels of group cohesion, which as we learned leads to increased satisfaction with group membership, better relationships, and better task performance. Groups with a strong but healthy level of conformity also project a strong group image to those outside the group, which can raise the group's profile or reputation. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 444. Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

"Getting Critical"- Hazing: Taking Conformity Pressures to the Extreme

Hazing can be defined as actions expected to be performed by aspiring or new members of a group that are irrelevant to the group's activities or mission and are humiliating, degrading, abusive, or dangerous. Brian K. Richardson, Zuoming Wang, and Camille A. Hall, "Blowing the Whistle against Greek Hazing: The Theory of Reasoned Action as a Framework for Reporting Intentions," Communication Studies 63, no. 2 (2012): 173. People who have participated in hazing or have been hazed often note that hazing activities are meant to build group identification and unity. Scholars note that hazing is rationalized because of high conformity pressures and that people who were hazed internalize the group's practices and are more likely to perpetuate hazing, creating a cycle of abuse. Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing among College Students and Points of Intervention," American Journal of Health Behavior 29, no. 2 (2005): 138. Hazing is not new; it has been around in academic and athletic settings since ancient Greece, but it has gotten much attention lately on college campuses as the number of student deaths attributed to hazing behaviors has increased steadily over the past years. In general, it is believed that hazing incidents are underreported, because these activities are done in secret within tightly knit organizations such as fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams that have strong norms of conformity. Brian K. Richardson, Zuoming Wang, and Camille A. Hall, "Blowing the Whistle against Greek Hazing: The Theory of Reasoned Action as a Framework for Reporting Intentions," Communication Studies 63, no. 2 (2012): 185–220.

The urge to belong is powerful, but where is the line when it comes to the actions people take or what people are willing to endure in order to be accepted? Hazing is meant to have aspiring group members prove their worth or commitment to the group. Examples of hazing include, but aren't limited to, being "kidnapped, transported, and abandoned"; drinking excessively in games or contests; sleep deprivation; engaging in or simulating sexual acts; being physically abused; being required to remain silent; wearing unusual clothes or costumes; or acting in a subservient manner to more senior group members. Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing among College Students and Points of Intervention," American Journal of Health Behavior 29, no. 2 (2005): 137; Aldo Cimino, "The Evolution of Hazing: Motivational Mechanisms and the Abuse of Newcomers," Journal of Cognition and Culture 11, no. 3–4 (2011): 235. Research has found that people in leadership roles, who are more likely to have strong group identification, are also more likely to engage in hazing activities. Shelly Campo, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple, "Prevalence and Profiling: Hazing among College Students and Points of Intervention," American Journal of Health Behavior 29, no. 2 (2005): 144. The same research also found that group members who have supportive friends outside of the organization are more likely to remove themselves from a hazing situation, which points to the fact that people who endure hazing may be doing so out of a strong drive to find the acceptance and belonging they do not have elsewhere.

1. What is your definition of hazing? When does something cross the line from a rite of passage or tradition to hazing?

2. What are some internal and external pressures that might lead to hazing activities?
3. Do some research on hazing incidents on college campuses. What concepts from this chapter do you think could be used in anti-hazing education campaigns to prevent incidents like the ones you researched?

Groupthink

Groupthink is a negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that results from high levels of cohesion and/or high conformity pressures. Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascos (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 134. When people rush to agreement or fear argument, groupthink has a tendency to emerge. Decisions made as a result of groupthink may range from a poorly-thought-out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

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

To Avoid Groupthink, Groups Should:

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

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. Randy Fujishin, Creating Effective Groups: The Art of Small Group Communication (San Francisco, CA: Acada Books, 2001): 160–61. Each of these types of conflict can vary in intensity, which can affect how much the conflict impacts the group and its members.

Procedural Conflict

Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations. In this type of conflict, group members differ in their beliefs about how something should be done. Procedural conflict can be handled by a group leader,

especially if the leader put group procedures into place or has the individual power to change them. If there is no designated leader or the leader doesn't have sole power to change procedures (or just wants input from group members), proposals can be taken from the group on ways to address a procedural conflict to initiate a procedural change. A vote to reach a consensus or majority can also help resolve procedural conflict.



Figure 4.4.3 Procedural conflict can often be resolved with a group vote. Photo by CES is under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

Substantive Conflict

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

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict emerges from conflict between individual members of the group. Whereas procedural conflict deals with how and substantive conflict deals with what, interpersonal conflict deals with who. Such conflict can be completely irrelevant to the functioning or purpose of the group, perhaps focusing instead on personality differences. 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. Passive-aggressive behavior is a sign that interpersonal conflict may be building under the surface, and other group members may want to intervene to avoid escalation and retaliation. Leaders can also meet with people involved in interpersonal conflict privately to help them engage in perception checking and act as mediators, if needed. While people who initiate procedural or substantive conflict may be perceived by other group members as concerned about the group's welfare and seen as competent in their ability to notice areas on which the group could improve, people who initiate interpersonal conflict are often held in ill-regard by other group members. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small

Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 217–18.

Primary and Secondary Tensions

Relevant to these types of conflict are primary and secondary tensions that emerge in every group. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Borman, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess Publishing, 1988), 72. When the group first comes together, members experience primary tension, which is tension based on uncertainty that is a natural part of initial interactions. It is only after group members begin to "break the ice" and get to know each other that the tension can be addressed and group members can proceed with the forming stage of group development. Small talk and politeness help group members manage primary tensions, and there is a relatively high threshold for these conflicts because we have all had experiences with such uncertainty when meeting people for the first time and many of us are optimistic that a little time and effort will allow us to get through the tensions. Since some people are more comfortable initiating conversation than others, it's important for more extroverted group members to include less talkative members. Intentionally or unintentionally excluding people during the negotiation of primary tensions can lead to unexpected secondary tensions later on. During this stage people are also less direct in their communication, using more hedges and vague language than they will later in the group process. The indirect communication and small talk that characterize this part of group development aren't a waste of time, as they help manage primary tensions and lay the foundation for future interactions that may involve more substantive conflict.

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

Managing Conflict in Small Groups

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

Tips for Managing Group Conflict:

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

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict

Remember that a complete lack of conflict in a group is a bad sign, as it indicates either a lack of activity or a lack of commitment on the part of the members. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 223. Conflict, when properly handled, can lead a group to have a

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

Conflict that goes on for too long or is poorly handled can lead to decreased cohesiveness. Group members who try to avoid a conflict can still feel anger or frustration when the conflict drags on. Members who consistently take task-oriented conflict personally and escalate procedural or substantive conflict to interpersonal conflict are especially unpopular with other group members. Mishandled or chronic conflict can eventually lead to the destruction of a group or to a loss in members as people weigh the costs and rewards of membership. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 220. Hopefully a skilled leader or other group members can take on conflict resolution roles in order to prevent these disadvantages of conflict.

Key Takeaways

- Task cohesion refers to the degree of commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group, and social cohesion refers to the degree of attraction and liking among group members. Group climate refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. The degree of each type of cohesion affects the group's climate. Groups can be very close socially but not perform well if they do not have an appropriate level of task cohesion. Groups that are too focused on the task can experience interpersonal conflict or a lack of motivation if the social cohesion, which helps enhance the feeling of interdependence, is lacking.
- Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group members are socialized by receiving technical and social information. Cohesion plays a role in socialization, as groups that have high levels of task and social cohesion are more likely to buy into the norms of the group. Socialization continues after a member has joined, as members are officially or unofficially rewarded or punished for adhering to or deviating from the group's norms.
- Conformity pressures are an important force behind group socialization. Internal pressures such as an internal drive to be seen as part of the group or to avoid feeling ashamed or guilty for deviating from the group influence behavior and communication. Likewise, external pressures such as group policies and the potential for reward or punishment also play into group dynamics. The pressures toward conformity can manifest in groupthink, which is characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas, a high level of agreement, and a fear of argument.
- Groups experience different kinds of conflict, including procedural, substantive, and interpersonal conflict.
    - Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations and deal with questions about "how" a group should do something. A leader may be able to resolve this conflict by changing or explaining a procedure or taking, from group members, proposals for or votes on procedural revisions.
    - Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Leaders and other group members should avoid closing off this type of conflict before people have had a chance to be heard, as a lack of substantive conflict can lead to groupthink. Instead, listen to all viewpoints, try to find common ground, and then weigh and evaluate the information as a group.
    - Interpersonal conflict emerges from personal conflict between individual members of a group. Manage interpersonal conflict by getting to the root cause of the conflict. In some cases, interpersonal conflict may be disguised as procedural or substantive conflict, or it may develop as a result of poorly managed procedural or substantive conflict. Leaders, group members not directly involved in the conflict, or even outside third parties may also be able to effectively mediate interpersonal conflict.

Exercises

1. Group cohesion and climate are important dynamics within a small group. Identify and then compare and contrast a current or former small group that was cohesive and one that was not cohesive, including a discussion of how the presence or lack of cohesion affected the group's climate.
2. Groupthink is a negative group dynamic that relates to cohesion and conformity pressures. Several historic events with far-reaching and devastating implications have been analyzed through the lens of groupthink. Choose one of the following examples, and do some Internet research on your own. Then explain how groupthink played a role in the event.
    a. The Watergate scandal and cover-up (1972–74)

   b. The space shuttle Challenger explosion (1986)
   c. The rationale for the invasion of Iraq—specifically the supposed existence of weapons of mass destruction (2001–2)
3. Getting integrated: How might you handle group conflict differently in an academic context versus a professional context? Why? Include a reference to a specific type of conflict discussed in this section and discuss which conflict management strategies discussed in the chapter might be best in each context.

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4.5: Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

- Understand the difference between informal and formal groups.
- Learn the stages of group development.
- Identify examples of the punctuated equilibrium model.
- Learn how group cohesion, social loafing, and collective efficacy can affect groups.

Because many tasks in today's world have become so complex, groups and teams have become an essential component of an organization's success. The success of the group depends on the successful management of its members and making sure all aspects of work are fair for each member. Being able to work in a group is a key skill for managers and employees alike.

Types of Groups: Formal and Informal

What is a group? A group is a collection of individuals who interact with each other such that one person's actions have an impact on the others. In organizations, most work is done within groups, and managing groups is key to each of the P-O-L-C functions. How groups function has important implications for organizational productivity. Groups where people get along, feel the desire to contribute, and are capable of coordinating their efforts may have high performance levels, whereas those characterized by extreme levels of conflict or hostility may demoralize members of the workforce.

In organizations, groups can be classified into two basic types: informal and formal. Informal work groups are made up of two or more individuals who are associated with one another in ways not prescribed by the formal organization. For example, a few people in the company who get together to play tennis on the weekend would be considered an informal group. A formal work group is made up of managers, subordinates, or both with close associations among group members that influence the behavior of individuals in the group. We will discuss many different types of formal work groups later on in this chapter.

Stages of Group Development

American organizational psychologist Bruce Tuckman presented a robust model in 1965 that is still widely used today. On the basis of his observations of group behavior in a variety of settings, he proposed a four-stage map of group evolution, known as the Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing Model. Tuckman, B. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384–399. Later he enhanced the model by adding a fifth and final stage, adjourning. The phases are illustrated in the Stages of the Group Development Model. Interestingly enough, just as an individual moves through developmental stages such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, so does a group, although in a much shorter period of time.

According to this theory, to facilitate a group successfully, the leader needs to move through various leadership styles over time. Generally, this is accomplished by first being more direct, eventually serving as a coach, and later, once the group is able to assume more power and responsibility for itself, shifting to delegator.

While research has not confirmed that this is descriptive of how groups progress, knowing and following these steps can help groups be more effective. For example, groups that do not go through the storming phase early on will often return to this stage toward the end of the group process to address unresolved issues. Another example of the validity of the group development model involves groups that take the time to get to know each other socially in the forming stage. When this socialization occurs, groups tend to handle future challenges better because the individuals have an understanding of each other's needs.



Figure 4.5.1 Stages of the Group Development Model

Forming

In the Forming stage, the group comes together for the first time. The members may already know each other or they may be total strangers. In either case, there is a level of formality, some anxiety, and a degree of guardedness as group members are not sure what is going to happen next. "Will I be accepted? What will my role be? Who has the power here?" These are some of the questions participants think about during this stage of group formation. Because of the large amount of uncertainty, members tend to be polite, conflict avoidant, and observant. They are trying to figure out the "rules of the game" without being too vulnerable. At this point, they may also be quite excited and optimistic about the task, perhaps experiencing a level of pride at being chosen to join a particular group.

Group members are trying to achieve several goals at this stage, although this may not necessarily be done consciously. First, they are trying to get to know one another. Often this can be accomplished by finding some common ground. Members also begin to explore group boundaries to determine what will be considered acceptable behavior. "Can I interrupt? Can I leave when I feel like it?" This trial phase may also involve testing the appointed leader or seeing whether a leader emerges from the group. At this point, group members are also discovering how the group will work in terms of what needs to be done and who will be responsible for each task. This stage is often characterized by abstract discussions about issues to be addressed by the group; those who like to get moving can become impatient with this part of the process. This phase is usually short in duration, perhaps a meeting or two.

Storming

Once group members feel sufficiently safe and included, they tend to enter the Storming phase. Participants focus less on keeping their guard up as they shed social facades, becoming more authentic and more argumentative. Group members begin to explore their power and influence, and they often stake out their territory by differentiating themselves from the other group members rather than seeking common ground. Discussions can become heated as participants raise conflicting points of view and values, or disagree over how tasks should be done and who is assigned to them. It is not unusual for group members to become defensive, competitive, or jealous. They may take sides or begin to form cliques within the group. Questioning and resisting direction from the leader is also quite common. "Why should I have to do this? Who designed this project in the first place? What gives you the authority to tell me what to do?"

Although little seems to get accomplished at this stage, it actually serves an important purpose: group members are becoming more authentic as they express their deeper thoughts and feelings. What they are really exploring is "Can I truly be me, have power, and be accepted?" During this chaotic stage, a great deal of creative energy that was previously buried is released and available for use, but it takes skill to move the group from Storming to Norming. In many cases, the group gets stuck in the Storming phase.

Once group members discover that they can be authentic and that the group is capable of handling differences without dissolving, they are ready to enter the next stage, Norming.

Norming

"We survived!" is the common sentiment as this stage. Group members often feel elated at this point, and they are much more committed to each other and the group's goal. Feeling energized by knowing they can handle the "tough stuff," group members are now ready to get to work. Finding themselves more cohesive and cooperative, participants find it easy to establish their own ground rules (or norms) and define their operating procedures and goals. The group tends to make big decisions, while subgroups or individuals handle the smaller decisions. It is hoped at this point the group members are more open and respectful toward each other and willing to ask one another for both help and feedback. They may even begin to form friendships and share more personal information.

At this point, the leader should become more of a facilitator by stepping back and letting the group assume more responsibility for its goal. Since the group's energy is running high, this is an ideal time to host a social or team-building event.

Performing

Galvanized by a sense of shared vision and a feeling of unity, the group is ready to go into high gear. Members are more interdependent, individuality and differences are respected, and group members feel themselves to be part of a greater entity. At the Performing stage, participants are not only getting the work done, but they also pay greater attention to how they are doing it. They ask such questions as, "Do our operating procedures best support productivity and quality assurance? Do we have suitable means for addressing differences that arise so we can preempt destructive conflicts? Are we relating to and communicating with each other in ways that enhance group dynamics and help us achieve our goals? How can I further develop as a person to become more effective?" By now, the group has matured, becoming more competent, autonomous, and insightful.

Group leaders can finally move into coaching roles and help members grow in skill and leadership. These leadership shifts are essential for managers enacting the Leadership function to keep in mind. In fact, a manager who leads multiple teams may find it necessary to shift leadership styles not only over time but between teams at different stages.

Adjourning

Just as groups form, so do they end. For example, many groups or teams formed in a business context are project-oriented and therefore are temporary. Alternatively, a working group may dissolve because of an organizational restructuring. As with graduating from school or leaving home for the first time, these endings can be bittersweet, with group members feeling a combination of victory, grief, and insecurity about what is coming next. For those who like routine and bond closely with fellow group members, this transition can be particularly challenging. Group leaders and members alike should be sensitive to handling these endings respectfully and compassionately. An ideal way to close a group is to set aside time to debrief ("How did it all go? What did we learn?"), acknowledge one another, and celebrate a job well done.

The Punctuated-Equilibrium Model

As you may have noted, the five-stage model we have just reviewed is a linear process. According to the model, a group progresses to the Performing stage, at which point it finds itself in an ongoing, smooth-sailing situation until the group dissolves. In reality, subsequent researchers, most notably Joy H. Karriker, have found that the life of a group is much more dynamic and cyclical in nature. Karriker, J. H. (2005). Cyclical group development and interaction-based leadership emergence in autonomous teams: an integrated model. Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 11(4), 54–64. For example, a group may operate in the Performing stage for several months. Then, because of a disruption, such as a competing emerging technology that changes the rules of the game or the introduction of a new CEO, the group may move back into the Storming phase before returning to Performing. Ideally, any regression in the linear group progression will ultimately result in a higher level of functioning. Proponents of this cyclical model draw from behavioral scientist Connie Gersick's study of punctuated equilibrium. Gersick, C. J. G. (1991). Revolutionary change theories: A multilevel exploration of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm. Academy of Management Review, 16(1), 10–36.

The concept of punctuated equilibrium was first proposed in 1972 by paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, who both believed that evolution occurred in rapid, radical spurts rather than gradually over time. Identifying numerous examples of this pattern in social behavior, Gersick found that the concept applied to organizational change. She proposed that groups remain fairly static, maintaining a certain equilibrium for long periods. Change during these periods is incremental, largely due to the resistance to change that arises when systems take root and processes become institutionalized. In this model, revolutionary change occurs in brief, punctuated bursts, generally catalyzed by a crisis or a problem that breaks through the systemic inertia and shakes up the deep organizational structures in place. At this point, the organization or group has the opportunity to learn and create new structures that are better aligned with current realities. Whether the group does this is not guaranteed. In sum, in Gersick's model, groups can repeatedly cycle through the Storming and Performing stages, with revolutionary change taking place during short transitional windows. For organizations and groups who understand that disruption, conflict, and chaos are inevitable in the life of a social system, these disruptions represent opportunities for innovation and creativity.

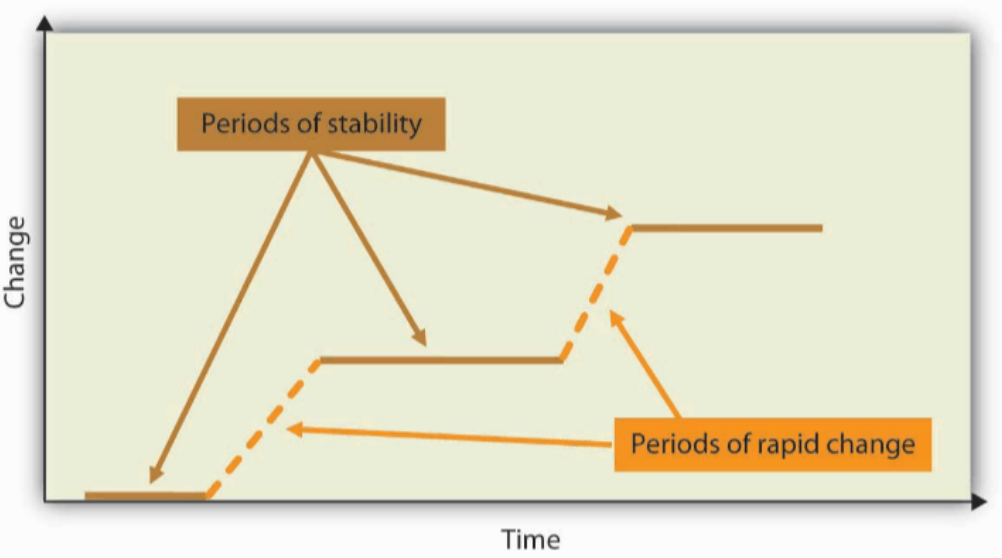


Figure 4.5.2 The Punctuated Equilibrium Model

Cohesion, Social Loafing, and Collective Efficacy

Cohesion can be thought of as a kind of social glue. It refers to the degree of camaraderie within the group. Cohesive groups are those in which members are attached to each other and act as one unit. The more cohesive a group, the more productive it will be and the more rewarding the experience will be for the group's members. Beal, D. J., Cohen, R. R., Burke, M. J., & McLendon, C. L. (2003). Cohesion and performance in groups: A meta-analytic clarification of construct relations. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88, 989–1004; Evans, C. R., & Dion, K. L. (1991). Group cohesion and performance: A meta-analysis. Small Group Research, 22, 175–186. Cohesive groups tend to have the following characteristics: they have a collective identity; they experience a moral bond and a desire to remain part of the group; they share a sense of purpose, working together on a meaningful task or cause; and they establish a structured pattern of communication.

The fundamental factors affecting group cohesion include the following:

- **Similarity**. The more similar group members are in terms of age, sex, education, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs, the more likely the group will bond.
- **Stability**. The longer a group stays together, the more cohesive it becomes.
- **Size**. Smaller groups tend to have higher levels of cohesion.
- **Support**. When group members receive coaching and are encouraged to support their fellow team members, group identity strengthens.
- **Satisfaction**. Cohesion is correlated with how pleased group members are with one another's performance, behavior, and conformity to group norms.

As you might imagine, there are many benefits in creating a cohesive group. Members are generally more personally satisfied and feel greater self-confidence and self-esteem in a group where they feel they belong. For many, membership in such a group can be a buffer against stress, which can improve mental and physical well-being. Because members are invested in the group and its work, they are more likely to regularly attend and actively participate in the group, taking more responsibility for the group's functioning. In addition, members can draw on the strength of the group to persevere through challenging situations that might otherwise be too hard to tackle alone.

Can a Group Have Too Much Cohesion?

Despite the advantages of cohesion, too much cohesion can be detrimental to a group. Because members can come to value belonging over all else, an internal pressure to conform may arise where some members modify their behavior to adhere to group norms. Members may become conflict avoidant, focusing on trying to please one another so as not to be ostracized. In some cases, members might censor themselves to maintain the party line. As such, the group is dominated by a superficial sense of harmony and discourages diversity of thought. Having less tolerance for deviants, who threaten the group's static

identity, cohesive groups will often disapprove of members who dare to disagree. Members attempting to make a change may be criticized, undermined, or even ostracized by other members, who perceive their attempts as a threat to the status quo. The painful possibility of being marginalized can keep many members in line with the majority.

The more strongly members identify with the group, the easier it is to see outsiders as inferior or, in extreme cases, as enemies. It is easy to see how this can lead to increased insularity. This form of prejudice can have a downward spiral effect. The group is not getting corrective feedback from within its own confines, and it is closing itself off from input and a cross-fertilization of ideas from the outside. In such an environment, groups can easily adopt extreme ideas that will not be challenged. Denial increases as problems are ignored and failures are blamed on external factors. With limited, often biased, information and no internal or external opposition, groups like these can make disastrous decisions.

Groupthink is a group pressure phenomenon that increases the risk of the group making flawed decisions by allowing reductions in mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. A famous example of groupthink is the decision to invade Cuba made by President John F. Kennedy and his cabinet in 1961. In a matter of days, Cuban forces repelled the invaders, whose objective was to overthrow the entire Cuban government, resulting in many casualties and captured troops. In retrospect, there were many reasons why the Bay of Pigs invasion was doomed from the start, but the planning and approval were characterized by a belief that the insiders knew best and did not need to consider "devil's advocate" points of view. As this example illustrates, groupthink is a serious risk in highly cohesive groups. Janis, I. L. (1972). Victims of groupthink. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Cohesive groups can go awry in much milder ways. For example, group members can value their social interactions so much that they have fun together but spend little time on accomplishing their assigned task. Or a group's goal may begin to diverge from the larger organization's goal and those trying to uphold the organization's goal may be criticized (for example, students may tease the class "brain" for doing well in school).

In addition, research shows that cohesion leads to acceptance of group norms. Goodman, P. S., Ravlin, E., & Schminke, M. (1987). Understanding groups in organizations. Research in Organizational Behavior, 9, 121–173. Groups with high task commitment tend to do well, but suppose you belong to a group in which the norms are to work as little as possible! As you might imagine, these groups accomplish little and can actually work together against the organization's goals.

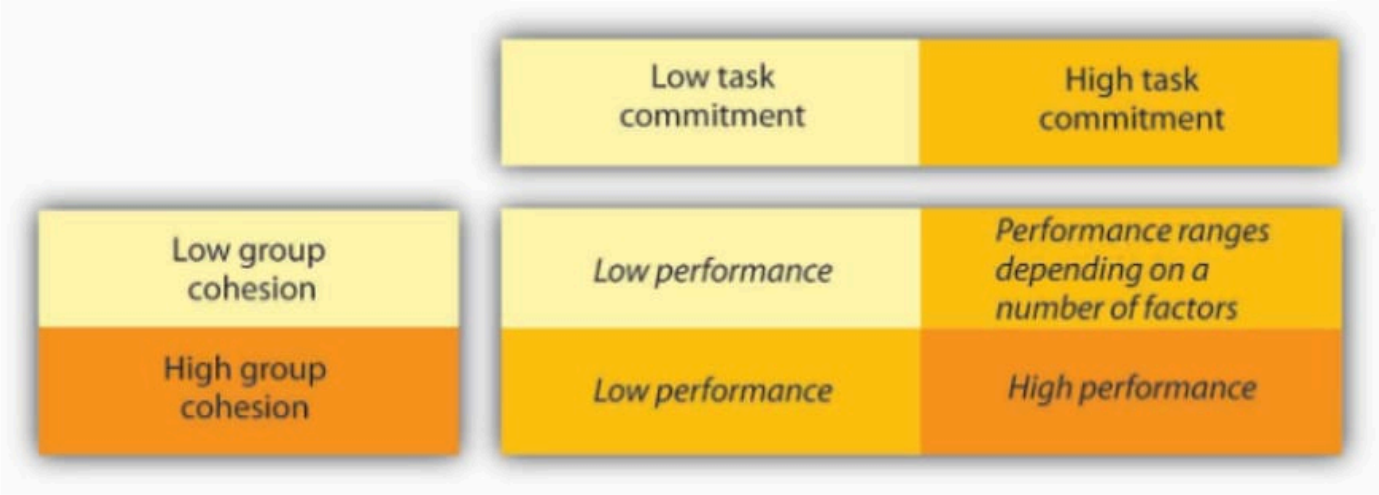


Figure 4.5.3 Groups with high cohesion and high task commitment tend to be the most effective.

Social Loafing

Social loafing refers to the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. This phenomenon, also known as the Ringelmann effect, was first noted by French agricultural engineer Max Ringelmann in 1913. In one study, he had people pull on a rope individually and in groups. He found that as the number of people pulling increased, the group's total pulling force was less than the sum of individual efforts had been when measured alone.Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 681–706.

Why do people work less hard when they are working with other people? Observations show that as the size of the group grows, this effect becomes larger as well. Karau, S. J., & Williams, K. D. (1993). Social loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical

integration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 681–706. The social loafing tendency is not so much a matter of laziness as a matter of perceiving that one will receive neither one's fair share of rewards if the group is successful nor blame if the group fails. Rationales for this behavior include, "My own effort will have little effect on the outcome." "Others aren't pulling their weight, so why should I?" Or "I don't have much to contribute, and no one will notice anyway." This is a consistent effect across a great number of group tasks and countries. Gabrenya, W. L., Latane, B., & Wang, Y. (1983). Social loafing in cross-cultural perspective. Journal of Cross-Cultural Perspective, 14, 368–384; Harkins, S., & Petty, R. E. (1982). Effects of task difficulty and task uniqueness on social loafing. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 43, 1214–1229; Taylor, D. W., & Faust, W. L. (1952). Twenty questions: Efficiency of problem-solving as a function of the size of the group. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 44, 360–363; Ziller, R. C. (1957). Four techniques of group decision-making under uncertainty. Journal of Applied Psychology, 41, 384–388. Research also shows that perceptions of fairness are related to less social loafing. Price, K. H., Harrison, D. A., & Gavin, J. H. (2006). Withholding inputs in team contexts: Member composition, interaction processes, evaluation structure, and social loafing. Journal of Applied Psychology, 91, 1375–1384. Therefore, teams that are deemed as more fair should also see less social loafing.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy refers to a group's perception of its ability to successfully perform well. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. A group with high collective efficacy is one whose members share a belief in the group's capability to pursue its agreed-upon course of action and attain its goals. Collective efficacy is influenced by a number of factors, including watching others ("that group did it and we're better than them"), verbal persuasion ("we can do this"), and how a person feels ("this is a good group"). Research shows that a group's collective efficacy is positively related to its performance. Gully, S. M., Incalcaterra, K. A., Joshi, A., & Beaubien, J. M. (2002). A meta-analysis of team-efficacy, potency, and performance: Interdependence and level of analysis as moderators of observed relationships. Journal of Applied Psychology, 87, 819–832; Porter, C. O. L. H (2005). Goal orientation: Effects on backing up behavior, performance, efficacy, and commitment in teams. Journal of Applied Psychology, 90, 811–818; Tasa, K., Taggar, S., & Seijts, G. H. (2007). The development of collective efficacy in teams: A multilevel and longitudinal perspective. Journal of Applied Psychology, 92, 17–27. In addition, this relationship is stronger when task interdependence (the degree an individual's task is linked to someone else's work) is high rather than low.

Key Takeaway

Groups may be either formal or informal. Groups go through developmental stages much like individuals do. The Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing-Adjourning Model is useful in prescribing stages that groups should pay attention to as they develop. The punctuated-equilibrium model of group development argues that groups often move forward during bursts of change after long periods without change. Groups that are similar, stable, small, supportive, and satisfied tend to be more cohesive than groups that are not. Cohesion can help support group performance if the group values task completion, but too much cohesion can also be a concern for groups. Social loafing increases as groups become larger. When collective efficacy is high, groups tend to perform better.

Exercises

1. Similarity. The more similar group members are in terms of age, sex, education, skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs, the more likely the group will bond.
2. Stability. The longer a group stays together, the more cohesive it becomes.
3. Size. Smaller groups tend to have higher levels of cohesion.
4. Support. When group members receive coaching and are encouraged to support their fellow team members, group identity strengthens.
5. Satisfaction. Cohesion is correlated with how pleased group members are with one another's performance, behavior, and conformity to group norms.
6. How do the tactics related to group dynamics involve the managerial functions outlined by the P-O-L-C framework?
7. If you believe the punctuated-equilibrium model is true about groups, how can you use this knowledge to help your own group?
8. Think about the most cohesive group you have ever been in. How did it compare to less cohesive groups in terms of similarity, stability, size, support, and satisfaction?
9. Why do you think social loafing occurs within groups? What can be done to combat it?
10. Have you seen instances of collective efficacy helping or hurting a team? Please explain your answer.

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4.6: Leadership and Small Group Communication

Learning Objectives

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

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 456. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 456. 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 4.6.1 A group leader may be formally designated by someone inside or outside the group or may emerge naturally during early group meetings. Image by Markus Spiske on Unsplash.

Leaders Emerge Because of Their Traits

The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 313. Some traits that leaders, in general, share are related to physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 120. In terms of physical appearance, designated leaders tend to be taller and more attractive than other group members. This could be because we consciously and/or subconsciously associate a larger size (in terms of height and build, but not body fat) with strength and strength with good leadership. As far as communication abilities, leaders speak more fluently, have a more confident tone, and communicate more often than other group members. Leaders are also moderately more intelligent than other group members, which is attractive because leaders need good problem-solving skills. 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. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 314. 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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 126. 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 semi structured contexts that are less formal and in groups composed of people who have specific knowledge

and are therefore be trusted to do much of their work independently. Fred E. Fiedler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 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. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 1988), 130–33. 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 his or her decisions. Rather than excluding or punishing the second-place candidate, the new leader should give him or her responsibilities within the group to make use of the group member's respected status.

Leaders Emerge Based on Communication Skill and Competence

This final approach to the study of leadership is considered a functional approach, because it focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This last approach is the most useful for communication scholars and for people who want to improve their leadership skills, because leadership behaviors (which are learnable and adaptable) rather than traits or situations (which are often beyond our control) are the primary focus of study. As we've already learned, any group member can exhibit leadership behaviors, not just a designated or emergent leader. Therefore leadership behaviors are important for all of us to understand even if we don't anticipate serving in leadership positions. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 126.

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.

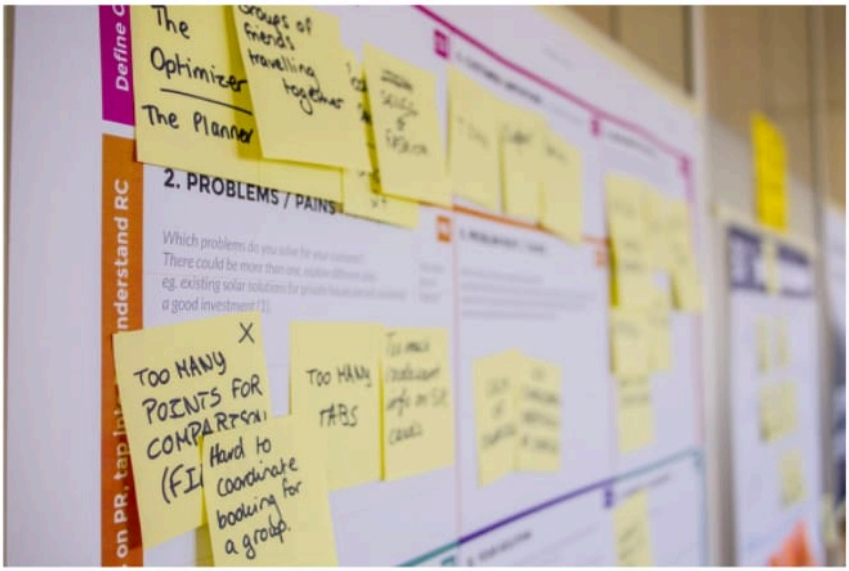


Figure 4.6.2 A group leader with high communication competence can facilitate brainstorming and group discussion to enhance the creativity and quality of group members' ideas. Image by Daria Nepriakhina on Unsplash.

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: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 131–32.

- 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: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 132–34.

- 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 meta-communicate, 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:

- 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. Julia T. Wood, "Leading in Purposive Discussions: A Study of Adaptive Behavior," Communication Monographs 44, no. 2 (1977): 152–65. One common way to study leadership style is to make a distinction among autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders. Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt, and Ralph K. White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created 'Social Climates,'" Journal of Social Psychology 10, no. 2 (1939): 269–99.These leadership styles can be described as follows:

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

While this is a frequently cited model of leadership styles, we will focus in more detail on a model that was developed a few years after this one. 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. Robert J. House and Terrence R. Mitchell, "Path-Goal Theory of Leadership," Journal of Contemporary Business 3 (1974): 81–97.

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 4.6.3 Directive leaders provide structure and clear expectations for their group. To be effective they must be skilled motivators. Image by Melany Rochester on Unsplash.

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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 122–23.

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.

"Getting Plugged In" - Steve Jobs as an Achievement-Oriented Leader

"Where can you find a leader with Jobs' willingness to fail, his sheer tenacity, persistence, and resiliency, his grandiose ego, his overwhelming belief in himself?" Alan Deutschman, "Exit the King," The Daily Beast, September 21, 2011, accessed August 23, 2012, http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/08/28/steve-jobs-american-genius.html. This closing line of an article following the death of Steve Jobs clearly illustrates the larger-than-life personality and extraordinary drive of achievement-oriented leaders. Jobs, who founded Apple Computers, was widely recognized as a visionary with a brilliant mind during his early years at the helm of Apple (from 1976 to 1985), but he hadn't yet gained respect as a business leader. Jobs left the company and later returned in 1997. After his return, Apple reached its height under his leadership, which was now enhanced by business knowledge and skills he gained during his time away from the company. The fact that Jobs was able to largely teach himself the ins and outs of business practices is a quality of achievement-oriented leaders, who are constantly self-reflective and evaluate their skills and performance, making adaptations as necessary.

Achievement-oriented leaders also often possess good instincts, allowing them to make decisions quickly while acknowledging the potential for failure but also showing a resiliency that allows them to bounce back from mistakes and come back stronger. Rather than bringing in panels of experts, presenting ideas to focus groups for feedback, or putting a new product through market research and testing, Jobs relied on his instincts, which led to some embarrassing failures and some remarkable successes that overshadowed the failures. Although Jobs made unilateral decisions, he relied heavily on the creative and technical expertise of others who worked for him and were able to make his creative, innovative, and some say genius ideas reality. As do other achievement-oriented leaders, Jobs held his group members to exceptionally high standards and fostered a culture that mirrored his own perfectionism. Constant comparisons to other technological innovators like Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft, pushed Jobs and those who worked for him to work tirelessly to produce the "next big thing." Achievement-oriented leaders like Jobs have been described as maniacal, intense, workaholics, perfectionists, risk takers, narcissists, innovative, and visionary. These descriptors carry positive and negative connotations but often yield amazing results when possessed by a leader, the likes of which only seldom come around.

1. Do you think Jobs could have been as successful had he employed one of the other leadership styles? Why or why not? How might the achievement-oriented leadership style be well suited for a technology company like Apple or the technology field in general?
2. In what circumstances would you like to work for an achievement-oriented leader, and why? In what circumstances would you prefer not to work with an achievement-oriented leader, and why?
3. Do some research on another achievement-oriented leader. Discuss how that leader's traits are similar to and/or different from those of Steve Jobs.

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. John R. P. French Jr. and Bertram Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in Studies in Social Power, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 150–67. Effective leaders do not need to possess all five types of power. Instead, competent leaders know how to draw on other group members who may be better able to exercise a type of power in a given situation.

Legitimate Power

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

Expert Power



Figure 4.6.4 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 post-surgery recovery. Image by Zach Vessels on Unsplash.

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

Referent Power

Referent power comes from the attractiveness, likeability, and charisma of the group member. As we learned earlier, more physically attractive people and more outgoing people are often chosen as leaders. This could be due to their referent power. Referent power also derives from a person's reputation. A group member may have referent power if he or she is well respected outside of the group for previous accomplishments or even because he or she is known as a dependable and capable group

member. Like legitimate power, the fact that a person possesses referent power doesn't mean he or she has the talent, skill, or other characteristic needed to actually lead the group. A person could just be likable but have no relevant knowledge about the group's task or leadership experience. Some groups actually desire this type of leader, especially if the person is meant to attract external attention and serve as more of a "figurehead" than a regularly functioning group member. For example, a group formed to raise funds for a science and nature museum may choose a former mayor, local celebrity, or NASA astronaut as their leader because of his or her referent power. In this situation it would probably be best for the group to have a secondary leader who attends to task and problem-solving functions within the group.

Information Power

Information power comes from a person's ability to access information that comes through informal channels and well-established social and professional networks. We have already learned that information networks are an important part of a group's structure and can affect a group's access to various resources. 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 he or she gives 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.

"Getting Real"- Leadership as the Foundation of a Career

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 transferrable 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.

As you build up your experience and reputation as a leader, be prepared for your workload to grow and your interpersonal

communication competence to become more important. Once you're in your career path, you can draw on this previous leadership experience and volunteer or step up when the need arises, which can help you get noticed. Of course, you have to be able to follow through on your commitment, which takes discipline and dedication. While you may be excited to prove your leadership chops in your new career path, I caution you about taking on too much too fast. It's easy for a young and/or new member of a work team to become overcommitted, as more experienced group members are excited to have a person to share some of their work responsibilities with. Hopefully, your previous leadership experience will give you confidence that your group members will notice. People are attracted to confidence and want to follow people who exhibit it. Aside from confidence, good leaders also develop dynamism, which is a set of communication behaviors that conveys enthusiasm and creates an energetic and positive climate. Once confidence and dynamism have attracted a good team of people, good leaders facilitate quality interaction among group members, build cohesion, and capitalize on the synergy of group communication in order to come up with forward-thinking solutions to problems. Good leaders also continue to build skills in order to become better leaders. Leaders are excellent observers of human behavior and are able to assess situations using contextual clues and nonverbal communication. They can then use this knowledge to adapt their communication to the situation. Leaders also have a high degree of emotional intelligence, which allows them to better sense, understand, and respond to others' emotions and to have more control over their own displays of emotions. Last, good leaders further their careers by being reflexive and regularly evaluating their strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Since our perceptions are often skewed, it's also good to have colleagues and mentors/supervisors give you formal evaluations of your job performance, making explicit comments about leadership behaviors. As you can see, the work of a leader only grows more complex as one moves further along a career path. But with the skills gained through many years of increasingly challenging leadership roles, a leader can adapt to and manage this increasing complexity.

1. What leadership positions have you had so far? In what ways might they prepare you for more complex and career-specific leadership positions you may have later?
2. What communication competencies do you think are most important for a leader to have and why? How do you rate in terms of the competencies you ranked as most important?
3. Who do you know who would be able to give you constructive feedback on your leadership skills? What do you think this person would say? (You may want to consider actually asking the person for feedback).

Key Takeaways

- Leaders fulfill a group role that is associated with status and power within the group that may be formally or informally recognized by people inside and/or outside of the group. While there are usually only one or two official leaders within a group, all group members can perform leadership functions, which are a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its tasks.
- There are many perspectives on how and why people become leaders:
  - Designated leaders are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected.
  - 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.
  - The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits or personal characteristics, such as physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality. While this approach is useful for understanding how people conceptualize ideal leaders, it doesn't offer communication scholars much insight into how leadership can be studied and developed as a skill.
  - Situational context also affects how leaders emerge. Different leadership styles and skills are needed based on the level of structure surrounding a group and on how group interactions play out in initial meetings and whether or not a leadership struggle occurs.
  - Leaders also emerge based on communication skill and competence, as certain communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This approach is most useful to communication scholars, because in it leadership is seen as a set of communication behaviors that are learnable and adaptable rather than traits or situational factors, which are often beyond our control.
- Leaders can adopt a directive, participative, supportive, or achievement-oriented style.
  - 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.
  - Participative leaders work to include group members in the decision-making process by soliciting and considering their opinions and suggestions.
  - Supportive leaders show concern for their followers' needs and emotions.
  - Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations.

- Leaders and other group members move their groups toward success and/or the completion of their task by tapping into various types of power.
  - Legitimate power flows from the officially recognized power, status, or title of a group member.
  - Expert power comes from knowledge, skill, or expertise that a group member possesses and other group members do not.
  - Referent power comes from the attractiveness, likeability, and charisma of the group member.
  - Information power comes from a person's ability to access information that comes through informal channels and well-established social and professional networks.
  - 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 (punishment).

Exercises

1. In what situations would a designated leader be better than an emergent leader, and vice versa? Why?
2. Think of a leader that you currently work with or have worked with who made a strong (positive or negative) impression on you. Which leadership style did he or she use most frequently? Cite specific communication behaviors to back up your analysis.
3. Getting integrated: Teachers are often viewed as leaders in academic contexts along with bosses/managers in professional, politicians/elected officials in civic, and parents in personal contexts. For each of these leaders and contexts, identify some important leadership qualities that each should possess, and discuss some of the influences in each context that may affect the leader and his or her leadership style.

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4.7: LEADERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP THEORIES

4.7.1: Leadership Theories

4.7.2: Contemporary Approaches to Leadership

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4.7.1: Leadership Theories

Learning Objectives

- Define and describe traits, situational, context-based, and transformative leadership theories.

There are many perspectives on leadership, but they generally fall into four main categories: leadership traits, situational or context-based leadership, functional leadership, and transformational leadership. Let's examine each in turn.

The first approach we'll consider is the oldest of all: universal leadership traits, or the view that there are inherent traits, that may be part of a person from birth as in talents, or acquired skills that express those in-born traits, that are somehow universal or constant across contexts and cultures. It is a significant challenge to even begin to consider the many contexts where leadership might be displayed, and so instead of focusing on the context, in this view we focus on the individual and his or her traits. Some studiesBass, B. (1981). Traits of Leadership: A follow-up to 1970. In R.M. Stogdill (ed.), Handbook of Leadership. New York: Free Press, pp. 73–96., Baker, D. (1990). A qualitative and quantitative analysis of verbal style and the elimination of potential leaders in small groups. Small Group Research, 38, pp. 13–26. have indicated that people in leadership possess the following ten traits as shown in Table 4.7.1.1 "Universal Leadership Traits".

Table 4.7.1.1: Universal Leadership Traits

	Trait	Explanation	Example
1	Achievement Orientation	A clear focus on achievement	She consistently makes time in her busy schedule for her school work. She is focused on completing her degree.
2	Adaptability	The ability to adapt to the context, including constraints or resources, to be successful	She understands the challenges of running a household and raising children on a budget, and still makes her studies a priority.
3	Energy	The ability to devote time, concentration, and effort to a challenge	Even though she is tired in the evening she makes time, after the children have gone to bed, to complete her studies each night.
4	Intelligence	The ability to perceive, understand, formulate a response to, and implement a plan of action to solve a challenge	There are never enough hours in the day, but she understands the challenges, sets priorities, and consistently gets the job done.
5	Innovation	The ability to perceive alternate plans of action to achieve similar or improved results	She understands the challenge and finds a faster, more efficient way to get the job done.
6	Persistence	The ability to persevere, or to stick with a challenge until it is solved.	She consistently completes her work on time, has completed all of her classes to date successfully, and is on track to graduate as planned.

	Trait	Explanation	Example
7	Responsibility	The ability to respond and the awareness of duty, obligation, or commitment to solve a challenge	She knows she has the ability to respond to the many challenges, recognizes the importance of a university degree to herself and her children, and completed her obligations.
8	Self-confidence	The confidence in one's ability to solve a challenge	She knows she can do it.
9	Sociability	The ability to interact with others effectively	She can work in groups effectively, even with challenging members.
10	Verbal Communication Ability	The ability to articulate effectively, or express one's thoughts, ideas, or opinions in ways that others can understand them with minimal or no miscommunication	She can express herself effectively. People understand her when she speaks.

As we review these terms we can observe many of them in ourselves and others in daily life. Are leaders those who possess all ten traits? Are these ten traits the only traits that represent leadership? No on both counts. Leaders may possess or exhibit some or all of these traits, but not all the time in every context. In addition, what we consider leadership in one context might be considered insubordination in another. Cultures vary as to their expectations for leaders and what traits they must possess, and we learn culture from each other. We are not born with it. We learn to communicate from and with each other. We are not built with an innate ability to communicate and our surroundings, including those who model behaviors for us, influence how we communicate with ourselves and others. If we are raised in a community where people take responsibility for their challenges and work together to solve them, we are more likely to model that behavior. If we are raised in a community that looks to an institution or an individual to solve problems for them, we are more likely to expect our problems to be solved for us. Since we can see that our environment influences our communication, our culture, and these traits, let's examine alternatives as we continue to explore the concept of leadership.

Our second approach to leadership shifts the focus or attention from the individual to the context, or situation. As we discussed previously, this makes for a significant challenge. How can we assess the myriad of situation factors at any given moment in time? In reality we cannot, but we can make the concerted effort to limit the factors we consider and explore the influence of context on our behaviors, including those associated with leadership within a specific cultural framework.

Situational leadership, or leadership in context, means that leadership itself depends on the situation at hand. In sharp contrast to the "natural born leader," "universal leadership traits" model of leadership we previously discussed, this viewpoint is relativist. Leadership is relative, or varies, based on the context. There is no one "universal trait" to which we can point or principle to which we can observe in action. There is no style of leadership that is more or less effective than another unless we consider the context. Then our challenge presents itself: how to match the most effective leadership strategy with the current context?

In order to match leadership strategies and context we first need to discuss the range of strategies as well as the range of contexts. While the strategies list may not be as long as we might imagine, the context list could go on forever. If we were able to accurately describe each context, and discuss each factor, we would quickly find the task led to more questions, more information, and the complexity would increase, making an accurate description or discussion impossible. Instead, we can focus our efforts on factors that each context contains and look for patterns, or common trends, that help us make generalizations about our observations.

For example, an emergency situation may require a leader to be direct, giving specific order to each person. Since each second counts the quick thinking and actions at the direction of a leader may be the most effective strategy. To stop and discuss, vote, or check everyone's feelings on the current emergency situation may waste valuable time. That same approach applied to common

governance or law-making may indicate a dictator is in charge, and that individuals and their vote are of no consequence. Instead an effective leader in a democratic process may ask questions, gather view points, and seek common ground as lawmakers craft a law that applies to everyone equally.

Hersey and Blanchard Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition—Utilizing Human Resources. New Jersey/Prentice Hall. take the situational framework and apply to an organizational perspective that reflects our emphasis on group communication. They assert that, in order to be an effective manager, one needs to change their leadership style based on the context, including the maturity of the people they are leading and the task details. Hersey and Blanchard Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition—Utilizing Human Resources. New Jersey/Prentice Hall. focus on two key issues: tasks and relationships, and present the idea that we can to a greater or lesser degree focus on one or the other to achieve effective leadership in a given context. They offer four distinct leadership styles or strategies (abbreviated with an "S"):

1. **Telling (S1)**. Leaders tell people what to do and how to do it.
2. **Selling (S2)**. Leaders provide direction, information, and guidance, but sell their message to gain compliance among group members.
3. **Participating (S3)**. Leaders focus on the relationships with group members and shares decision-making responsibilities with them.
4. **Delegating (S4)**. Leaders focus on relationships, rely on professional expertise or group member skills, and monitor progress. They allow group members to more directly responsible for individual decisions but may still participate in the process.

Telling and selling strategies are all about getting the task done. Participating and delegating styles are about developing relationships and empowering group members to get the job done. Each style or approach is best suited, according to Hersey and Blanchard, Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. H. (1977). Management of Organizational Behavior 3rd Edition—Utilizing Human Resources. New Jersey/Prentice Hall. to a specific context. Again, assessing a context can be a challenging task but they indicate the focus should be on the maturity of the group members. It is a responsibility of the leader to assess the group members and the degree to which they possess the maturity to work independently or together effective, including whether they have the right combination of skills and abilities that the task requires. Once again, they offer us four distinct levels (abbreviated with "M" for maturity):

1. **M1, or level one**. This is the most basic level where group members lack the skills, prior knowledge, skills, or self-confidence to accomplish the task effectively. They need specific directions, and systems of rewards and punishment (for failure) may be featured. They will need external motivation from the leader to accomplish the task.
2. **M2, or level two**. At this level the group members may possess the motivation, or the skills and abilities, but not both. They may need specific, additional instructions or may require external motivation to accomplish the task.
3. **M3, or level three**. In this level we can observe group members who are ready to accomplish the task, are willing to participate, but may lack confidence or direct experience, requiring external reinforcement and some supervision.
4. **M4, or level four**. Finally we can observe group members that are ready, prepared, willing, and confident in their ability to solve the challenge or complete the task. They require little supervision.

Now it is our task to match the style or leadership strategy to the maturity level of the group members as shown in Table 4.7.1.2 "Situational Leadership: Leadership Style and Maturity Level".

Table 4.7.1.2: Situational Leadership: Leadership Style and Maturity Level

	Leadership Style (S)	Maturity Level (M)
1	S1	M1
2	S2	M2
3	S3	M3

	Leadership Style (S)	Maturity Level (M)
4	S4	M4

This is one approach to situational leadership that applies to our exploration of group communication, but it doesn't represent all approaches. What other factors might you consider other than style and maturity? How might we assess diversity, for example, in this approach? We might have a skilled professional who speaks English as their second language, and who comes from a culture where constant supervision is viewed as controlling or domineering, and if a leader takes a S1 approach to provide leadership, we can anticipate miscommunication and even frustration. There is no "One Size Fits All" leadership approach that works for every context, but the situational leadership viewpoint reminds us of the importance of being in the moment and assessing our surroundings, including our group members and their relative strengths and areas of emerging skill. The effective group communicator recognizes the Hersey-Blanchard approach provides insight and possible solutions to consider, but also keeps the complexity of the context in mind when considering a course of action.

Our third approach to consider is called functional leadership, or leadership that focused on behaviors that address needs and help the group achieve its goals. Hackman, J. R., & Walton, R. E. (1986). Leading groups in organizations. In P. S. Goodman (Ed.), Designing effective work groups (pp. 72–119). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass., McGrath, J. E. (1962). Leadership behavior: Some requirements for leadership training. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Civil Service Commission., Adair, J. (1988). Effective Leadership. London. Pan Books., Kouzes, J. M. and Posner, B. Z. (2002). The leadership challenge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. The leader needs to assess needs, including task, team, and individual group member needs. Balance and performance are emphasized, and the time the leader spends on a specific approach varies based on their assessment of the area of need. The highest priority is completion of the task in this approach, but it is balanced against team and individual group member needs. Each activity or approach targets each area of need, and the leader focuses on it emphasize the area, alternating their time on any given activity based on the existing needs.

Table 4.7.1.3: Functional Leadership

	Task Need	Team Need	Individual Need
1	Assessing the situation	Training	Training and Coaching
2	Understanding the task	Building team spirit	Recognizing individual skills and abilities; leveraging them on the task
3	Preparing the plan to address the task	Focus on the mission; sense of purpose	Focus on the mission; sense of purpose
4	Implementing the plan addressing the task	Motivation, praise, and rewards	Motivation, praise, and rewards
5	Allocating time and resources to the task	Focus on the tempo or pace of performance	Fostering interdependence while respecting individual performance, including roles and tasks
6	Re-evaluating the plan and making adjustments	Status recognition or performance acknowledgement	Status recognition or performance acknowledgement

	Task Need	Team Need	Individual Need
7	Understanding Quality Standards	Discipline, including sanctions and punishment	Attending to personal problems
8	Quality control	Quality Control	Individual output
9	Evaluating outcomes	Redirection, review of the action plan	Individual role and task review
10	Sharing the outcomes (Communication)	Facilitating group interactions (Communication)	Individual interaction (Communication)

As we can see in Table 4.7.1.3 "Functional Leadership", the functional leader focuses on the short and long term needs of the group. If the group is lost, perhaps time invested in re-evaluating the plan and making adjustments, meeting a task and a team need at the same time, might prove effective. If an individual group member is struggling, perhaps supportive coaching and even additional training might yield results. Based on the leader's assessment of the needs, they will select the appropriate action and maintain a priority order. They will also be constantly attuned to change, ready to adapt and meet the ever-changing needs of the task, team, or individual.

Our final approach to consider, called transformational leadership, emphasizes the vision, mission, motivations, and goals of a group or team and motivates them to accomplish the task or achieve the result. This model of leadership asserts that people will follow a person who inspires them, who clearly communicates their vision with passion, and helps get things done with energy and enthusiasm.

James MacGregor Burns, a presidential biographer, first introduced the concept, discussing the dynamic relationship between the leader and the followers, as they together motivate and advance towards the goal or objective. Burns contributed to his theory, suggesting there are four key components of transformation leadership, as shown in Table 4.7.1.4 "Four Key Components of Transformational Leadership".

Table 4.7.1.4: Four Key Components of Transformational Leadership

	Component of Transformational Leadership	Explanation
1	Intellectual Stimulation	Transformational leaders encourage creativity and ingenuity, challenging the status quo and encouraging followers to explore new approaches and opportunities.
2	Individualized Consideration	Transformational Leaders recognize and celebrate each follower's unique contributions to the group.
3	Inspirational Motivation	Transformational Leaders communicate a clear vision, helping followers understand the individual steps necessary to accomplish the task or objective while sharing in the anticipation of completion.

	Component of Transformational Leadership	Explanation
4	Idealized Influence	Transformational Leaders serve as role models, demonstrating expertise, skills, and talent that others seek to emulate, inspiring positive actions while reinforcing trust and respect.

The leader conveys the group's goals and aspirations, displays passion for the challenge that lies ahead, and demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm that motivates group members to succeed. This approach focuses on the positive changes that need to occur in order for the group to be successful, and requires the leader to be energetic and involved with the process, even helping individual members complete their respective roles or tasks.

In this section we have discussed leadership traits, situational leadership, functional leadership, and finally transformative leadership theories. We can recognize that there are no universal traits associated with leadership, but there are traits that are associated with it that we develop across time through our experiences. We can also recognize that the context or situation makes a significant impact on leadership, and matching the situation to the leadership approach requires skill and expertise. Every challenge is unique in some way, and the effective leader can recognize that aligning their actions and support with the needs of the group makes sense. The functional perspective requires a leader to assess task needs, group needs, and individual needs, and then devote time, energy, and resources to them in priority order. Finally, a transformative leadership approach involves an articulate leader with a clear vision that is shared with energy and enthusiasm with followers, encouraging them to embrace the steps required as well as the end goal, objective, or mission result. Each approach offers us a viewpoint to consider as we approach leadership in teams, and all serve as important insights into how to better lead an effective group.

Key Takeaway

Leadership traits, situational leadership, functional leadership, and transformative leadership comprise four key approaches to leadership theory.

Exercises

1. Do you think natural leaders exist? Why or why not? Discuss your thoughts with classmates.
2. Describe a transformative leader that you know or have known in the past. How did they act and what did they do that was inspirational? Write a 2–3 paragraph discussion of your experience and share it with a classmate.
3. Think of a leader you admire and respect. Which approach do they best represent (traits, situational, functional, or transformative) and why? How would you characterize this leader's style and why? Please share your observations with your classmates.

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4.7.2: Contemporary Approaches to Leadership

Learning Objectives

- Learn about the difference between transformational and transactional leaders.
- Find out about charismatic leadership and how it relates to leader performance.
- Describe how high-quality leader-subordinate relationships develop.
- Define servant leadership and evaluate its potential for leadership effectiveness.
- Define authentic leadership and evaluate its potential for leadership effectiveness.

In 7.1 we discussed the fundamentals of leadership. This section provides a more contemporary look at what leadership theories make the greatest contributions to today's business environment? In this section, we will review the most recent developments in the field of leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory is a recent addition to the literature, but more research has been conducted on this theory than all the contingency theories combined. The theory distinguishes between transformational and transactional leaders. Transformational leaders lead employees by aligning employee goals with the leader's goals. Thus, employees working for transformational leaders start focusing on the company's well-being rather than on what is best for them as individual employees. However, transactional leaders ensure that employees demonstrate the right behaviors because the leader provides resources in exchange.

Transformational leaders have four tools in their possession, which they use to influence employees and create commitment to the company goals. First, transformational leaders are charismatic. Charisma refers to behaviors leaders demonstrate that inspire confidence, commitment, and admiration toward the leader. Charismatic individuals have a "magnetic" personality that is appealing to followers. Leaders such as Barack Obama, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Mahatma Gandhi, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (founder of the Republic of Turkey), and Winston Churchill are viewed as charismatic. Second, transformational leaders use inspirational motivation or come up with a vision that is inspiring to others. Third is the use of intellectual stimulation, which means that they challenge organizational norms and status quo, and they encourage employees to think creatively and work harder. Finally, they use individualized consideration, which means that they show personal care and concern for the well-being of their followers. Examples of transformational business leaders include Steve Jobs of Apple; Lee Iacocca, who transformed Chrysler in the 1980s; and Jack Welch, who was the CEO of General Electric for 20 years. Each of these leaders is charismatic and is held responsible for the turnarounds of their companies.

While transformational leaders rely on their charisma, persuasiveness, and personal appeal to change and inspire their companies, transactional leaders use three other methods. Contingent rewards mean rewarding employees for their accomplishments. Active management by exception involves leaving employees to do their jobs without interference, but at the same time proactively predicting potential problems and preventing them from occurring. Passive management by exception is similar in that it involves leaving employees alone, but in this method, the manager waits until something goes wrong before coming to the rescue.

Which leadership style do you think is more effective, transformational or transactional? Research shows that transformational leadership is a powerful influence over leader effectiveness as well as employee satisfaction. In fact, transformational leaders increase the intrinsic motivation of their followers, build more effective relationships with employees, increase performance and creativity of their followers, increase team performance, and create higher levels of commitment to organizational change efforts. However, except for passive management by exception, the transactional leadership styles are also effective, and they also have positive influences over leader performance as well as employee attitudes. To maximize their effectiveness, leaders are encouraged to demonstrate both transformational and transactional styles. They should also monitor themselves to avoid demonstrating passive management by exception or leaving employees to their own devices until problems arise.

Why is transformational leadership more effective? The key factor may be trust. Trust is the belief that the leader will show integrity, fairness, and predictability in his or her dealings with others. Research shows that when leaders demonstrate transformational leadership behaviors, followers are more likely to trust the leader. The tendency to trust in transactional leaders

is substantially lower. Because transformational leaders express greater levels of concern for people's well-being, and appeal to people's values, followers are more likely to believe that the leader has a trustworthy character.

Is transformational leadership genetic? Some people assume that charisma is something people are born with. You either have charisma or you don't. However, research does not support this idea. We must acknowledge that there is a connection between some personality traits and charisma. Specifically, people who have a neurotic personality tend to demonstrate lower levels of charisma, and people who are extraverted tend to have higher levels of charisma. However, personality explains only around 10% of the variance in charisma. A large body of research has shown that it is possible to train people to increase their charisma and increase their transformational leadership.



Figure 4.7.2.1 Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Turkish Republic and its first president, is known as a charismatic leader. He is widely admired and respected in Turkey and around the world. His picture appears in all schools, state buildings, denominations of Turkish lira, and in many people's homes in Turkey. Image is in the public domain.

Even if charisma may be teachable, a more fundamental question remains: is it really needed? Charisma is only one element of transformational leadership and leaders can be effective without charisma. In fact, charisma has a dark side. For every charismatic hero such as Lee Iacocca, Steve Jobs, and Virgin's Sir Richard Branson, there are charismatic personalities who harmed their organizations or nations, such as Adolph Hitler of Germany and Jeff Skilling of Enron. Leadership experts warn that when organizations are in a crisis, a board of directors or hiring manager may turn to heroes who they hope will save the organization and sometimes hire people who have no other particular qualifications outside of perceived charisma.

An interesting study shows that when companies have performed well, their CEOs are perceived as charismatic, but CEO charisma has no relation to the future performance of a company. So, what we view as someone's charisma may be largely because of their association with a successful company, and the success of a company depends on a large set of factors, including industry effects and historical performance. While it is true that charismatic leaders may sometimes achieve great results, the search for charismatic leaders under all circumstances may be irrational.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory proposes that the type of relationship leaders have with their followers (members of the organization) is the key to understanding how leaders influence employees. Leaders form different types of relationships with their employees. In high-quality LMX relationships, the leader forms a trust-based relationship with the member. The leader and member like each other, help each other when needed, and respect one another. In these relationships, the leader and the member are both ready to go above and beyond their job descriptions to promote the other's ability to succeed. In contrast, in low-quality LMX relationships, the leader and the member have lower levels of trust, liking, and respect toward each other. These relationships do not have to involve actively disliking each other, but the leader and member do not go beyond their formal job descriptions in their exchanges. In other words, the member does his or her job, the leader provides rewards and punishments, and the relationship does not involve high levels of loyalty or obligation toward each other.

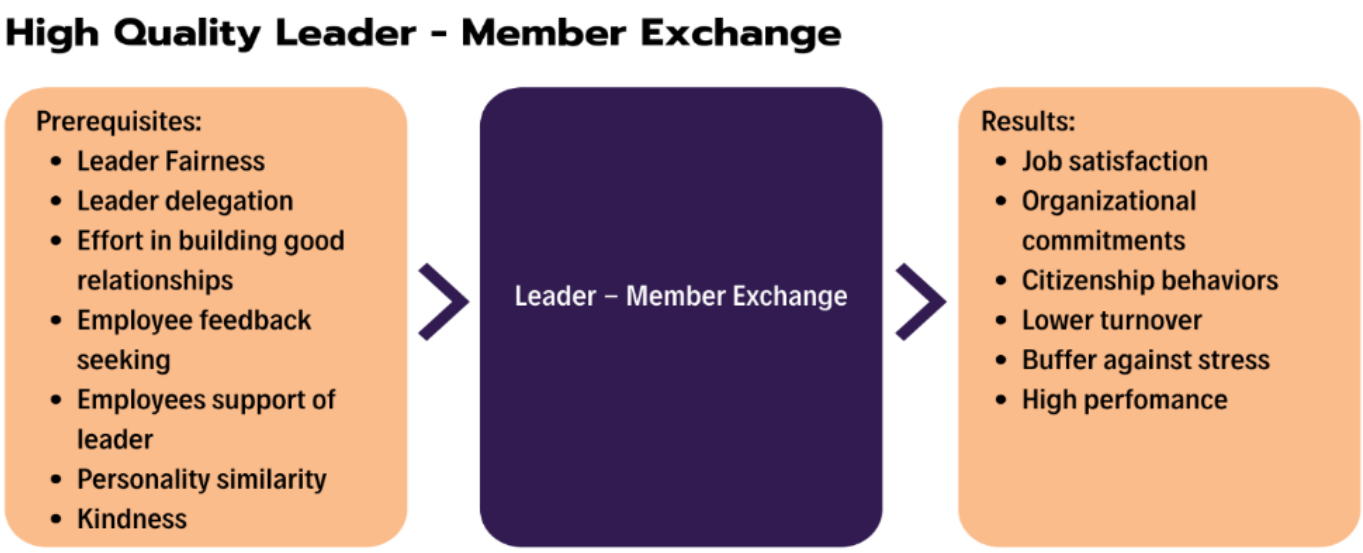


Figure 4.7.2.2 Factors Contributing to the Development of a High-Quality Leader-Member Exchange. Image by Trudi Radtke is under a CC-BY 4.0 license.

If you have work experience, you may have witnessed the different types of relationships managers form with their employees. In fact, many leaders end up developing differentiated relationships with their followers. Within the same work group, they may have in-group members who are close to them and out-group members who are more distant. If you have ever been in a high-quality LMX relationship with your manager, you may attest to its advantages. Research shows that high-quality LMX members are more satisfied with their jobs, more committed to their companies, have higher levels of clarity about what is expected of them, and perform at a higher level. Because of all the help, support, and guidance they receive, those employees who have a good relationship with the manager are in a better position to perform well. Given all they receive, these employees are motivated to reciprocate to the manager, and therefore they demonstrate higher levels of citizenship behaviors such as helping the leader and coworkers. Being in a high-quality LMX relationship is also advantageous because a high-quality relationship is a buffer against many stressors, such as being a misfit in a company, having personality traits that do not match job demands, and having unmet expectations. The list of benefits high-quality LMX employees receive is long, and it is not surprising that these employees are less likely to leave their jobs.

The problem, of course, is that not all employees have a high-quality relationship, and those who are in the leader's out-group may suffer as a result. But how do you end up developing such a high-quality relationship with the leader? That seems to depend on many factors. Managers can help develop such a high-quality and trust-based relationship by treating their employees in a fair and dignified manner. They can also test to see whether the employee is trustworthy by delegating certain tasks when the employee first starts working with the manager. Employees also have an active role in developing the relationship. Employees can seek feedback to improve their performance, be open to learning new things on the job, and engage in political behaviors such as flattery.

Interestingly, high performance on the employee's part does not seem to be enough to develop a high-quality exchange with the leader. Instead, interpersonal factors such as personality similarity and liking are more powerful influences over how the relationship develops. Finally, the relationship development occurs in a slightly different manner in different types of companies; corporate culture matters in how leaders develop these relationships. In performance-oriented cultures, how the leader distributes rewards seem to be the relevant factor, whereas in people-oriented cultures, whether the leader treats people with dignity is more relevant.

Should you worry if you do not have a high-quality relationship with your manager? One problem in a low-quality exchange is that you may not have access to the positive work environment available to the high-quality LMX members. Second, low LMX employees may feel that their situation is unfair. Even when their objective performance does not warrant it, those who have a good relationship with the leader tend to receive positive performance appraisals. Moreover, they are more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt. For example, when they succeed, the manager is more likely to think that they succeeded because they put forth a lot of effort and they had high abilities, whereas for low LMX members who perform objectively well, the manager is less likely to think so. In other words, the leader may interpret the same situation differently, depending on which employee is involved and may reward low LMX employees less even when they are performing well. In short, those with a low-quality relationship with the leader may experience a work environment that may not be very supportive or fair.

Despite its negative consequences, we cannot say that all employees want to have a high-quality relationship with the leader. Some employees may genuinely dislike the leader and may not value the rewards in the leader's possession. If the leader is not well liked in the company and is known as abusive or unethical, being close to such a person may imply guilt by association. For employees who have no interest in advancing their careers in the current company (such as a student employee who is working in retail but has no interest in retail as a career), having a low-quality exchange may afford the opportunity to just do one's job without having to go above and beyond these job requirements. Finally, not all leaders are equally capable of influencing their employees by having a good relationship with their employees: It also depends on the power and influence of the leader in the overall company and how the leader himself or herself is treated within the company. Leaders who are more powerful will have more to share with employees who are close to them.

What LMX theory implies for leaders is that one way of influencing employees is through the types of relationships leaders form with their employees. These relationships develop naturally because of the work-related and personal interactions between the manager and the employee. Because they occur naturally, some leaders may not be aware of the power that lies in them. These relationships have an important influence over employee attitudes and behaviors. In the worst case, they have the potential to create a negative work environment characterized by favoritism and unfairness. Therefore, managers are advised to be aware of how they build these relationships; put forth effort in cultivating these relationships consciously; be open to forming good relationships to people from all backgrounds regardless of their permanent characteristics such as sex, race, age, or disability status; and prevent these relationships from leading to an unfair work environment.

Self-Assessment: Rate Your LMX

Answer the following questions using 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = fully agree

1. _____ I like my supervisor very much as a person.
2. _____ My supervisor is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend.
3. _____ My supervisor is a lot of fun to work with.
4. _____ My supervisor defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.
5. _____ My supervisor would come to my defense if I were "attacked" by others.
6. _____ My supervisor would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake.
7. _____ I do work for my supervisor that goes beyond what is specified in my job description.
8. _____ I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to further the interests of my work group.
9. _____ I do not mind working my hardest for my supervisor.
10. _____ I am impressed with my supervisor's knowledge of his/her job.
11. _____ I respect my supervisor's knowledge of and competence on the job.
12. _____ I admire my supervisor's professional skills.

Scoring:

Add your score for 1, 2, 3 = _____ This is your score on the Liking factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of liking. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of liking. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of liking.

Add your score for 4, 5, 6 = _____ This is your score on the Loyalty factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of loyalty. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of loyalty. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of loyalty.

Add your score for 7, 8, 9 = _____ This is your score on the Contribution factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of contribution. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of contribution. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of contribution.

Add your score for 10, 11, 12 = _____ This is your score on the Professional Respect factor of LMX.

A score of 3 to 4 indicates a low LMX in terms of professional respect. A score of 5 to 6 indicates an average LMX in terms of professional respect. A score of 7+ indicates a high-quality LMX in terms of professional respect.

Servant Leadership

The early 21st century has been marked by a series of highly publicized corporate ethics scandals: between 2000 and 2003, we witnessed Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen, Qwest, and Global Crossing shake investor confidence in corporations and leaders. The importance of ethical leadership and keeping long-term interests of stakeholders in mind is becoming more widely acknowledged.

Servant leadership approach defines the leader's role as serving the needs of others. According to this approach, the primary mission of the leader is to develop employees and help them reach their goals. Servant leaders put their employees first, understand their personal needs and desires, empower them, and help them develop in their careers. Unlike mainstream management approaches, the overriding objective in servant leadership is not necessarily getting employees to contribute to organizational goals. Instead, servant leaders feel an obligation to their employees, customers, and the external community. Employee happiness is seen as an end in itself, and servant leaders sometimes sacrifice their own well-being to help employees succeed. In addition to a clear focus on having a moral compass, servant leaders are also interested in serving the community. In other words, their efforts to help others are not restricted to company insiders, and they are genuinely concerned about the broader community surrounding their company.

Even though servant leadership has some overlap with other leadership approaches such as transformational leadership, its explicit focus on ethics, community development, and self-sacrifice are distinct characteristics of this leadership style. Research shows that servant leadership has a positive effect on employee commitment, employee citizenship behaviors toward the community (such as participating in community volunteering), and job performance. Leaders who follow the servant leadership approach create a climate of fairness in their departments, which leads to higher levels of interpersonal helping behavior. Servant leadership is a tough transition for many managers who are socialized to put their own needs first, be driven by success, and tell people what to do. In fact, many of today's corporate leaders are not known for their humility! However, leaders who have adopted this approach attest to its effectiveness. David Wolfskehl, of Action Fast Print in New Jersey, founded his printing company when he was 24. He marks the day he started asking employees what he can do for them as the beginning of his company's new culture. In the next two years, his company increased its productivity by 30%.

Authentic Leadership

Leaders have to be a lot of things to a lot of people. They operate within different structures, work with different types of people, and they have to be adaptable. At times, it may seem that a leader's smartest strategy would be to act as a social chameleon, changing his or her style whenever doing so seems advantageous. But this would lose sight of the fact that effective leaders have to stay true to themselves. The authentic leadership approach embraces this value: its key advice is "be yourself." Think about it: We all have different backgrounds, different life experiences, and different role models. These trigger events over the course of our lifetime that shape our values, preferences, and priorities. Instead of trying to fit into societal expectations about what a leader should be like, act like, or look like, authentic leaders derive their strength from their own past experiences. Thus, one key characteristic of authentic leaders is that they are self-aware. They are introspective, understand where they are coming from, and have a thorough understanding of their own values and priorities. Second, they are not afraid to act the way they are. In other words, they have high levels of personal integrity. They say what they think. They behave in a way consistent with their values—they practice what they preach. Instead of trying to imitate other great leaders, they find their style in their own personality and life experiences.

One example of an authentic leader is Martin Luther King Jr., one of the leaders of the American civil rights movement. Dr. King led by example and was not afraid to practice what he preached, even to the point of being arrested for his message of equality.

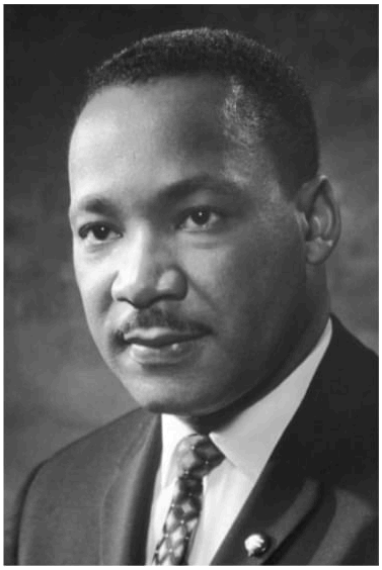


Figure 4.7.2.3 An example of an authentic leader is Martin Luther King Jr., the great civil rights leader. Martin Luther understood that quality leadership required humility, intelligence, self-confidence, self-awareness, and determination. Image is in the public domain.

Authentic leadership requires understanding oneself. Therefore, in addition to self-reflection, feedback from others is needed to gain a true understanding of one's behavior and effect on others. Authentic leadership is viewed as a potentially influential style because individuals are more likely to trust such a leader. Moreover, working for authentic leaders is likely to lead to greater levels of satisfaction, performance, and overall well-being on the part of employees. Best-selling author Jim Collins studied companies that had, in his opinion, gone from good to great, and he found they had one thing in common. All of these companies had what he calls Level 5 leaders who build organizations through their personal humility and professional will. He notes that Level 5 leaders are modest and understated. In many ways, they can be seen as truly authentic leaders.

Key Takeaway

Contemporary approaches to leadership include transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, servant leadership, and authentic leadership. The transformational leadership approach highlights the importance of leader charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration as methods of influence. Its counterpart is the transactional leadership approach, in which the leader focuses on getting employees to achieve organizational goals. According to leader-member exchange (LMX) approach, the unique, trust-based relationships leaders develop with employees is the key to leadership effectiveness. Recently, leadership scholars started to emphasize the importance of serving others and adopting a customer-oriented view in leadership; another recent focus is on the importance of being true to oneself as a leader. While each leadership approach focuses on a different element of leadership, effective leaders will need to change their style based on the demands of the situation as well as using their own values and moral compass.

Exercises

1. What are the characteristics of transformational leaders? Are transformational leaders more effective than transactional leaders?
2. What is charisma? What are the advantages and disadvantages of charismatic leadership? Should organizations look for charismatic leaders when selecting managers?
3. What are the differences (if any) between a leader having a high-quality exchange with employees and being friends with employees?
4. What does it mean to be a servant leader? Do you know any leaders whose style resembles servant leaders? What are the advantages of adopting such a leadership style?
5. What does it mean to be an authentic leader? How would such a style be developed?

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4.8: Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

Learning Objectives

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

Although the steps of problem solving and decision making that we will discuss next may seem obvious, we often don't think to or choose not to use them. Instead, we start working on a problem and later realize we are lost and have to backtrack. I'm sure we've all reached a point in a project or task and had the "OK, now what?" moment. I've recently taken up some carpentry projects as a functional hobby, and I have developed a great respect for the importance of advanced planning. It's frustrating to get to a crucial point in building or fixing something only to realize that you have to unscrew a support board that you already screwed in, have to drive back to the hardware store to get something that you didn't think to get earlier, or have to completely start over. In this section, we will discuss the group problem-solving process, methods of decision making, and influences on these processes.

Group Problem Solving

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

Problems of all sorts have three common components:

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

Discussion of these three elements of a problem helps the group tailor its problem-solving process, as each problem will vary. While these three general elements are present in each problem, the group should also address specific characteristics of the problem. Five common and important characteristics to consider are task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in problem, group member familiarity with problem, and the need for solution acceptance. Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 222–23.

1. **Task difficulty**. Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing a difficult and complex task in order to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information.
2. **Number of possible solutions**. There are usually multiple ways to solve a problem or complete a task, but some problems have more potential solutions than others. Figuring out how to prepare a beach house for an approaching hurricane is fairly complex and difficult, but there are still a limited number of things to do—for example, taping and boarding up windows; turning off water, electricity, and gas; trimming trees; and securing loose outside objects. Other problems may be more creatively based. For example, designing a new restaurant may entail using some standard solutions but could also entail many different types of innovation with layout and design.
3. **Group member interest in problem**. When group members are interested in the problem, they will be more engaged with the problem-solving process and invested in finding a quality solution. Groups with high interest in and knowledge about the problem may want more freedom to develop and implement solutions, while groups with low interest may prefer a leader who

provides structure and direction.

4. **Group familiarity with problem.** Some groups encounter a problem regularly, while other problems are more unique or unexpected. A family who has lived in hurricane alley for decades probably has a better idea of how to prepare its house for a hurricane than does a family that just recently moved from the Midwest. Many groups that rely on funding have to revisit a budget every year, and in recent years, groups have had to get more creative with budgets as funding has been cut in nearly every sector. When group members aren't familiar with a problem, they will need to do background research on what similar groups have done and may also need to bring in outside experts.
5. **Need for solution acceptance.** In this step, groups must consider how many people the decision will affect and how much "buy-in" from others the group needs in order for their solution to be successfully implemented. Some small groups have many stakeholders on whom the success of a solution depends. Other groups are answerable only to themselves. When a small group is planning on building a new park in a crowded neighborhood or implementing a new policy in a large business, it can be very difficult to develop solutions that will be accepted by all. In such cases, groups will want to poll those who will be affected by the solution and may want to do a pilot implementation to see how people react. Imposing an excellent solution that doesn't have buy-in from stakeholders can still lead to failure.



Figure 4.8.1 To find group cohesion observe a marching band. Everyone works together and knows their role, acting in unison they make music that inspires their team. Image by Katrina Berban on Unsplash.

Group Problem-Solving Process

There are several variations of similar problem-solving models based on US American scholar John Dewey's reflective thinking process. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 1988), 112–13. As you read through the steps in the process, think about how you can apply what we learned regarding the general and specific elements of problems. Some of the following steps are straightforward, and they are things we would logically do when faced with a problem. However, taking a deliberate and systematic approach to problem solving has been shown to benefit group functioning and performance. A deliberate approach is especially beneficial for groups that do not have an established history of working together and will only be able to meet occasionally. Although a group should attend to each step of the process, group leaders or other group members who facilitate problem solving should be cautious not to dogmatically follow each element of the process or force a group along. Such a lack of flexibility could limit group member input and negatively affect the group's cohesion and climate.

Step 1: Define the Problem

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way. Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 229. At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some good questions to ask during this stage: What is the current difficulty? How did we come to know that the difficulty exists? Who/what is involved? Why is it meaningful/urgent/important? What have the effects been so far? What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification?

At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a problem statement. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of city officials could use the following problem statement: “Our state does not currently have a mechanism for citizens to report suspected ethical violations by city officials.”

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

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

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

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

Step 4: Evaluate Solutions

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

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

Step 5: Implement and Assess the Solution

Implementing the solution requires some advanced planning, and it should not be rushed unless the group is operating under strict time restraints or delay may lead to some kind of harm. Although some solutions can be implemented immediately, others may take days, months, or years. As was noted earlier, it may be beneficial for groups to poll those who will be affected by the

solution as to their opinion of it or even to do a pilot test to observe the effectiveness of the solution and how people react to it. Before implementation, groups should also determine how and when they would assess the effectiveness of the solution by asking, “How will we know if the solution is working or not?” Since solution assessment will vary based on whether or not the group is disbanded, groups should also consider the following questions: If the group disbands after implementation, who will be responsible for assessing the solution? If the solution fails, will the same group reconvene or will a new group be formed?



Figure 4.8.2 Once a solution has been reached and the group has the “green light” to implement it, it should proceed deliberately and cautiously, making sure to consider possible consequences and address them as needed. Image by Harshal Desai on Unsplash.

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

“Getting Competent” - Problem Solving and Group Presentations

Giving a group presentation requires that individual group members and the group as a whole solve many problems and make many decisions. Although having more people involved in a presentation increases logistical difficulties and has the potential to create more conflict, a well-prepared and well-delivered group presentation can be more engaging and effective than a typical presentation. The main problems facing a group giving a presentation are (1) dividing responsibilities, (2) coordinating schedules and time management, and (3) working out the logistics of the presentation delivery.

In terms of dividing responsibilities, assigning individual work at the first meeting and then trying to fit it all together before the presentation (which is what many college students do when faced with a group project) is not the recommended method. Integrating content and visual aids created by several different people into a seamless final product takes time and effort, and the person “stuck” with this job at the end usually ends up developing some resentment toward his or her group members. While it’s OK for group members to do work independently outside of group meetings, spend time working together to help set up some standards for content and formatting expectations that will help make later integration of work easier. Taking the time to complete one part of the presentation together can help set those standards for later individual work. Discuss the roles that various group members will play openly so there isn’t role confusion. There could be one point person for keeping track of the group’s progress and schedule, one point person for communication, one point person for content integration, one point person for visual aids, and so on. Each person shouldn’t do all that work on his or her own but help focus the group’s attention on his or her specific area during group meetings. Chaunce Stanton, “How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach,” Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills, November 3, 2009, accessed August 28, 2012, http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/group-presentations-unified-team-approach.

Scheduling group meetings is one of the most challenging problems groups face, given people’s busy lives. From the beginning, it should be clearly communicated that the group needs to spend considerable time in face-to-face meetings, and group members

should know that they may have to make an occasional sacrifice to attend. Especially important is the commitment to scheduling time to rehearse the presentation. Consider creating a contract of group guidelines that includes expectations for meeting attendance to increase group members' commitment.

Group presentations require members to navigate many logistics of their presentation. While it may be easier for a group to assign each member to create a five-minute segment and then transition from one person to the next, this is definitely not the most engaging method. Creating a master presentation and then assigning individual speakers creates a more fluid and dynamic presentation and allows everyone to become familiar with the content, which can help if a person doesn't show up to present and during the question-and-answer section. Once the content of the presentation is complete, figure out introductions, transitions, visual aids, and the use of time and space. Chaunce Stanton, "How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach," Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills, November 3, 2009, accessed August 28, 2012, http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/group-presentations-unified-team-approach. In terms of introductions, figure out if one person will introduce all the speakers at the beginning, if speakers will introduce themselves at the beginning, or if introductions will occur as the presentation progresses. In terms of transitions, make sure each person has included in his or her speaking notes when presentation duties switch from one person to the next. Visual aids have the potential to cause hiccups in a group presentation if they aren't fluidly integrated. Practicing with visual aids and having one person control them may help prevent this. Know how long your presentation is and know how you're going to use the space. Presenters should know how long the whole presentation should be and how long each of their segments should be so that everyone can share the responsibility of keeping time. Also consider the size and layout of the presentation space. You don't want presenters huddled in a corner until it's their turn to speak or trapped behind furniture when their turn comes around.

1. Of the three main problems facing group presenters, which do you think is the most challenging and why?
2. Why do you think people tasked with a group presentation (especially students) prefer to divide the parts up and have members work on them independently before coming back together and integrating each part? What problems emerge from this method? In what ways might developing a master presentation and then assigning parts to different speakers be better than the more divided method? What are the drawbacks to the master presentation method?

Decision Making in Groups

We all engage in personal decision making daily, and we all know that some decisions are more difficult than others. When we make decisions in groups, we face some challenges that we do not face in our personal decision making, but we also stand to benefit from some advantages of group decision making. Rodney W. Napier and Matti K. Gershenfeld, Groups: Theory and Experience, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 292. Group decision making can appear fair and democratic but really only be a gesture that covers up the fact that certain group members or the group leader have already decided. Group decision making also takes more time than individual decisions and can be burdensome if some group members do not do their assigned work, divert the group with self-centered or unproductive role behaviors, or miss meetings. Conversely, though, group decisions are often more informed, since all group members develop a shared understanding of a problem through discussion and debate. The shared understanding may also be more complex and deep than what an individual would develop, because the group members are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that can broaden their own perspectives. Group decisions also benefit from synergy, one of the key advantages of group communication that we discussed earlier. Most groups do not use a specific method of decision making, perhaps thinking that they'll work things out as they go. This can lead to unequal participation, social loafing, premature decisions, prolonged discussion, and a host of other negative consequences. So in this section we will learn some practices that will prepare us for good decision making and some specific techniques we can use to help us reach a final decision.

Brainstorming before Decision Making

Before groups can make a decision, they need to generate possible solutions to their problem. The most commonly used method is brainstorming, although most people don't follow the recommended steps of brainstorming. As you'll recall, brainstorming refers to the quick generation of ideas free of evaluation. The originator of the term brainstorming said the following four rules must be followed for the technique to be effective:

1. Evaluation of ideas is forbidden.
2. Wild and crazy ideas are encouraged.
3. Quantity of ideas, not quality, is the goal.
4. New combinations of ideas presented are encouraged.

To make brainstorming more of a decision-making method rather than an idea-generating method, group communication

scholars have suggested additional steps that precede and follow brainstorming.

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

Discussion before Decision Making

The nominal group technique guides decision making through a four-step process that includes idea generation and evaluation and seeks to elicit equal contributions from all group members. Andre L. Delbecq and Andrew H. Ven de Ven, "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning," The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 7, no. 4 (1971): 466–92. This method is useful because the procedure involves all group members systematically, which fixes the problem of uneven participation during discussions. Since everyone contributes to the discussion, this method can also help reduce instances of social loafing. To use the nominal group technique, do the following:

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

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

During the second step, the facilitator goes around the group in a consistent order asking each person to share one idea at a time. As the idea is shared, the facilitator records it on a master list that everyone can see. Keep track of how many times each idea comes up, as that could be an idea that warrants more discussion. Continue this process until all the ideas have been shared. As a note to facilitators, some group members may begin to edit their list or self-censor when asked to provide one of their ideas. To limit a person's apprehension with sharing his or her ideas and to ensure that each idea is shared, I have asked group members to exchange lists with someone else so they can share ideas from the list they receive without fear of being personally judged.

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

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

Specific Decision-Making Techniques

Some decision-making techniques involve determining a course of action based on the level of agreement among the group

members. These methods include majority, expert, authority, and consensus rule. Table 8.1 reviews the pros and cons of each of these methods.



Figure 4.8.3 Majority rule is a simple method of decision making based on voting. In most cases a majority is considered half plus one. Image by Element5 Digital on Unsplash.

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

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

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

Table 4.8.1 Pros and Cons of Agreement-Based Decision-Making Techniques

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

"Getting Critical" - Six Hats Method of Decision Making

Edward de Bono developed the Six Hats method of thinking in the late 1980s, and it has since become a regular feature in decision-making training in business and professional contexts. Edward de Bono, Six Thinking Hats (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1985). The method's popularity lies in its ability to help people get out of habitual ways of thinking and to allow group members to play different roles and see a problem or decision from multiple points of view. The basic idea is that each of the six hats represents a different way of thinking, and when we figuratively switch hats, we switch the way we think. The hats and their style of thinking are as follows:

- **White hat**. Objective—focuses on seeking information such as data and facts and then processes that information in a neutral way.
- **Red hat**. Emotional—uses intuition, gut reactions, and feelings to judge information and suggestions.
- **Black hat**. Negative—focuses on potential risks, points out possibilities for failure, and evaluates information cautiously and defensively.
- **Yellow hat**. Positive—is optimistic about suggestions and future outcomes, gives constructive and positive feedback, points out benefits and advantages.
- **Green hat**. Creative—tries to generate new ideas and solutions, thinks "outside the box."
- **Blue hat**. Philosophical—uses meta-communication to organize and reflect on the thinking and communication taking place in the group, facilitates who wears what hat and when group members change hats.

Specific sequences or combinations of hats can be used to encourage strategic thinking. For example, the group leader may start off wearing the Blue Hat and suggest that the group start their decision-making process with some “White Hat thinking” in order to process through facts and other available information. During this stage, the group could also process through what other groups have done when faced with a similar problem. Then the leader could begin an evaluation sequence starting with two minutes of “Yellow Hat thinking” to identify potential positive outcomes, then “Black Hat thinking” to allow group members to express reservations about ideas and point out potential problems, then “Red Hat thinking” to get people’s gut reactions to the previous discussion, then “Green Hat thinking” to identify other possible solutions that are more tailored to the group’s situation or completely new approaches. At the end of a sequence, the Blue Hat would want to summarize what was said and begin a new sequence. To successfully use this method, the person wearing the Blue Hat should be familiar with different sequences and plan some of the thinking patterns ahead of time based on the problem and the group members. Each round of thinking should be limited to a certain time frame (two to five minutes) to keep the discussion moving.

1. This decision-making method has been praised because it allows group members to “switch gears” in their thinking and allows for role playing, which lets people express ideas more freely. How can this help enhance critical thinking? Which combination of hats do you think would be best for a critical thinking sequence?
2. What combinations of hats might be useful if the leader wanted to break the larger group up into pairs and why? For example, what kind of thinking would result from putting Yellow and Red together, Black and White together, or Red and White together, and so on?
3. Based on your preferred ways of thinking and your personality, which hat would be the best fit for you? Which would be the most challenging? Why?

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.



Figure 4.8.4 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. Image by Judith E. Bell is under a CC-BYSA 2.0 license.

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.

- 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.

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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Groups: Theory, Practice, Skills, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 139. 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 relational to task focus.

Cultural Context and Decision Making

Just like neighborhoods, schools, and countries, small groups vary in terms of their degree of similarity and difference. Demographic changes in the United States and increases in technology that can bring different people together make it more likely that we will be interacting in more and more heterogeneous groups. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 5. 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. Beth Bonniwell Haslett and Jenn Ruebush, "What Differences Do Individual Differences in Groups Make?: The Effects of Individuals, Culture, and Group Composition," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 133. 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. David C. Thomas, "Cultural Diversity and Work Group Effectiveness: An Experimental Study," Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 30, no. 2 (1999): 242–63. Unfortunately, groups often operate under time constraints and other pressures that make the possibility for intercultural dialogue and understanding difficult. The main disadvantage of heterogeneous groups is the possibility for conflict, but given that all groups experience conflict, this isn't solely due to the presence of diversity. We will now look more specifically at how some of the cultural value orientations we've learned about already in this book can play out in groups with international diversity and how domestic diversity in terms of demographics can also influence group decision making.

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.Beth Bonniwell Haslett and Jenn Ruebush, "What Differences Do Individual Differences in Groups Make?: The Effects of Individuals, Culture, and Group Composition," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 122.

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.Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 176. The current generations in the US workplace and consequently in work-based groups include the following:

- **The Silent Generation**. Born between 1925 and 1942, currently in their mid-sixties to mid-eighties, this is the smallest generation in the workforce right now, as many have retired or left for other reasons. This generation includes people who were born during the Great Depression or the early part of World War II, many of whom later fought in the Korean War. Gerald Clarke, "The Silent Generation Revisited," Time, June 29, 1970, 46.
- **The Baby Boomers**. Born between 1946 and 1964, currently in their late forties to mid-sixties, this is the largest generation in the workforce right now. Baby boomers are the most populous generation born in US history, and they are working longer than previous generations, which means they will remain the predominant force in organizations for ten to twenty more years.
- **Generation X**. Born between 1965 and 1981, currently in their early thirties to mid-forties, this generation was the first to see technology like cell phones and the Internet make its way into classrooms and our daily lives. Compared to previous generations, "Gen-Xers" are more diverse in terms of race, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation and also have a greater appreciation for and understanding of diversity.
- **Generation Y**. Born between 1982 and 2000, "Millennials" as they are also called are currently in their late teens up to about thirty years old. This generation is not as likely to remember a time without technology such as computers and cell phones. They are just starting to enter into the workforce and have been greatly affected by the economic crisis of the late 2000s, experiencing significantly high unemployment rates.

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.

Key Takeaways

- Every problem has common components: an undesirable situation, a desired situation, and obstacles between the undesirable and desirable situations. Every problem also has a set of characteristics that vary among problems, including task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in the problem, group familiarity with the problem, and the need for solution acceptance.
- The group problem-solving process has five steps:

    1. Define the problem by creating a problem statement that summarizes it.
    2. Analyze the problem and create a problem question that can guide solution generation.
    3. Generate possible solutions. Possible solutions should be offered and listed without stopping to evaluate each one.
    4. Evaluate the solutions based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Groups should also assess the potential effects of the narrowed list of solutions.
    5. Implement and assess the solution. Aside from enacting the solution, groups should determine how they will know the solution is working or not.

- Before a group makes a decision, it should brainstorm possible solutions. Group communication scholars suggest that groups (1) do a warm-up brainstorming session; (2) do an actual brainstorming session in which ideas are not evaluated, wild ideas are encouraged, quantity not quality of ideas is the goal, and new combinations of ideas are encouraged; (3) eliminate duplicate ideas; and (4) clarify, organize, and evaluate ideas. In order to guide the idea-generation process and invite equal participation from group members, the group may also elect to use the nominal group technique.
- Common decision-making techniques include majority rule, minority rule, and consensus rule. With majority rule, only a majority, usually one-half plus one, must agree before a decision is made. With minority rule, a designated authority or expert has final say over a decision, and the input of group members may or may not be invited or considered. With consensus rule, all members of the group must agree on the same decision.
- Several factors influence the decision-making process:
  - Situational factors include the degree of freedom a group has to make its own decisions, the level of uncertainty facing the group and its task, the size of the group, the group's access to information, and the origin and urgency of the problem.
  - Personality influences on decision making include a person's value orientation (economic, aesthetic, theoretical, political, or religious), and personality traits (dominant/submissive, friendly/unfriendly, and instrumental/emotional).
  - Cultural influences on decision making include the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the group makeup; cultural values and characteristics such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles; and gender and age differences.

Exercises

1. In terms of situational influences on group problem solving, task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group interest in problem, group familiarity with problem, and need for solution acceptance are five key variables discussed in this chapter. For each of the two following scenarios, discuss how the situational context created by these variables might affect the group's communication climate and the way it goes about addressing its problem.
   a. **Scenario 1**. Task difficulty is high, number of possible solutions is high, group interest in problem is high, group familiarity with problem is low, and need for solution acceptance is high.
   b. **Scenario 2**. Task difficulty is low, number of possible solutions is low, group interest in problem is low, group familiarity with problem is high, and need for solution acceptance is low.
2. Getting integrated: Certain decision-making techniques may work better than others in academic, professional, personal, or civic contexts. For each of the following scenarios, identify the decision-making technique that you think would be best and explain why.
   a. **Scenario 1**: Academic. A professor asks his or her class to decide whether the final exam should be an in-class or take-home exam.
   b. **Scenario 2**: Professional. A group of coworkers must decide which person from their department to nominate for a company-wide award.
   c. **Scenario 3**: Personal. A family needs to decide how to divide the belongings and estate of a deceased family member who did not leave a will.
   d. **Scenario 4**: Civic. A local branch of a political party needs to decide what five key issues it wants to include in the national party's platform.
3. Group communication researchers have found that heterogeneous groups (composed of diverse members) have advantages over homogenous (more similar) groups. Discuss a group situation you have been in where diversity enhanced your and/or the group's experience.

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5.1: RHETORICAL BASICS- CANNONS AND APPEALS

5.1.1: Five Canons of Rhetoric
5.1.2: Aristotle's Appeals
5.1.3: Putting it Together (Cannons and Appeals)

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5.1.1: Five Canons of Rhetoric

Learning Objectives

1. Define and describe the purpose and key components of each of the Five Canons of Rhetoric.
2. Explain the enduring relevance of the Five Canons as foundational guidelines for effective and ethical public speaking in contemporary contexts.

What are the Five Canons?

Cicero, the renowned Roman philosopher, senator, consul, and one of history's greatest orators, outlined five essential principles for creating and delivering powerful messages. These principles, known as the Five Canons of Rhetoric, are tried-and-true guidelines that remain highly relevant for anyone looking to communicate effectively today. They are: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery. In this chapter we will explore each one of these principles and their application to contemporary public speaking, specifically in persuasive contexts.


Figure 5.1.1.1 Marble bust of Cicero

Invention

Invention is the crucial first step in crafting any message. It's the process of finding, exploring, and developing all the materials you might want to include to make your communication as effective as possible. Cicero himself defined it as "the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause probable," which essentially means finding the very best ways to persuade your audience. This stage is often the most time-consuming because it requires deep thought. You need to have a clear purpose, truly understand your subject, and, most importantly, know your audience inside and out. This understanding will guide you in making many important choices:

- **Crafting Your Argument:** How can you best frame your ideas to be most persuasive to this specific audience? This involves identifying what arguments will resonate with them, what they care about, and what might move them.
- **Gathering Evidence:** What types of support will work best? You'll want to collect a variety of evidence, such as facts, statistics, relevant laws, expert opinions, anecdotes, or personal stories. Having diverse evidence is key, as different audiences are convinced by different things. Knowing your listeners helps you select the most credible and compelling proofs.
- **Considering Timing (Kairos):** Be mindful of the context and time limitations of your speech. The right message delivered at the wrong moment or in a rushed way can lose its impact. This also includes thinking about the opportune moment to present your message for maximum effect.

Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is a perfect illustration of how timing impacts invention. On that famous day in 1863, the main speaker, Edward Everett, delivered a two-hour address. Lincoln followed with a speech lasting less than five minutes. While the audience at the time might not have fully grasped its genius, Everett famously wrote to Lincoln, "*I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.*" Today, Lincoln's brief words are universally remembered, while Everett's lengthy oration is forgotten. This shows that the invention process isn't just about *what* you say, but *when* and *how concisely* you say it.


Figure 5.1.1.2 Abraham Lincoln

Examples of Invention 5.1.1.1

- A political candidate brainstorms the most important points to address in an upcoming debate, considering what will resonate with voters.
- Before writing an essay, a student free-writes ideas to explore different angles and find the strongest topic.
- A defense attorney prepares for a trial by listing all possible ways to counter the charges against their client, gathering facts and arguments.

Arrangement

Arrangement is the process of organizing your message in the most effective way for your audience. Just as a well-built house has a foundation, walls, and a roof, a persuasive speech needs a clear structure to be understood and impactful. Every effective speech should have three essential parts:

- **An Introduction:** To grab attention and set the stage.
- **A Body:** Where you present your main points and evidence.
- **A Conclusion:** To summarize and leave a lasting impression.

But arrangement goes beyond these basic parts. It also involves carefully deciding the order of your main points, how you group your supporting subpoints, and where you place specific details to achieve the greatest effect on your listeners.

Most Common Persuasive Organizational Speech Structures 5.1.1.2

For persuasive speeches in particular, there are several powerful organizational patterns you should consider during the arrangement stage:

- **Monroe's Motivated Sequence:** This five-step pattern is designed to move an audience to action.
    1. Attention: Grab the audience's interest.

2. Need: Show them a problem that needs to be solved.
3. Satisfaction: Present your solution to the problem.
4. Visualization: Help them imagine the benefits of your solution or the negative consequences of not adopting it.
5. Action: Tell them exactly what they need to do.

- **Problem-Solution:** A straightforward approach where you first describe a significant problem and then offer your proposed solution.
- **Problem-Cause-Solution:** This pattern digs deeper by not only identifying a problem and offering a solution but also thoroughly explaining the underlying causes of the problem.
- **Comparative Advantages:** If your audience already agrees there's a problem, this structure focuses on showing why your proposed solution is better than others. You present several solutions and highlight the unique benefits (advantages) of your preferred one.

Audience analysis is just as vital in arrangement as it is in invention. The way you structure your message should always consider who you're speaking to. For instance, a speaker might start with a compelling story or a surprising statistic to immediately capture their audience's attention and connect emotionally, rather than immediately diving into complex facts.

Many new speakers think they can skip the arrangement stage and just "wing it" when they deliver their speech. This is a common mistake! Arrangement is crucial. Spending time thoughtfully organizing your material provides a clear roadmap for what you will say and ensures your argument flows logically. This allows your audience to easily follow along and grasp your message, making your speech far more persuasive.

Example of Arrangement 5.1.1.3

1. Before giving a presentation, a student creates an outline to determine the most logical sequence for their main ideas and supporting details.
2. A defense attorney preparing for a major trial strategically decides the order in which to present evidence and arguments, aiming to build a compelling narrative for the jury.
3. A student preparing a presentation for a science fair carefully organizes their information and visuals on a poster board to lead viewers through their experiment's steps and findings clearly.

Style

Style is the stage where you make deliberate choices about the language you use in your speech, including specific word choice, sentence structures, and figures of speech. These choices are crucial because they shape the tone and overall impression of your message. It's vital that your chosen style perfectly fits the occasion and your audience.

In their article, *Classic Rhetoric 101-The Five Canons of Rhetoric Brett and Kate McKay* use an analogy to explain the importance of style in speech. They talk about two identical gifts, one wrapped in a beautiful box with a beautiful bow on top and the other wrapped in a crushed box and newspaper. Which one would you pick? While the gifts were identical, most people would pick the first one. They conclude with the wise lesson: " It doesn't matter how great your message is, if you don't wrap it up with style, people will probably ignore it in favor of a message that's packaged nicely." Some important points when considering the "packaging" include:

- **Speaking correctly** (think grammar and syntax)
- **Enunciating** with clarity
- **Clear and simple writing**, think of explaining complex ideas in such a way that an 8th grader can understand.
- **Using figures of speech** or colorful language to make your speech interesting to listen to.

Example of Style 5.1.1.4

Churchill's famous speech "We Shall Find on the Beaches" is due to its use of the figure of speech anaphora, repeating a keyword or phrase for impact:

"Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."


Figure 5.1.1.2 Winston Churchill

Memory

In ancient Greece and Rome, it was a strong expectation for orators to memorize their entire speeches and deliver them without notes. This was seen as a sign of dedication, intellect, and respect for the audience. Even today, speakers who present their messages from memory are often perceived as more credible, confident, and eloquent than those who rely heavily on notes. Think about the speakers you've personally heard: who seemed more engaging? Those who hid behind their notes, or those who spoke "from the heart" and made eye contact, connecting visually with natural body language?

While strict, word-for-word memorization might be less common or even discouraged in some modern contexts (to avoid sounding stiff or "scripted"), the canon of Memory is still incredibly important. It's not just about rote memorization; it's about committing your ideas to heart and making your speech memorable for your audience. Here's how to effectively apply the canon of Memory in your speech preparation:

- **Draw on Your Own Knowledge:** Begin by tapping into what you already know about your subject. This allows you to speak more naturally and confidently, establishing context and finding common ground with your audience without needing to look at notes.
- **Craft a Memorable Message:** Structure your speech in a way that helps your audience remember your key points. This might involve using vivid stories, incorporating humor, creating clear and easily digestible main points (like organizing into "three main reasons"), or using rhetorical devices that stick in the mind.
- **Internalize Your Speech (or Key Points):** Whether you memorize the entire speech or just your major points, the act of internalizing your content allows you to deliver it more fluidly. This frees you up to focus on making good eye contact, using natural gestures, and genuinely connecting with your audience—all crucial elements of the next canon, Delivery.

Examples of Memory 5.1.1.5

1. A political candidate thoroughly rehearses their speech so they can make direct eye contact with the audience and use effective body language, rather than relying on a teleprompter or script.
2. A student preparing for an academic conference presentation memorizes their major arguments and supporting evidence, allowing them to speak confidently and engage with the audience without reading directly from a paper.
3. A defense attorney internalizes the key points of her closing argument, enabling her to interact dynamically with the jurors and deliver a powerful, unhindered appeal.

Delivery

Delivery is the final canon and focuses on how you present your message to your audience. This involves all your nonverbal cues, which can either emphasize your message and make it powerful, or make it seem bland and forgettable. Your delivery includes your eye contact, gestures, posture, body movement, vocal volume, tone of voice, speech rate, clarity of articulation, and even your strategic use of pauses.

As Cicero himself noted, delivery holds "the sole and supreme power in oratory." Without it, even the most brilliant speaker can fail to impress, while a moderately skilled individual can shine. A great speech can be lost due to poor delivery, which can significantly harm a speaker's credibility *(ethos)*. Historical figures like the famous Greek speaker **Demosthenes** understood the importance of delivery. He reportedly practiced speaking with pebbles in his mouth to improve diction, ran to strengthen his voice, and delivered speeches over the roar of waves to build volume and projection.

To make your delivery effective, intentionally consider these aspects:

- **Vocal Variety:** Vary your volume, tone of voice, and speech rate to match the emotions and emphasis you're trying to convey.
- **Strategic Pauses:** Use silence to highlight key points, allow the audience to process information, or build anticipation.
- **Engaging Eye Contact:** Connect with your audience by making appropriate and consistent eye contact across the room.
- **Purposeful Body Language:** Be mindful of your posture, movement, and hand gestures. Use them to reinforce your message and show confidence, rather than distract.
- **Practice in Context:** Rehearse your speech in a setting similar to your actual presentation. This helps you make intentional choices about how you'll stand, move, and use gestures, ensuring a natural and impactful delivery.
- **Appropriate Attire:** Consider how your clothing affects your professional image and the audience's perception of your credibility for the specific occasion.

Examples of Delivery 5.1.1.6

As she delivers her speech, a political candidate speaks with energy and conviction, using a strong voice and deliberate hand gestures to emphasize her points.

1. At an academic conference, a student moves away from the podium and walks around the room as he delivers his paper, creating a more dynamic and engaging presentation.
2. During her closing argument, a defense attorney makes direct eye contact with each juror, using a calm yet firm tone to convey sincerity and conviction.

Exercises

1. Of Cicero's Five Canons (Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, Delivery), which do you feel you naturally excel at, and which presents the biggest challenge for you? How might intentionally focusing on improving your weaker canon change your approach to communication?
2. The chapter discusses how the Canon of Memory has evolved significantly in modern times due to teleprompters and notes. How do you see the other four canons (Invention, Arrangement, Style, Delivery) being adapted or utilized differently in today's digital age, especially with the rise of social media, online video content, or virtual presentations? Give specific examples for at least two canons.
3. Canon Deconstruction: Choose a a TED Talk and identify how the speaker utilized each one of the canons providing specific

examples from the talk.

Image References

Gardner, A., photographer. (1865) Abraham Lincoln, three-quarter length portrait, seated and holding his spectacles and a pencil. United States, 1865. [Feb. 5] [Photograph] Retrieved from the Library of Congress.

Liam Clarkson-Holborn. Cicero. CC BY-SA 4.0 , via Wikimedia Commons

United Nations Information Office, New York, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. Winston Churchill, 1942.

Adapted from:

McKay, B., & McKay, K. (2011, January 26). Classical rhetoric 101: The five canons of rhetoric: Invention. The Art of Manliness.

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5.1.2: Aristotle's Appeals



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Persuasion Through Different Lenses

More than 2,000 years ago, thinkers like Aristotle and Cicero developed influential ideas about persuasion that continue to shape how public speaking is taught today. Their appeals and canons give speakers practical tools for developing, organizing, and delivering persuasive messages.

But these classical Western traditions are only part of the story. Cultures around the world have developed different ways of thinking about credibility, argument, storytelling, relationships, and the role of the audience. Understanding several rhetorical traditions gives us a broader view of what persuasion can look like.

Aristotle's Three Appeals

More than 2,000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that effective persuasion depends on balancing three types of appeals: ethos, logos, and pathos (Beebe & Beebe, 2023). While speakers often favor one appeal over the others, the strongest persuasive messages typically combine all three. Audiences want to know that a speaker is credible, that the argument makes sense, and that the issue matters on a human level.

Imagine a student proposing a Student Wellness Initiative that includes food trucks, napping pods, exercise rooms, and meditation spaces. The speaker builds ethos by researching successful programs at other colleges, uses logos by presenting studies linking student well-being to academic success and retention, and appeals to pathos by asking the audience to imagine a campus where students feel less stressed, more connected, and excited to spend time between classes. Together, these appeals make the proposal more persuasive than relying on facts, emotions, or credibility alone.

Ethos: Credibility and Trust

Ethos refers to a speaker's credibility, character, and trustworthiness. Audiences are more likely to listen to speakers they view as knowledgeable, honest, and ethical. Ethos can come from personal experience, expertise, research, preparation, or the way a speaker presents themselves.

Example: A community college student transferring to a UC can strengthen ethos by citing accurate statistics on transfer rates and sharing their own experience navigating the transfer process. In the workplace, a young professional might build ethos by

demonstrating expertise while also showing respect for colleagues' perspectives.

Importantly, ethos is not just about credentials. A speaker who appears prepared, fair-minded, and genuine can often build credibility even without formal expertise. Building ethos takes time, but it can be lost quickly if a speaker exaggerates, misrepresents evidence, or appears untrustworthy.

Logos: Logic and Evidence

Logos refers to the use of logic, evidence, and reasoning to support an argument. Speakers use facts, statistics, examples, expert testimony, and cause-and-effect reasoning to help audiences understand why a claim makes sense.

Example: A student arguing for a Student Wellness Initiative might present research showing that exercise improves academic performance, that stress is a major barrier to student success, and that colleges with wellness programs often report higher student satisfaction and retention rates.

Logos is often the foundation of persuasive speaking because audiences are more likely to accept arguments that are supported by clear evidence and sound reasoning. However, facts alone do not always motivate people to change their beliefs or behaviors. Effective speakers help audiences understand not only what the evidence says, but why it matters.

Pathos: Emotion and Human Connection

Pathos refers to appeals that connect with an audience's emotions, values, hopes, fears, and experiences. Emotional appeals help audiences understand why an issue matters and why they should care.

Example: A student advocating for a Student Wellness Initiative might ask listeners to remember a time when they felt overwhelmed, exhausted, or disconnected during a stressful quarter. They might describe students trying to balance classes, work, family responsibilities, and long commutes while struggling to find places on campus to recharge and connect with others.

Pathos is sometimes misunderstood as manipulation, but ethical emotional appeals help audiences connect with the human side of an issue. When used responsibly, pathos can make information more memorable, relatable, and meaningful.

Exercise: Which Appeal is Used in this Ad? 5.1.2.1

Watch the following television advertisements and decide - what appeal(s) is emphasized? Do you believe the appeal(s) used is effective in persuading the audience to buy the product? Click on the underlined words to access the link to the ads on Youtube

1. The Best a Man Can Get
2. Maddie
3. Diligence
4. Do I Look Fasionable?

Discuss or Write your responses available at the end of this section.

Balancing the Three Appeals

While it can be useful to think of ethos, logos, and pathos separately, effective persuasive speakers often use all three together. A speech with only emotion may feel manipulative. A speech with only facts may feel dry or disconnected. A speech with credibility but little evidence may lack persuasive power.

The most effective persuasive messages answer three audience questions:

- Can I trust you? (Ethos)
- Does your argument make sense? (Logos)
- Why should I care? (Pathos)

When speakers successfully address all three questions, they are more likely to create messages that are credible, compelling, and persuasive. Here's another way of looking at it through when crafting your outline:

- Ethos: Honest, respectful, inclusive language builds credibility.
- Logos: Precise definitions, accurate wording, and clear explanations strengthen logic.
- Pathos: Vivid stories, imagery, metaphors, and emotionally resonant language help audiences care.

Adapted from:

Hong, R. (2026, July 24). COMM 101: 12.4: Building Persuasive Power: Appeals, Canons, and Culture. Persuasive Speaking.

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Answers

Exercise: Which Appeal is Used in this Ad? 5.1.2.1

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5.1.3: Putting it Together (Cannons and Appeals)

Putting It All Together

Aristotle's appeals and Cicero's canons give us practical tools for creating persuasive messages. The appeals help us think about credibility, reasoning, and emotion, while the canons help us develop, organize, practice, and deliver those ideas effectively.

Table 5.1.3.1 shows how these classical concepts can work together in college, workplace, and global contexts. But effective persuasion also depends on something these models alone cannot fully explain: culture and context. What sounds credible, logical, emotional, or appropriate can vary across audiences and communities.

To understand persuasion more fully, we need to look beyond the classical Western tradition and consider how other rhetorical traditions approach communication.

Table 5.1.3.1: Appeals and Canons in Action

Concept	What It Means	Example: Community College & Transfer	Example: Workplace	Example: Global Issue
Ethos (Credibility)	The speaker's trustworthiness, knowledge, and ethics	A student cites accurate transfer statistics and shares their own transfer journey	An employee highlights past project successes to show expertise	A scientist explains climate data with a strong record of peer-reviewed research
Logos (Logic)	Using evidence, facts, and clear reasoning	A student argues for affordable textbooks by showing average costs and open-source alternatives	A manager presents productivity data to support hybrid work	A UN speaker shares statistics on rising global temperatures
Pathos (Emotion)	Appealing to values, hopes, and emotions	A student shares stories about food insecurity on campus to encourage peers to support the food pantry	A team leader uses inspiring stories to motivate staff during a tough project	An activist appeals to compassion by describing families displaced by floods
Invention	Generating ideas and arguments	Brainstorming reasons why tutoring services should be expanded on campus	Identifying solutions to reduce workplace burnout	Proposing global partnerships to improve access to vaccines
Arrangement	Organizing content effectively	Structuring a speech on housing insecurity as Problem-Cause-Solution	Arranging a pitch by outlining need, benefits, and cost savings	Organizing a global summit speech into causes of deforestation and solutions
Style	Choosing words, tone, and delivery style	Using encouraging language when urging peers to apply for scholarships	Using clear, professional language in a board meeting	Choosing urgent but respectful language in international diplomacy
Memory	Mastery of material so ideas flow naturally	Rehearsing key points before a class presentation	Remembering data points for a client proposal	Speaking confidently about global poverty stats without notes
Delivery	How the message is presented (voice, gestures, visuals)	Using eye contact and a confident voice in a transfer scholarship interview	Using strong visuals and steady pace in a workplace training	Delivering a speech with passion and clarity at a climate march


Figure 5.1.3.1 Infinity by The Hidden Hide with Ray from Flickr is licensed CC-BY 4.0

Persuasion Across Cultures and Traditions

Aristotle's ideas about ethos, pathos, and logos have had a major influence on how public speaking is taught in the United States. But they represent one rhetorical tradition, not the only way people have understood effective communication. Comparative rhetoric broadens our understanding of persuasion by examining rhetorical traditions across cultures rather than treating Western approaches as universal (Mao, 2014).

Different cultures and historical traditions have developed their own ideas about what makes a speaker credible, what audiences value, and how people should handle disagreement. Some Western traditions emphasize individual argument, direct claims, evidence, and debate. Other traditions may place greater emphasis on relationships, community, harmony, storytelling, listening, or indirect communication. Contemporary intercultural rhetoric also cautions against treating cultures as fixed categories. Communication changes depending on the people involved, their communities, the situation, and the larger social context (McIntosh et al., 2022).

For example, Confucian rhetorical traditions emphasize relationships, ethical character, respect, and social harmony. A speaker's credibility may depend as much on how they fulfill their responsibilities to others as on how effectively they argue a position. Indigenous rhetorical traditions often emphasize storytelling, collective knowledge and memory, relationships to community and place, and knowledge passed between generations (Gross, 2021). African and African American rhetorical traditions have also drawn upon storytelling, rhythm, repetition, audience participation, and call-and-response, making the audience an active participant in communication rather than simply a group receiving a message (Browdy & Milu, 2022).

These traditions remind us that there is no single formula for effective persuasion. Even concepts such as credibility, logic, and emotional appeal can look different across cultures and communities. A speech that sounds confident and persuasive to one audience might sound aggressive, disrespectful, or overly individualistic to another. Effective speakers consider not only what they want to say, but also the cultural experiences, expectations, and values their audiences may bring to the interaction.

Studying rhetoric across cultures also gives us another tool for critically examining public discourse. When analyzing a historical speech, political debate, protest movement, social media campaign, or contemporary controversy, don't just ask, "Was it persuasive?" Ask: Who was speaking? Who had the power to speak? Whose voices were missing? What cultural values shaped the message? What did the speaker want the audience to believe or do?

Critical analysis means looking beyond whether we agree with a message and examining how persuasion works, whose interests it serves, and what consequences it may have.

Key Takeaways

- Ethos, logos, and pathos are the three primary persuasive appeals. Effective speakers build credibility (ethos), support claims with logic and evidence (logos), and connect to audience values and emotions (pathos).
- The Five Canons of Rhetoric provide a framework for creating effective messages. Invention, arrangement, style (effective language choices), memory, and guide speakers from developing an idea to delivering it effectively.
- Persuasion is shaped by culture, context, and audience. Studying different rhetorical traditions helps us understand how persuasion works and critically evaluate the messages we encounter.

Adapted from:

Hong, R. (2026, July 24). COMM 101: 12.4: Building Persuasive Power: Appeals, Canons, and Culture. Persuasive Speaking.

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5.2: ORGANIZING YOUR SPEECH

5.2.1: Why Outline?

5.2.2: Basic Components of an Effective Speech Outline

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5.2.2.1.1: Why Use an Introduction

5.2.2.1.2: Attention Getter

5.2.2.1.3: Preview of Main Points and Statement of Purpose

5.2.2.2: Main Points - The Heart of Your Speech

5.2.2.3: Transitions- Keep Your Speech Moving

5.2.2.4: Conclusion- A Memorable Close

5.2.3: Sample Basic Speech Outline

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5.2.1: Why Outline?

Organization of a speech benefits the audience and the speaker in multiple ways. This section will lay out the reasons why creating an effective outline will be helpful to reduce speech anxiety, increase speaker credibility, and enhance audience understanding and retention of information.

Outlines Reduce Speech Anxiety

Speech anxiety stems from a variety of factors. However, all speakers feel decreased speech anxiety when they have a good handle on, not only what they are speaking about, but also the order their speech will follow. An effective speech outline provides a basic order for a speech. When we think about most popular music, we know it follows a typical sequence: Introduction, Verse 1, Verse 2, Chorus, Bridge, Instrumental, Verse 3, Chorus. Similarly, a basic speech follows a characteristic organizational sequence.

Basic Speech Order

1. INTRODUCTION: Attention Getter and Preview of Main Points
2. BODY: 3 Main Points, with Transition sentences in between
3. CONCLUSION: Review of Main Points and Memorable Close

Knowing the order of your speech will follow this basic order provides you, as a speaker, with a powerful tool. Even if you forget exactly what you want to say, you know where you are in the speech and can get back on track. If you are using index cards to support your memory and decrease speech anxiety, you will have these cards organized to follow your speech outline.

Recommended List of Index Cards to Support Effective Public Speaking

- CARD 1: Attention Getter
- CARD 2: Main Points
- CARD 3: Memorable Close
- CARD 4: List of Research Citations

Increase Speaker Credibility

Audiences have a more positive reception to a speech that uses a clear organizational pattern, when compared with one that sounds disorganized or random. Additionally, audiences state that they are more interested in speeches with a clear order.[1] Even a basic speech with strong organization starts with an Attention Getter and Preview of Main Points. If you think about this, the attention getter is specifically crafted to gain attention from audience members. If well done, this obviously will boost audience interest. The Preview of Main Points tells the audience exactly what to expect. This keeps their interest, as they want to know more about the main points mentioned briefly within the introduction.

Not only do audiences find speeches more interesting due to a clear order, they also rate speakers with excellent organizational skills as more persuasive. We will discuss the art of persuasion more in this chapter. For now, it is essential to recognize that how well a speaker organizes a speech is a key component to persuading an audience, regardless of the subject matter. Audience's find speakers who clearly preview main points, follow up with more information about those main points, provide transitions that tie one main point to the next, and end with a review of main points more credible. If you think about it - this makes perfect sense. In a well organized speech, the speaker tells the audience what to expect (preview of main points), then follows-up with details of the three main points. In other words, during the BODY of the speech, the speaker does exactly what they purport to do in their INTRODUCTION. Audiences who watch a disorganized speech rate that speaker as lacking in credibility.[2]

Boost Audience Retention

Have you ever listened to a speech or sat through an entire lecture, only to forget most of what was said within a matter of

minutes or hours? You're not alone. Many studies, beginning with the classic Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve paper[3] find that people who hear information presented in a lecture or classroom quickly forget that information. There is some evidence that when speakers use an organized pattern, including a repetition of information that occurs with a preview and review of main points, that audience members retain the information for longer periods of time. [4] There are other ways to build audience retention of information, including encouraging listeners to use retrieval practice methods, such as practice quizzes, flashcards, taking notes, and answering questions without notes.[5]

- Practice quizzes
- Flashcards
- Writing everything remembered from memory
- Answering questions without notes

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5.2.2: BASIC COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE SPEECH OUTLINE

5.2.2.1: Introduction - Start off Strong

5.2.2.1.1: Why Use an Introduction

5.2.2.1.2: Attention Getter

5.2.2.1.3: Preview of Main Points and Statement of Purpose

5.2.2.2: Main Points - The Heart of Your Speech

5.2.2.3: Transitions- Keep Your Speech Moving

5.2.2.4: Conclusion- A Memorable Close

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5.2.2.1: INTRODUCTION - START OFF STRONG

5.2.2.1.1: Why Use an Introduction

5.2.2.1.2: Attention Getter

5.2.2.1.3: Preview of Main Points and Statement of Purpose

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- 9: Why Introductions Matter- How to Effectively Begin a Speech by Jason Wrench, Anne Goding, Danette Ifert Johnson, and Bernardo Alexander Attias is licensed CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Original source: https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/stand-up-speak-out-3.

5.2.2.1.1: Why Use an Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Name the three essential components of an effective introduction.



Figure 5.2.2.1.1.1 Open and Welcome by Markus Winkler on Pexels

Imagine you are hosting a party in your home. When someone comes to the door, you greet them and welcome them inside. The introduction for a speech is similar to a welcome to your audience. An effective introduction has two major requirements:

1. Strong Attention Getter
2. Preview of Main Points
3. Statement of Purpose

The pages in this section will detail how to create and use these components.

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5.2.2.1.2: Attention Getter

Learning Objectives

- Describe why a strong attention getter is an essential part of an effective speech
- Compare and contrast at least two different strategies for an Attention Getter

Have you ever heard the saying: "You never get a second chance to make a first impression?" Nowhere is this more true than when you begin a speech. The first line of a speech is an important opportunity to gain the interest of your audience. This page will discuss strategies you can use for this essential and critical first line of your speech.

Gain Audience Attention

The first major purpose of an introduction is to gain your audience's attention and make them interested in what you have to say. One of the biggest mistakes that novice speakers make is to assume that people will naturally listen because the speaker is speaking. While many audiences may be polite and not talk while you're speaking, actually getting them to listen to what you are saying is a completely different challenge. Let's face it—we've all tuned someone out at some point because we weren't interested in what they had to say. If you do not get the audience's attention at the outset, it will only become more difficult to do so as you continue speaking. This page will detiail strategies for grabbing an audience's attention and interest.



5.2.2.1.2.1 Woman Using Smart Phone by Andrea Piacquadio on Pexels

Strategies to Capture Audience Interest

For the most part, your attention getter will be one or two sentences. That means, as a speaker, you have a very limited time to capture the audience's interest and attention. In the 21st Century, your attempts to get the audience's attention will compete with not only the audience's thoughts, physical and emotional feelings, and bias, but you will likely also be battling with the distraction of a cell phone. Even if the person is not currently holding or using a screen, the addiction most of us have to our digital devices makes us less able to focus or concentrate for long periods of time. One study found that even when a cell phone is off and face down on a desk, "the mere presence of their smartphone was enough to reduce their cognitive capacity."[1] Therefore, it is essential to craft and deliver an attention getter that not only captures the audience's interest, but does this quickly.

Asking a Question

There are several strategies for developing an effective attention getter. The first is to activate the audience's mind and their desire to participate by asking a question. Let's say you are giving a speech about your experience volunteering. You could start with any of the following questions to gain your audience's attention:

- Have you ever volunteered and found your life's purpose?
- Need more experience to put on your resume without getting a job?
- What kinds of tasks do you like to do so much, you don't even care if you get paid?

Craft a Question to Start Your Speech

Imagine you are giving a speech on one of the following topics. Create a one sentence question to start of the speech that will gain your audience's interest.

Speech Topics:

1. Travel to another state, country, or continent
2. Taking care of a family member, babysitting a younger sibling or cousin
3. Discussing your favorite hobby (Art, Music, Exercise, etc.)
4. Overcoming challenges or starting over after an epic fail

Answer available at the end of this section.

Citing Statistics or Evidence Relevant to Your Audience

Sometimes your audience needs evidence that your subject is important. Other times, they may need convincing that you are a trustworthy source of information. In order to address both of these audience needs, speakers can use research to gain attention, credibility, and interest. If we take the same topic as before, giving a speech about your experience volunteering, you might consider one of the following citations of trustworthy evidence to start your speech.

- According to The Corporation for National and Community Service in 2013, people who volunteer have a 27% better chance of finding a job than those who don't.
- Not only does volunteering help others, but according to the International Journal Voluntas in 2026, people who volunteer benefit from increased mental and physical well-being.
- Between 25-35% of high school and college seniors engage in formal community service or nonprofit volunteering, according to the United States Census Bureau in 2023.

Use an Interesting Quote

Giving a speech can be a little intimidating. Students who have a fear of public speaking may find comfort in a quote from Nelson Mandela: "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." Using a quote that is relevant to your speech topic is another way to gain audience attention, while also providing a thought-provoking way to involve the people in your audience. Make sure you have a trustworthy source (or multiple sources) to confirm the author and the quote itself, before you use it in your speech. Here are some quotes you might use to start that speech about volunteering, in order to encourage members of the audience to listen to what you have to say.

- “Volunteering is an act of heroism on a grand scale. And it matters profoundly. It does more than help people beat the odds; it changes the odds.” -Bill Clinton
- Oprah Winfrey said "What I know for sure is that what you give comes back to you."
- “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?” —Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Tell the Audience the Beginning of a Story

Essentially, a speech is a story we tell with a beginning, middle, and end. Audiences love a good story! One way to improve the

chances that your audience will listen to what you say is to start your speech like a good story. You can look at the first line of a good book to see how a well-written first line or introduction invites the reader into the story, while also providing a reason for the reader to continue reading. A well-crafted first line of a speech can do the same for an audience - draw them in with a strong first sentence, while providing a reason for them to continue listening. Here are some examples using the same topic of volunteering.

- Who would have thought that I would meet the love of my life while volunteering to help farmers in Nicaragua?
- Five hours into my first day volunteering at the hospital, I witnessed my first overdose patient. Gray skin, blue lips, and a weak pulse, I had no idea if this person would live through the night.
- After I lost my Dad, my Mom had to work longer hours and I felt alone and depressed. That was until a volunteer from Big Brothers and Sisters came into my life.

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Answers

Craft a Question to Start Your Speech

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5.2.2.1.3: Preview of Main Points and Statement of Purpose

The introduction to a speech starts with an Attention Getter. As detailed previously, the Attention Getter takes many forms. The Attention Getter gets the audience's attention and gives them a reason to continue listening to the speech. After the Attention Getter, the best practice to continue the introduction to the topic, is for the speaker to provide a Preview of Main Points.

Preview of Main Points

In order to provide a Preview of Main Points, the speaker will need to know what main points they plan to use. Most student speeches include three main points. Let's look at an example of a basic speech based on the speaker's personal experience as a volunteer.



Figure 5.2.2.1.3.1 Piano Hands by Wellness Gallery Catalyst Foundation on Pexels

Attention Getter: I never enjoyed piano lessons, but I loved accompanying a chorus of developmentally disabled adults as a volunteer pianist.

Preview of Main Points: Today, I will tell you how much I hated piano lessons, how I started volunteering with a chorus of developmentally disabled adults, and the ways that experience changed my life for the better.

Statement of Purpose

Any time you are preparing to give a speech, you will want to write a one sentence purpose statement. This purpose statement is something you may never state verbally to your audience, however it will guide your development of the speech. Many times the purpose statement will be included within your main points. For example, in the previous section, the purpose statement is embedded within the preview of main points. However, a speaker may choose to state this purpose statement explicitly and separately from the preview of main points.

Attention Getter: I never enjoyed piano lessons, but I loved accompanying a chorus of developmentally disabled adults as a volunteer pianist.

Name and Purpose Statement: My name is Juanita Velo and I hope to convince you to volunteer while you are in school.

Preview of Main Points: Today, I will tell you how much I hated piano lessons, how I started volunteering with a chorus of developmentally disabled adults, and the ways that experience changed my life for the better.

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5.2.2.2: Main Points - The Heart of Your Speech

Learning Outcomes

- Revisit the function of a specific purpose.
- Transition from a specific purpose to a series of main points.
- Narrow a speech from all the possible points to the main points.
- Explain how to prepare meaningful main points.



Figure 5.2.2.2.1 Image by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

When creating a speech, it's important to remember that speeches have three clear parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction establishes the topic and whets your audience's appetite, and the conclusion wraps everything up at the end of your speech. The real "meat" of your speech happens in the body. In this section, we're going to discuss how to think strategically about the body of your speech.

We like the word strategic because it refers to determining what is important or essential to the overall plan or purpose of your speech. Too often, new speakers just throw information together and stand up and start speaking. When that happens, audience members are left confused and the reason for the speech may get lost. To avoid being seen as disorganized, we want you to start thinking critically about the organization of your speech. In this section, we will discuss how to take your speech from a specific purpose to creating the main points of your speech.

What Is Your Specific Purpose?

Before we discuss how to determine the main points of your speech, we want to revisit your speech's specific purpose, which we discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Recall that a speech can have one of three general purposes: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. The general purpose refers to the broad goal for creating and delivering the speech. The specific purpose, on the other hand, starts with one of those broad goals (inform, persuade, or entertain) and then further informs the listener about the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the speech.

The specific purpose is stated as a sentence incorporating the general purpose, the specific audience for the speech, and a prepositional phrase that summarizes the topic.

Suppose you are going to give a speech about using open-source software. Here are three examples (each with a different general purpose and a different audience):

Table 5.2.2.2.1

General Purpose	To inform
Specific Purpose	To inform a group of school administrators about the various open-source software packages that could be utilized in their school districts.
General Purpose	To persuade
Specific Purpose	To persuade a group of college students to make the switch from Microsoft Office to the open-source office suite OpenOffice.
General Purpose	To entertain
Specific Purpose	To entertain members of a business organization with a mock eulogy of for-pay software giants as a result of the proliferation of open-source alternatives.

In each of these three examples, you'll notice that the general topic is the same—open-source software—but the specific purpose is different because the speech has a different general purpose and a different audience. Before you can think strategically about organizing the body of your speech, you need to know what your specific purpose is. If you have not yet written a specific purpose for your current speech, please go ahead and write one now.

From Specific Purpose to Main Points

Once you've written down your specific purpose, you can now start thinking about the best way to turn that specific purpose into a series of main points. Main points are the key ideas you present to enable your speech to accomplish its specific purpose. In this section, we're going to discuss how to determine your main points and how to organize those main points into a coherent, strategic speech.

How Many Main Points do I Need?

While there is no magic number for how many main points a speech should have, speech experts generally agree that the fewer the number of main points the better. First and foremost, experts on the subject of memory have consistently shown that people don't tend to remember very much after they listen to a message or leave a conversation.[4] While many different factors can affect a listener's ability to retain information after a speech, how the speech is organized is an important part of that process.[5] [6] For the speeches you will be delivering in a typical public speaking class, you will usually have just two or three main points. If your speech is less than three minutes long, then two main points will probably work best. If your speech is between three and ten minutes in length, then it makes more sense to use three main points.

You may be wondering why we are recommending only two or three main points. The reason comes straight out of the research on listening. According to LeFrancois, people are more likely to remember information that is meaningful, useful, and of interest to them; different or unique; organized; visual; and simple.[7] Two or three main points are much easier for listeners to remember than ten or even five. In addition, if you have two or three main points, you'll be able to develop each one with examples, statistics, or other forms of support. Including support for each point will make your speech more interesting and more memorable for your audience.

Narrowing Down Your Main Points

When you write your specific purpose and review the research you have done on your topic, you will probably find yourself thinking of quite a few points that you'd like to make in your speech. Whether that's the case or not, we recommend taking a few minutes to brainstorm and develop a list of points. In brainstorming, your goal is simply to think of as many different points as you can,

not to judge how valuable or important they are. What information does your audience need to know to understand your topic? What information does your speech need to convey to accomplish its specific purpose? Consider the following example:

Table 5.2.2.2.2

Specific Purpose	To inform a group of school administrators about the various open-source software packages that could be utilized in their school districts.
Brainstorming List of Points	· Define open-source software. · Define educational software. · List and describe the software commonly used by school districts. · Explain the advantages of using open-source software. · Explain the disadvantages of using open-source software. · Review the history of open-source software. · Describe the value of open-source software. · Describe some educational open-source software packages. · Review the software needs of my specific audience. · Describe some problems that have occurred with open-source software.

Now that you have brainstormed and developed a list of possible points, how do you go about narrowing them down to just two or three main ones? Remember, your main points are the key ideas that help build your speech. When you look over the preceding list, you can then start to see that many of the points are related to one another. Your goal in narrowing down your main points is to identify which individual, potentially minor points can be combined to make main points. This process is called chunking because it involves taking smaller chunks of information and putting them together with like chunks to create more fully developed chunks of information. Before reading our chunking of the preceding list, see if you can determine three large chunks out of the list (note that not all chunks are equal).

Table 5.2.2.2.3

Specific Purpose	To inform a group of school administrators about the various open-source software packages that could be utilized in their school districts.
Main Point 1	**School districts use software in their operations.** · Define educational software. · List and describe the software commonly used by school districts.

Specific Purpose	To inform a group of school administrators about the various open-source software packages that could be utilized in their school districts.
Main Point 2	**What is open-source software?** · Define open-source software. · Review the history of open-source software. · Explain the advantages of using open-source software. · Describe the value of open-source software. · Explain the disadvantages of using open-source software. · Describe some problems that have occurred with open-source software.
Main Point 3	**Name some specific open-source software packages that may be appropriate for these school administrators to consider.** · Review the software needs of my specific audience. · Describe some educational open-source software packages.

You may notice that in the preceding list, the number of subpoints under each of the three main points is a little disjointed or the topics don't go together clearly. That's all right. Remember that these are just general ideas at this point. It's also important to remember that there is often more than one way to organize a speech. Some of these points could be left out and others developed more fully, depending on the purpose and audience. We'll develop the preceding main points more fully in a moment.

Helpful Hints for Preparing Your Main Points

Now that we've discussed how to take a specific purpose and turn it into a series of main points, here are some helpful hints for creating your main points.

Uniting Your Main Points

Once you've generated a possible list of main points, you want to ask yourself this question: "When you look at your main points, do they fit together?" For example, if you look at the three preceding main points (school districts use software in their operations; what is open-source software; name some specific open-source software packages that may be appropriate for these school administrators to consider), ask yourself, "Do these main points help my audience understand my specific purpose?"

Suppose you added a fourth main point about open-source software for musicians—would this fourth main point go with the other three? Probably not. While you may have a strong passion for open-source music software, that main point is extraneous information for the speech you are giving. It does not help accomplish your specific purpose, so you'd need to toss it out.

Keeping Your Main Points Separate

The next question to ask yourself about your main points is whether they overlap too much. While some overlap may happen naturally because of the singular nature of a specific topic, the information covered within each main point should be clearly distinct from the other main points. Imagine you're giving a speech with the specific purpose "to inform my audience about the health reasons for eating apples and oranges." You could then have three main points: that eating fruits is healthy, that eating apples is healthy, and that eating oranges is healthy. While the two points related to apples and oranges are clearly distinct, both of those main points would probably overlap too much with the first point "that eating fruits is healthy," so you would probably decide to eliminate the first point and focus on the second and third. On the other hand, you could keep the first point and then develop two new points giving additional support to why people should eat fruit.

Balancing Main Points

One of the biggest mistakes some speakers make is to spend most of their time talking about one of their main points, completely neglecting their other main points. To avoid this mistake, organize your speech so as to spend roughly the same amount of time on each main point. If you find that one of your main points is simply too large, you may need to divide that main point into two main points and consolidate your other main points into a single main point.

Let's see if our preceding example is balanced (school districts use software in their operations; what is open-source software; name some specific open-source software packages that may be appropriate for these school administrators to consider). What do you think? Obviously, the answer depends on how much time a speaker will have to talk about each of these main points. If you have an hour to talk, then you may find that these three main points are balanced. However, you may also find them wildly unbalanced if you only have five minutes to speak because five minutes is not enough time to even explain what open-source software is. If that's the case, then you probably need to rethink your specific purpose to ensure that you can cover the material in the allotted time.

Creating Parallel Structure for Main Points

Another major question to ask yourself about your main points is whether or not they have a parallel structure. By parallel structure, we mean that you should structure your main points so that they all sound similar. When all your main points sound similar, it's simply easier for your audiences to remember your main points and retain them for later. Let's look at our sample (school districts use software in their operations; what is open-source software; name some specific open-source software packages that may be appropriate for these school administrators to consider). Notice that the first and third main points are statements, but the second one is a question. Basically, we have an example here of main points that are not parallel in structure. You could fix this in one of two ways. You could make them all questions: what are some common school district software programs; what is open-source software; and what are some specific open-source software packages that may be appropriate for these school administrators to consider. Or you could turn them all into statements: school districts use software in their operations; define and describe open-source software; name some specific open-source software packages that may be appropriate for these school administrators to consider. Either of these changes will make the grammatical structure of the main points parallel.

Maintaining Logical Flow of Main Points

The last question you want to ask yourself about your main points is whether the main points make sense in the order you've placed them. The next section goes into more detail of common organizational patterns for speeches, but for now we want you to just think logically about the flow of your main points. When you look at your main points, can you see them as progressive, or does it make sense to talk about one first, another one second, and the final one last? If you look at your order, and it doesn't make sense to you, you probably need to think about the flow of your main points. Often, this process is an art and not a science. But let's look at a couple of examples.

School Dress Codes Example

- Main Point 1: History of school dress codes
- Main Point 2: Problems with school dress codes
- Main Point 3: Eliminating school dress codes

Rider Law Legislation

- Main Point 1: Why should states have rider laws?
- Main Point 2: What are the effects of a lack of rider laws?
- Main Point 3: What is rider law legislation?

When you look at these two examples, what are your immediate impressions of the two examples? In the first example, does it make sense to talk about history, and then the problems, and finally how to eliminate school dress codes? Would it make sense to put history as your last main point? Probably not. In this case, the main points are in a logical sequential order. What about the second example? Does it make sense to talk about your solution, then your problem, and then define the solution? Not really! What order do you think these main points should be placed in for a logical flow? Maybe you should explain the problem (lack of rider laws), then define your solution (what is rider law legislation), and then argue for your solution (why states should have rider laws). Notice that in this example you don't even need to know what "rider laws" are to see that the flow didn't make sense.

Key Takeaways

- All speeches start with a general purpose and then move to a specific purpose that gives the who, what, where, and how for the speech.
- Transitioning from the specific purpose to possible main points means developing a list of potential main points you could discuss. Then you can narrow your focus by looking for similarities among your potential main points and combining ones that are similar.
- Shorter speeches will have two main points while longer speeches will generally have three or more main points. When creating your main points, make sure that they are united, separate, balanced, parallel, and logical.

Exercises

- Generate a specific purpose for your current speech. Conduct a brainstorming activity where you try to think of all the possible points you could possibly make related to your specific purpose. Once you've finished creating this list, see if you can find a meaningful pattern that helps you develop three main points.
- Pair up with a partner. Take the three main points you developed in the previous exercise, exchange papers with your partner and ask him or her to see whether or not they are united, separate, balanced, parallel, and logical. You do the same for your partner's main points. If they are not, what can you or your partner do to fix your main points?

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5.2.2.3: Transitions- Keep Your Speech Moving

Keeping Your Speech Moving

Learning Objectives

- Describe the importance of transitions within a speech.
- Identify and be able to use a variety of transition words to create effective transitions within a speech.
- Explain a variety of strategies to help audience members keep up with a speech's content: internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts.

Have you ever been listening to a speech or a lecture and found yourself thinking, "I am so lost!" or "Where the heck is this speaker going?" Chances are one of the reasons you weren't sure what the speaker was talking about was that the speaker didn't effectively keep the speech moving. When we are reading and encounter something we don't understand, we have the ability to reread the paragraph and try to make sense of what we're trying to read. Unfortunately, we are not that lucky when it comes to listening to a speaker. We cannot pick up our universal remote and rewind the person. For this reason, speakers need to really think about how they keep a speech moving so that audience members are easily able to keep up with the speech. In this section, we're going to look at four specific techniques speakers can use that make following a speech much easier for an audience: transitions, internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts.



Figure 5.2.2.3.1 Man in a running position Image by Niko Twisty from Pexels

Transitions Between Main Points

A transition is a phrase or sentence that indicates that a speaker is moving from one main point to another main point in a speech. Basically, a transition is a sentence where the speaker summarizes what was said in one point and previews what is going to be discussed in the next point. Let's look at some examples:

- Now that we've seen the problems caused by lack of adolescent curfew laws, let's examine how curfew laws could benefit our community.
- Thus far we've examined the history and prevalence of alcohol abuse among Native Americans, but it is the impact that this abuse has on the health of Native Americans that is of the greatest concern.

- Now that we've thoroughly examined how these two medications are similar to one another, we can consider the many clear differences between the two medications.
- Although he was one of the most prolific writers in Great Britain prior to World War II, Winston Churchill continued to publish during the war years as well.

You'll notice that in each of these transition examples, the beginning phrase of the sentence indicates the conclusion of a period of time (now that, thus far). Table 10.1 contains a variety of transition words that will be useful when keeping your speech moving.

TABLE 5.2.2.3.1 Transition Words

Transition Type	Example Phrases
Addition	also, again, as well as, besides, coupled with, following this, further, furthermore, in addition, in the same way, additionally, likewise, moreover, similarly
Consequence	accordingly, as a result, consequently, for this reason, for this purpose, hence, otherwise, so then, subsequently, therefore, thus, thereupon, wherefore
Generalizing	as a rule, as usual, for the most part, generally, generally speaking, ordinarily, usually
Exemplifying	chiefly, especially, for instance, in particular, markedly, namely, particularly, including, specifically, such as
Illustration	for example, for instance, for one thing, as an illustration, illustrated with, as an example, in this case
Emphasis	above all, chiefly, with attention to, especially, particularly, singularly
Similarity	comparatively, coupled with, correspondingly, identically, likewise, similar, moreover, together with
Exception	aside from, barring, besides, except, excepting, excluding, exclusive of, other than, outside of, save
Restatement	in essence, in other words, namely, that is, that is to say, in short, in brief, to put it differently
Contrast and Comparison	contrast, by the same token, conversely, instead, likewise, on one hand, on the other hand, on the contrary, nevertheless, rather, similarly, yet, but, however, still, nevertheless, in contrast
Sequence	at first, first of all, to begin with, in the first place, at the same time, for now, for the time being, the next step, in time, in turn, later on, meanwhile, next, then, soon, the meantime, later, while, earlier, simultaneously, afterward, in conclusion, with this in mind
Common Sequence Patterns	first, second, third... generally, furthermore, finally in the first place, also, lastly in the first place, pursuing this further, finally to be sure, additionally, lastly in the first place, just in the same way, finally basically, similarly, as well
Summarizing	after all, all in all, all things considered, briefly, by and large, in any case, in any event, in brief, in conclusion, on the whole, in short, in summary, in the final analysis, in the long run, on balance, to sum up, to summarize, finally
Diversion	by the way, incidentally
Direction	here, there, over there, beyond, nearly, opposite, under, above, to the left, to the right, in the distance
Location	above, behind, by, near, throughout, across, below, down, off, to the right, against, beneath, in back of, onto, under, along, beside, in front of, on top of, among, between, inside, outside, around, beyond, into, over

Beyond transitions, there are several other techniques that you can use to clarify your speech organization for your audience. The

next sections address several of these techniques, including internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts.

Internal Previews

An internal preview is a phrase or sentence that gives an audience an idea of what is to come within a section of a speech. An internal preview works similarly to the preview that a speaker gives at the end of a speech introduction, quickly outlining what they are going to talk about (i.e., the speech's three main body points). In an internal preview, the speaker highlights what they are going to discuss within a specific main point during a speech.

Ausubel was the first person to examine the effect that internal previews had on retention of oral information.[8] Basically, when a speaker clearly informs an audience what they are going to be talking about in a clear and organized manner, the audience listens for those main points, which leads to higher retention of the speaker's message. Let's look at a sample internal preview:

> To help us further understand why recycling is important, we will first explain the positive benefits of recycling and then explore how recycling can help our community.

When an audience hears that you will be exploring two different ideas within this main point, they are ready to listen for those main points as you talk about them. In essence, you're helping your audience keep up with your speech.

Rather than being given alone, internal previews often come after a speaker has transitioned to that main topic area. Using the previous internal preview, let's see it along with the transition to that main point.

> Now that we've explored the effect that a lack of consistent recycling has on our community, let's explore the importance of recycling for our community (transition). To help us further understand why recycling is important, we will first explain the positive benefits of recycling and then explore how recycling can help our community (internal preview).

While internal previews are definitely helpful, you do not need to include one for every main point of your speech. In fact, we recommend that you use internal previews sparingly to highlight only main points containing relatively complex information.

Internal Summaries

Whereas an internal preview helps an audience know what you are going to talk about within a main point at the beginning, an internal summary is delivered to remind an audience of what they just heard within the speech. In general, internal summaries are best used when the information within a specific main point of a speech was complicated. To write your own internal summaries, look at the summarizing transition words in Table 10.1. Let's look at an example.

> To sum up, school bullying is a definite problem. Bullying in schools has been shown to be detrimental to the victim's grades, the victim's scores on standardized tests, and the victim's future educational outlook.

In this example, the speaker was probably talking about the impact that bullying has on an individual victim educationally. Of course, an internal summary can also be a great way to lead into a transition to the next point of a speech.

> In this section, we have explored how bullying in schools has been shown to be detrimental to the victim's grades, the victim's scores on standardized tests, and the victim's future educational outlook (internal summary). Therefore, schools need to implement campus-wide, comprehensive anti-bullying programs (transition).

While not sounding like the more traditional transition, this internal summary helps readers summarize the content of that main point. The sentence that follows then leads to the next major part of the speech, which is going to discuss the importance of antibullying programs.

Signposts

Have you ever been on a road trip and watched the green rectangular mile signs pass you by? Fifty miles to go. Twenty-five miles to go. One mile to go. Signposts within a speech function the same way. A signpost is a guide a speaker gives their audience to help the audience keep up with the content of a speech. If you look at Table 10.1 and look at the "common sequence patterns," you'll see a series of possible signpost options. In essence, we use these short phrases at the beginning of a piece of information to help our audience members keep up with what we're discussing. For example, if you were giving a speech whose main point

was about the three functions of credibility, you could use internal signposts like this:

- The first function of credibility is competence.
- The second function of credibility is trustworthiness.
- The final function of credibility is caring/goodwill.

Signposts are simply meant to help your audience keep up with your speech, so the more simplistic your signposts are, the easier it is for your audience to follow.

In addition to helping audience members keep up with a speech, signposts can also be used to highlight specific information the speaker thinks is important. Where the other signposts were designed to show the way (like highway markers), signposts that call attention to specific pieces of information are more like billboards. Words and phrases that are useful for highlighting information can be found in Table 10.1 under the category “emphasis.” All these words are designed to help you call attention to what you are saying so that the audience will also recognize the importance of the information.

Key Takeaways

- Transitions are very important because they help an audience stay on top of the information that is being presented to them. Without transitions, audiences are often left lost and the ultimate goal of the speech is not accomplished.
- Specific transition words, like those found in Table 10.1, can be useful in constructing effective transitions.
- In addition to major transitions between the main points of a speech, speakers can utilize internal previews, internal summaries, and signposts to help focus audience members on the information contained within a speech.

Exercises

- Using the main points you created earlier in this chapter, create clear transitions between each main point. Look at the possible transition words in Table 10.1 See which words are best suited for your speech. Try your transitions out on a friend or classmate to see if the transition makes sense to other people.
- Take your most complicated main point and create an internal preview for that main point and then end the point with an internal summary.
- Think about your current speech. Where can you use signposts to help focus your audience’s attention? Try at least two different ways of phrasing your signposts.

Reference

8. Ausubel, D. P. (1968). *Educational psychology*. Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

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5.2.2.4: Conclusion- A Memorable Close

When you deliver a speech, the final words the audience hears are important. We know, due to the primacy and latency effect, that people are more likely to remember the first and last thing they hear (as opposed to information in the middle). That is why it is essential to carefully plan your conclusion. The conclusion of a speech has two major parts: The Review of Main Points and the Memorable Close. We will go through each of those components in detail on this page.

Review of Main Points

In an effective speech, the speaker uses repetition of the main points, to ensure that the audience hears the most important parts of the speech three times.

- Time #1: Preview of Main Points
- Time #2: The Three Main Points in the Body of the Speech
- Time #3: Review of Main Points

Although the speaker has already previewed the main points in the introduction and then repeated each of the main points within the body of the speech, the review of main points provides the final emphasis on these important statements. The Review of Main Points can be a one sentence reminder. For example, if the three main points of the speech are:

- Main Point #1: When I was ten years old, my mother had a stroke and was hospitalized.
- Main Point #2: My mother's nurses were kind, competent, and fantastic at communication.
- Main Point #3: As a high school senior, I decided to pursue nursing as my career.

You Review of Main Points might be: "I have told you about my introduction to nursing as a child, the positive experiences I had with the nurses caring for my mother, and how this experience led me to choose nursing as a career."

Another condensed version for the Review of Main Points could be: "Due to the positive experiences I had with nurses when I was young, this led me to choose nursing as a career."

Notice how the Review of Main Points does not restate everything you spoke about in the body of your speech. The speaker will just want to touch on the main points mentioned, in order to remind the audience of the most important points of the story. The Review of Main Points should not be the final words of the speech however, this will be the Memorable Close.



Figure 5.2.2.4.1 Bookends by Chris Gladis licensed as CC-BY 2.0 on Flickr

Memorable Close

The Memorable Close is the final words an audience will hear from a speaker. The most effective speeches have an Attention Getter (the first words stated) that is somehow related to the Memorable Close (the final words stated). You might think about the Attention Getter and Memorable Close as bookends, with all of the words in between them as the books that fill in the space. There are many ways to create a relationship between the Attention Getter and Memorable Close.

Table 5.2.2.4.1 Examples of Attention Getters and Memorable Closes

Relationship	Attention Getter	Memorable Close
Question/ Answer	Have you ever thought about what job you would do, even if you didn't get paid?	I started volunteering as a Music Therapist because I loved the work. I ended up becoming a paid Music Therapist, due to the unpaid experience I had.
Statistics or Evidence and a Result	In 2013, The Corporation for National Community Service stated that people who volunteer have a 27% better chance of finding a job than those who don't.	I was one of the 27% of college students who took a volunteer position to start and ended up getting a job as a result.
Quotation Bookends	Martin Luther King Jr. said: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?"	I decided to serve in the United States Army after considering the words of John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you - Ask what you can do for your country."
Beginning/ Ending of a Story	Who would have thought that I would meet the love of my life while volunteering to help farmers in Nicaragua?	Falling in love with a farmer in Nicaragua wasn't on my Peace Corps game plan, but 25 years of marriage later, it was the right choice!

Creating a relationship between your attention getter and memorable close keeps your speech focused and tied together. Make sure to try out different closing words with a friend, instructor, or family member who can let you know how it comes across. The first and last words of your speech should be strong, memorable, and indicative of the whole body of your speech.

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5.2.3: Sample Basic Speech Outline

A basic speech outline contains all of the components previously discussed in the first two chapters of this resource. Using the basic outline provided, you can organize a simple speech. Try using the basic speech outline to plan out a speech where you discuss any of the following:

- Introduce yourself and your favorite hobbies
- Work with a classmate to introduce each other and discuss something unique about the other person's life
- Something you are already an expert on (for example: video games, musician/performer, being a sibling, what it's like to work and go to school, etc.)

Basic Speech Outline

Purpose statement (one sentence):

Audience Analysis: (How many people do you expect? Who is in your audience?)

INTRODUCTION:

Attention Getter:

Preview of Main Points:

MAIN POINT I:

Transition:

MAIN POINT II:

Transition:

MAIN POINT III:

CONCLUSION:

Review of Main Points:

Memorable Close:

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5.3: DELIVERING THE SPEECH

Delivering the Speech



Figure 5.3.1 Martin Luther King, Jr-bswise - - CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

How we deliver a speech is just as important, if not more so, than the basic message we are trying to convey to an audience. But if you have worked hard on preparing the verbal part of your speech, you may feel that delivery is just an "extra" that should not require much time or effort. After all, your speech is carefully planned, researched, and polished. It is committed safely to paper and hard drive. It's a carefully constructed, logically crafted, ethical message. The words alone should engage your audience's attention and interest—right?

The nonverbal part of your speech is a presentation of yourself as well as your message. Through the use of eye contact, vocal expression, body posture, gestures, and facial display, you enhance your message and invite your audience to give their serious attention to it, and to you. Your credibility, your sincerity, and your knowledge of
your speech become apparent through your nonverbal behaviors. The interplay between the verbal and nonverbal components of your speech can either bring the message vividly to life or confuse or bore the audience. Therefore, it is best that you neither overdramatize your speech delivery behaviors nor downplay them. This is a balance achieved through rehearsal, trial and error, and experience.

In this chapter, we are going to examine effective strategies for delivering a speech. To help you enhance your delivery, we will begin by discussing how to prepare your delivery for different environments. Second, we will talk about how to effectively use notes to enhance your delivery. Finally, we will examine characteristics of good delivery and give some strategies for practicing effectively for the day when you will deliver your speech.

5.3.1: Preparation- Practice and Notecards

5.3.1.1: Using Notes Effectively

5.3.1.2: Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery

5.3.2: Performance- Nonverbal Communication is Key

5.3.3: Types of Presentation Aids

5.3.4: Speech Feedback and Evaluation

5.3.5: Speaking Contexts That Affect Delivery

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5.3.1: Preparation- Practice and Notecards

Practice Effectively

You might get away with presenting a hastily practiced speech, but the speech will not be as good as it could be. In order to develop your best speech delivery, you need to practice—and use your practice time effectively. Practicing does not mean reading over your notes, mentally running through your speech, or even speaking your speech aloud over and over. Instead, you need to practice with the goal of identifying the weaknesses in your delivery, improving upon them, and building good speech delivery habits.

When you practice your speech, place both your feet in full, firm contact with the floor to keep your body from swaying side to side. Some new public speakers find that they don't know what to do with their hands during the speech. Your practice sessions should help you get comfortable. When you're not gesturing, you can rest your free hand lightly on a lectern or simply allow it to hang at your side. Since this is not a familiar posture for most people, it might feel awkward, but in your practice sessions, you can begin getting used to it.

Seek Input from Others

Because we can't see ourselves as others see us, one of the best ways to improve your delivery is to seek constructive criticism from others. This, of course, is an aspect of your public speaking course, as you will receive evaluations from your instructor and possibly from your fellow students. However, by practicing in front of others before it is time to present your speech, you can anticipate and correct problems so that you can receive a better evaluation when you give the speech "for real."

Ask your practice observers to be honest about the aspects of your delivery that could be better. Sometimes students create study groups just for this purpose. When you create a study group of classroom peers, everyone has an understanding of the entire creative process, and their feedback will thus be more useful to you than the feedback you might get from someone who has never taken the course or given a speech.

If your practice observers seem reluctant to offer useful criticisms, ask questions. How was your eye contact? Could they hear you? Was your voice well modulated? Did you mispronounce any words? How was your posture? Were your gestures effective? Did you have any mannerisms that you should learn to avoid? Because peers are sometimes reluctant to say things that could sound critical, direct questions are often a useful way to help them speak up.

If you learn from these practice sessions that your voice tends to drop at the ends of sentences, make a conscious effort to support your voice as you conclude each main point. If you learn that you have a habit of clicking a pen, make sure you don't have a pen with you when you speak or that you keep it in your pocket. If your practice observers mention that you tend to hide your hands in the sleeves of your shirt or jacket, next time wear short sleeves or roll your sleeves up before beginning your speech. If you learn through practice that you tend to sway or rock while you speak, you can consciously practice and build the habit of *not* swaying.

When it is your turn to give feedback to others in your group, assume that they are as interested in doing well as you are. Give feedback in the spirit of helping their speeches be as good as possible.



Figure 5.3.1.1 Practice by Daniel Dionne licensed as CC BY-SA 2.0 on Flickr

Use Audio and/or Video to Record Yourself

Technology has made it easier than ever to record yourself and others using the proliferation of electronic devices people are likely to own. Video, of course, allows you the advantage of being able to see yourself as others see you, while audio allows you to concentrate on the audible aspects of your delivery. As we mentioned earlier in the chapter, if neither video nor audio is available, you can always observe yourself by practicing your delivery in front of a mirror.

After you have recorded yourself, it may seem obvious that you should watch and listen to the recording. This can be intimidating, as you may fear that your performance anxiety will be so obvious that everyone will notice it in the recording. But students are often pleasantly surprised when they watch and listen to their recordings, as even students with very high anxiety may find out that they "come across" in a speech much better than they expected.

A recording can also be a very effective diagnostic device. Sometimes students believe they are making strong contact with their audiences, but their cards contain so many notes that they succumb to the temptation of reading. By finding out from the video that you misjudged your eye contact, you can be motivated to rewrite your notecards in a way that doesn't provide the opportunity to do so much reading.

It is most likely that in viewing your recording, you will benefit from discovering your strengths and finding weak areas you can strengthen.

It's a great deal of work to prepare a good speech, and you want to present it effectively so that your audience will benefit as much as possible. We've already said that extemporaneous speaking provides the best opportunity for speaker-audience contact and that speaking extemporaneously means you do not have your full manuscript or outline with you. Instead, you will use notecards. The cards should have notes, not the full text of your speech. This can also be done with an autocue device—the TelePrompTer does not have to provide a full word-for-word script.

We have developed a system for creating highly effective notecards. Our system has been used effectively both in public speaking courses and in freshman composition courses. Surprisingly, the system consists of only five cards. For many people, this does not sound like nearly enough cards. We would make the case that you can do a good job with five cards, and we have seen many students do just that.

The Purpose of Speaker Notes

Using notes adds to your credibility as a speaker. If you depend on a full manuscript to get through your delivery, your listeners might believe you don't know the content of your speech. Second, the temptation to read the entire speech directly from a manuscript, even if you're only carrying it as a safety net, is nearly overwhelming. Third, well-prepared cards are more gracefully handled than sheets of paper, and they don't rattle if your hands tremble from nervousness. Finally, cards look better than sheets of paper. Five carefully prepared cards, together with practice, will help you more than you might think.



Figure 5.3.1.2 Main Points by Magda Ehlers on Pexels

Key Tips for Using Notes

Plan on using just five cards, written on one side only. Get 4 × 6 cards. Use one card for the introduction, one card for each of your three main points, and one card for the conclusion.

If you use as much care in developing your five notecards as you do your speech, they should serve you well. If you lose your place or go blank during the speech, you will only need a few seconds to find where you were and get going again. For instance, if you know that you presented the introduction and the first main point, which centers on the Emancipation Proclamation, you can readily go to your second card and remind yourself that your next main point is about the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.

In addition, the use of your notecards allows you to depart from the exact prepared wordings in your manuscript. In your recovery from losing your place, you can transpose a word or phrase to make your recovery graceful. It allows you to avoid feeling pressured to say every single word in your manuscript.

Under no circumstances should you ever attempt to put your entire speech on cards in little tiny writing. You will end up reading words to your audience instead of telling them your meaning, and the visual aspect of your speech will be spoiled by your need to squint to read your cards.

Include Only Key Words

Your cards should include key words and phrases, not full sentences. The words and phrases should be arranged in order so that you can stay organized and avoid forgetting important points.

One exception to the key word guideline would be an extended or highly technical quotation from an authoritative source. If it is critically important to present an exact quotation, you may add one additional card that will contain the quotation together with its citation. If you plan to use such a quotation, make sure it has central importance in your speech.

Prepare Notecards to Trigger Recall

The “trick” to selecting the words to write on your cards is to identify the keywords that will trigger a recall sequence. For instance, if the word “Fukushima” brings to mind the nuclear power plant meltdown that followed the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, then that one word on your notecard should propel you through a sizable sequence of points and details. Once you have delivered that material, perhaps you’ll glance at your card again to remind yourself of the key word or phrase that comes next.

You must discover what works for you and then select those words that tend to jog your recall. Having identified what works, make

a preliminary set of five cards, written on one side only. Number the cards, and practice with them. Revise and refine them the way you would an outline. If you must, rewrite an entire card to make it work better, and test it the next time you practice.

Always practice with your notecards—and with any visual aids you plan to use. Practicing is also the best way to find out what kinds of things might go wrong with your notes in the presented speech and what steps you should take to make things go smoothly.

Write in Large Letters

You should be able to read something on your card by glancing, not peering at it. A few key words and phrases, written in large, bold print with plenty of white space between them, will help you. If the lighting in your speech location is likely to have glare, be sure to write your notes in ink, as pencil can be hard to read in poor lighting.

Hold Your Notes Naturally

Notes are a normal part of giving a presentation. You do not need to conceal them from the audience; in fact, trying to hide and use your notes at the same time tends to be very awkward and distracting. Some instructors recommend that you avoid gesturing with your notes on the grounds that nervous shaking is more noticeable if you are holding your notes in your hand. If this is the case for you, practice gesturing with your free hand, or put your cards down if you need to use both hands. Other instructors recommend treating notecards as a natural extension of your hand, as they believe it is distracting to put your notes down and pick them up again. Whichever "rule" you follow, remember that the goal is for your use of notecards to contribute to your overall appearance of confidence and credibility.

Practice Improves Delivery

Luckily, public speaking is an activity that, when done conscientiously, strengthens with practice. As you become aware of the areas where your delivery has room for improvement, you will begin developing a keen sense of what "works" and what audiences respond to.

It is advisable to practice out loud in front of other people several times, spreading your rehearsals out over several days. To do this kind of practice, of course, you need to have your speech be finalized well ahead of the date when you are going to give it. During these practice sessions, you can time your speech to make sure it lasts the appropriate length of time. A friend of ours was the second student on the program in an event where each student's presentation was to last thirty to forty-five minutes. After the first student had been speaking for seventy-five minutes, the professor in charge asked, "Can we speed this up?" The student said yes, and proceeded to continue speaking for another seventy-five minutes before finally concluding his portion of the program. Although we might fault the professor for not "pulling the plug," clearly the student had not timed his speech in advance.

Your practice sessions will also enable you to make adjustments to your notecards to make them more effective in supporting your contact with your audience. This kind of practice is not just a strategy for beginners; it is practiced by many highly placed public figures with extensive experience in public speaking.

Your public speaking course is one of the best opportunities you will have to manage your performance anxiety, build your confidence in speaking extemporaneously, develop your vocal skills, and become adept at self-presentation. The habits you can develop through targeted practice are to build continuously on your strengths and to challenge yourself to find new areas for improving your delivery. By taking advantage of these opportunities, you will gain the ability to present a speech effectively whenever you may be called upon to speak publicly.

Citations

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5.3.1.1: Using Notes Effectively

Learning Objectives

1. Know how to use notecards to free you from your manuscript.
2. Know how to use notecards to stay organized while you make audience contact.
3. Understand how to develop effective notecards for a speech.

Using Notes Effectively

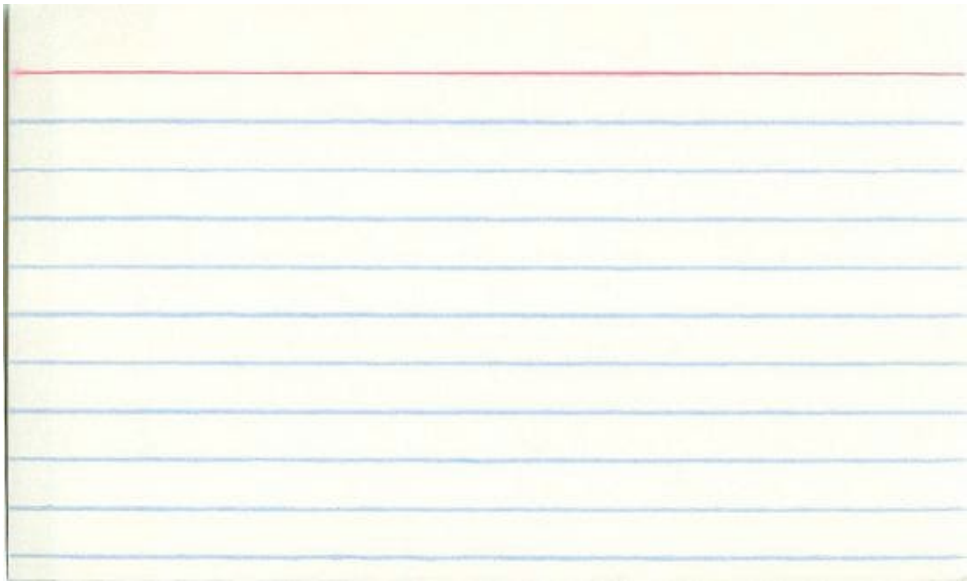


Figure 5.3.1.1.1 Dave Gray – Blank index card! – CC BY 2.0.

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The Purpose of Speaker Notes

Using notes adds to your credibility as a speaker. If you depend on a full manuscript to get through your delivery, your listeners might believe you don't know the content of your speech. Second, the temptation to read the entire speech directly from a manuscript, even if you're only carrying it as a safety net, is nearly overwhelming. Third, well-prepared cards are more gracefully handled than sheets of paper, and they don't rattle if your hands tremble from nervousness. Finally, cards look better than sheets of paper. Five carefully prepared cards, together with practice, will help you more than you might think.

Key Tips for Using Notes

Plan on using just five cards, written on one side only. Get 4 × 6 cards. Use one card for the introduction, one card for each of your three main points, and one card for the conclusion.

Include Only Key Words

Your cards should include key words and phrases, not full sentences. The words and phrases should be arranged in order so that you can stay organized and avoid forgetting important points.

One exception to the key word guideline would be an extended or highly technical quotation from an authoritative source. If it is critically important to present an exact quotation, you may add one additional card that will contain the quotation together with its citation. If you plan to use such a quotation, make sure it has central importance in your speech.

Hold Your Notes Naturally

Notes are a normal part of giving a presentation. You do not need to conceal them from the audience; in fact, trying to hide and use your notes at the same time tends to be very awkward and distracting. Some instructors recommend that you avoid gesturing with your notes on the grounds that nervous shaking is more noticeable if you are holding your notes in your hand. If this is the case for you, practice gesturing with your free hand, or put your cards down if you need to use both hands. Other instructors recommend treating notecards as a natural extension of your hand, as they believe it is distracting to put your notes down and pick them up again. Whichever "rule" you follow, remember that the goal is for your use of notecards to contribute to your overall appearance of confidence and credibility.

Prepare Notecards to Trigger Recall

The "trick" to selecting the words to write on your cards is to identify the keywords that will trigger a recall sequence. For instance, if the word "Fukushima" brings to mind the nuclear power plant meltdown that followed the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011, then that one word on your notecard should propel you through a sizable sequence of points and details. Once you have delivered that material, perhaps you'll glance at your card again to remind yourself of the key word or phrase that comes next.

You must discover what works for you and then select those words that tend to jog your recall. Having identified what works, make a preliminary set of five cards, written on one side only. Number the cards, and practice with them. Revise and refine them the way you would an outline. If you must, rewrite an entire card to make it work better, and test it the next time you practice.

Always practice with your notecards—and with any visual aids you plan to use. Practicing is also the best way to find out what kinds of things might go wrong with your notes in the presented speech and what steps you should take to make things go smoothly.

Write in Large Letters

You should be able to read something on your card by glancing, not peering at it. A few key words and phrases, written in large, bold print with plenty of white space between them, will help you. If the lighting in your speech location is likely to have glare, be sure to write your notes in ink, as pencil can be hard to read in poor lighting.

Using Your Notecards Well

If you use as much care in developing your five notecards as you do your speech, they should serve you well. If you lose your place or go blank during the speech, you will only need a few seconds to find where you were and get going again. For instance, if you know that you presented the introduction and the first main point, which centers on the Emancipation Proclamation, you can readily go to your second card and remind yourself that your next main point is about the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution.

In addition, the use of your notecards allows you to depart from the exact prepared wordings in your manuscript. In your recovery from losing your place, you can transpose a word or phrase to make your recovery graceful. It allows you to avoid feeling pressured to say every single word in your manuscript.

Under no circumstances should you ever attempt to put your entire speech on cards in little tiny writing. You will end up reading words to your audience instead of telling them your meaning, and the visual aspect of your speech will be spoiled by your need to squint to read your cards.

Key Takeaways

- Good notecards keep you from reading to your audience.
- Good notecards are carefully based on key words and phrases to promote recall.
- Good notecards should enhance your relationship with listeners.

Exercises

1. Using the introduction to your speech, create a 4 × 6 notecard that includes the grabber, the thesis statement, and the preview. Test it by standing as you would during a speech and using it to guide you.
2. Answer these questions: Is it absolutely crucial to utter every word on your outline? Are there some words or phrases that are crucially important? How can you use your notecards to focus on the most important ideas?
3. Select key terms from your speech that you believe will trigger your recall of the sequence of main ideas in your speech. Use them as the basis of your next four notecards. Test the cards by practicing with them to see whether your selected terms are the ones you should use.

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5.3.1.2: Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery

Learning Objectives

1. Explain why having a strong conversational quality is important for effective public speaking.
2. Explain the importance of eye contact in public speaking.
3. Define vocalics and differentiate among the different factors of vocalics.
4. Explain effective physical manipulation during a speech.
5. Understand how to practice effectively for good speech delivery.

Practicing for Successful Speech Delivery



Figure 5.3.1.2.1 Christian Pierret – Speech – CC BY 2.0.

There is no foolproof recipe for good delivery. Each of us is unique, and we each embody different experiences and interests. This means each person has an approach, or a style, that is effective for her or him. This further means that anxiety can accompany even the most carefully researched and interesting message. Even when we know our messages are strong and well-articulated on paper, it is difficult to know for sure that our presentation will also be good.

We are still obligated to do our best out of respect for the audience and their needs. Fortunately, there are some tools that can be helpful to you even the very first time you present a speech. You will continue developing your skills each time you put them to use and can experiment to find out which combination of delivery elements is most effective for you.

What Is Good Delivery?

The more you care about your topic, the greater your motivation to present it well. Good delivery is a process of presenting a clear, coherent message in an interesting way. Communication scholar Stephen E. Lucas tells us:

Good delivery…conveys the speaker's ideas clearly, interestingly, and without distracting the audience. Most audiences prefer delivery that combines a certain degree of formality with the best attributes of good conversation—directness, spontaneity, animation, vocal and facial expressiveness, and a lively sense of communication (Lucas, 2009).

Many writers on the nonverbal aspects of delivery have cited the findings of psychologist Albert Mehrabian, asserting that the bulk of an audience's understanding of your message is based on nonverbal communication. Specifically, Mehrabian is often credited

with finding that when audiences decoded a speaker's meaning, the speaker's face conveyed 55 percent of the information, the vocalics conveyed 38 percent, and the words conveyed just 7 percent (Mehrabian, 1972). Although numerous scholars, including Mehrabian himself, have stated that his findings are often misinterpreted (Mitchell), scholars and speech instructors do agree that nonverbal communication and speech delivery are extremely important to effective public speaking.

In this section of the chapter, we will explain six elements of good delivery: conversational style, conversational quality, eye contact, vocalics, physical manipulation, and variety. And since delivery is only as good as the practice that goes into it, we conclude with some tips for effective use of your practice time.

Conversational Style

Conversational style is a speaker's ability to sound expressive and to be perceived by the audience as natural. It's a style that approaches the way you normally express yourself in a much smaller group than your classroom audience. This means that you want to avoid having your presentation come across as didactic or overly exaggerated. You might not feel natural while you're using a conversational style, but for the sake of audience preference and receptiveness, you should do your best to appear natural. It might be helpful to remember that the two most important elements of the speech are the message and the audience. You are the conduit with the important role of putting the two together in an effective way. Your audience should be thinking about the message, not the delivery.

Stephen E. Lucas defines conversational quality as the idea that "no matter how many times a speech has been rehearsed, it still *sounds* spontaneous" [emphasis in original] (Lucas, 2009). No one wants to hear a speech that is so well rehearsed that it sounds fake or robotic. One of the hardest parts of public speaking is rehearsing to the point where it can appear to your audience that the thoughts are magically coming to you while you're speaking, but in reality you've spent a great deal of time thinking through each idea. When you can sound conversational, people pay attention.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is a speaker's ability to have visual contact with everyone in the audience. Your audience should feel that you're speaking to them, not simply uttering main and supporting points. If you are new to public speaking, you may find it intimidating to look audience members in the eye, but if you think about speakers you have seen who did not maintain eye contact, you'll realize why this aspect of speech delivery is important. Without eye contact, the audience begins to feel invisible and unimportant, as if the speaker is just speaking to hear her or his own voice. Eye contact lets your audience feel that your attention is on them, not solely on the cards in front of you.

Sustained eye contact with your audience is one of the most important tools toward effective delivery. O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein note that eye contact is mandatory for speakers to establish a good relationship with an audience (O'Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2001). Whether a speaker is speaking before a group of five or five hundred, the appearance of eye contact is an important way to bring an audience into your speech.

Eye contact can be a powerful tool. It is not simply a sign of sincerity, a sign of being well prepared and knowledgeable, or a sign of confidence; it also has the power to convey meanings. Arthur Koch tells us that all facial expressions "can communicate a wide range of emotions, including sadness, compassion, concern, anger, annoyance, fear, joy, and happiness" (Koch, 2010).

If you find the gaze of your audience too intimidating, you might feel tempted to resort to "faking" eye contact with them by looking at the wall just above their heads or by sweeping your gaze around the room instead of making actual eye contact with individuals in your audience until it becomes easier to provide real contact. The problem with fake eye contact is that it tends to look mechanical. Another problem with fake attention is that you lose the opportunity to assess the audience's understanding of your message. Still, fake eye contact is somewhat better than gripping your cards and staring at them and only occasionally glancing quickly and shallowly at the audience.

This is not to say that you may never look at your notecards. On the contrary, one of the skills in extemporaneous speaking is the ability to alternate one's gaze between the audience and one's notes. Rehearsing your presentation in front of a few friends should help you develop the ability to maintain eye contact with your audience while referring to your notes. When you are giving a speech that is well prepared and well rehearsed, you will only need to look at your notes occasionally. This is an ability that will develop even further with practice. Your public speaking course is your best chance to get that practice.

Effective Use of Vocalics

Vocalics, also known as paralanguage, is the subfield of nonverbal communication that examines how we use our voices to communicate orally. This means that you speak loudly enough for all audience members (even those in the back of the room) to hear you clearly, and that you enunciate clearly enough to be understood by all audience members (even those who may have a hearing impairment or who may be English-language learners). If you tend to be soft-spoken, you will need to practice using a louder volume level that may feel unnatural to you at first. For all speakers, good vocalic technique is best achieved by facing the audience with your chin up and your eyes away from your notecards and by setting your voice at a moderate speed. Effective use of vocalics also means that you make use of appropriate pitch, pauses, vocal variety, and correct pronunciation.

If you are an English-language learner and feel apprehensive about giving a speech in English, there are two things to remember: first, you can meet with a reference librarian to learn the correct pronunciations of any English words you are unsure of; and second, the fact that you have an accent means you speak more languages than most Americans, which is an accomplishment to be proud of.

If you are one of the many people with a stutter or other speech challenge, you undoubtedly already know that there are numerous techniques for reducing stuttering and improving speech fluency and that there is no one agreed-upon "cure." The Academy Award–winning movie *The King's Speech* did much to increase public awareness of what a person with a stutter goes through when it comes to public speaking. It also prompted some well-known individuals who stutter, such as television news reporter John Stossel, to go public about their stuttering (Stossel, 2011). If you have decided to study public speaking in spite of a speech challenge, we commend you for your efforts and encourage you to work with your speech instructor to make whatever adaptations work best for you.

Volume

Volume refers to the loudness or softness of a speaker's voice. As mentioned, public speakers need to speak loudly enough to be heard by everyone in the audience. In addition, volume is often needed to overcome ambient noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner or the dull roar of traffic passing by. In addition, you can use volume strategically to emphasize the most important points in your speech. Select these points carefully; if you emphasize everything, nothing will seem important. You also want to be sure to adjust your volume to the physical setting of the presentation. If you are in a large auditorium and your audience is several yards away, you will need to speak louder. If you are in a smaller space, with the audience a few feet away, you want to avoid overwhelming your audience with shouting or speaking too loudly.

Rate

Rate is the speed at which a person speaks. To keep your speech delivery interesting, your rate should vary. If you are speaking extemporaneously, your rate will naturally fluctuate. If you're reading, your delivery is less likely to vary. Because rate is an important tool in enhancing the meanings in your speech, you do not want to give a monotone drone or a rapid "machine-gun" style delivery. Your rate should be appropriate for your topic and your points. A rapid, lively rate can communicate such meanings as enthusiasm, urgency, or humor. A slower, moderated rate can convey respect, seriousness, or careful reasoning. By varying rapid and slower rates within a single speech, you can emphasize your main points and keep your audience interested.

Pitch

Pitch refers to the highness or lowness of a speaker's voice. Some speakers have deep voices and others have high voices. As with one's singing voice range, the pitch of one's speaking voice is determined to a large extent by physiology (specifically, the length of one's vocal folds, or cords, and the size of one's vocal tract). We all have a normal speaking pitch where our voice is naturally settled, the pitch where we are most comfortable speaking, and most teachers advise speaking at the pitch that feels natural to you.

While our voices may be generally comfortable at a specific pitch level, we all have the ability to modulate, or move, our pitch up or down. In fact, we do this all the time. When we change the pitch of our voices, we are using inflections. Just as you can use volume strategically, you can also use pitch inflections to make your delivery more interesting and emphatic. If you ordinarily speak with a soprano voice, you may want to drop your voice to a slightly lower range to call attention to a particular point. How we use inflections can even change the entire meaning of what we are saying. For example, try saying the sentence "I love public speaking" with a higher pitch on one of the words—first raise the pitch on "I," then say it again with the pitch raised on "love,"

and so on. "*I* love public speaking" conveys a different meaning from "I love *public* speaking," doesn't it?

There are some speakers who don't change their pitch at all while speaking, which is called monotone. While very few people are completely monotone, some speakers slip into monotone patterns because of nerves. One way to ascertain whether you sound monotone is to record your voice and see how you sound. If you notice that your voice doesn't fluctuate very much, you will need to be intentional in altering your pitch to ensure that the emphasis of your speech isn't completely lost on your audience.

Finally, resist the habit of pitching your voice "up" at the ends of sentences. It makes them sound like questions instead of statements. This habit can be disorienting and distracting, interfering with the audience's ability to focus entirely on the message. The speaker sounds uncertain or sounds as though he or she is seeking the understanding or approval of the listener. It hurts the speaker's credibility and it needs to be avoided.

The effective use of pitch is one of the keys to an interesting delivery that will hold your audience's attention.

Pauses

Pauses are brief breaks in a speaker's delivery that can show emphasis and enhance the clarity of a message. In terms of timing, the effective use of pauses is one of the most important skills to develop. Some speakers become uncomfortable very quickly with the "dead air" that the pause causes. And if the speaker is uncomfortable, the discomfort can transmit itself to the audience. That doesn't mean you should avoid using pauses; your ability to use them confidently will increase with practice. Some of the best comedians use the well-timed pause to powerful and hilarious effect. Although your speech will not be a comedy routine, pauses are still useful for emphasis, especially when combined with a lowered pitch and rate to emphasize the important point you do not want your audience to miss.

Vocal Variety

Vocal variety has to do with changes in the vocalics we have just discussed: volume, pitch, rate, and pauses. No one wants to hear the same volume, pitch, rate, or use of pauses over and over again in a speech. Your audience should never be able to detect that you're about to slow down or your voice is going to get deeper because you're making an important point. When you think about how you sound in a normal conversation, your use of volume, pitch, rate, and pauses are all done spontaneously. If you try to overrehearse your vocalics, your speech will end up sounding artificial. Vocal variety should flow naturally from your wish to speak with expression. In that way, it will animate your speech and invite your listeners to understand your topic the way you do.

Pronunciation

The last major category related to vocalics is pronunciation, or the conventional patterns of speech used to form a word. Word pronunciation is important for two reasons: first, mispronouncing a word your audience is familiar with will harm your credibility as a speaker; and second, mispronouncing a word they are unfamiliar with can confuse and even misinform them. If there is any possibility at all that you don't know the correct pronunciation of a word, find out. Many online dictionaries, such as the Wiktionary (wiktionary.org), provide free sound files illustrating the pronunciation of words.

Many have commented on the mispronunciation of words such as "nuclear" and "cavalry" by highly educated public speakers, including US presidents. There have been classroom examples as well. For instance, a student giving a speech on the Greek philosopher Socrates mispronounced his name at least eight times during her speech. This mispronunciation created a situation of great awkwardness and anxiety for the audience. Everyone felt embarrassed and the teacher, opting not to humiliate the student in front of the class, could not say anything out loud, instead providing a private written comment at the end of class.

Another aspect of pronunciation in public speaking is avoiding the use of verbal surrogates or "filler" words used as placeholders for actual words (like *er*, *um*, *uh*, etc.). You might be able to get away with saying "um" as many as two or three times in your speech before it becomes distracting, but the same cannot be said of "like." We know of a student who trained herself to avoid saying "like." As soon as the first speech was assigned, she began wearing a rubber band on her left wrist. Each time she caught herself saying "like," she snapped herself with the rubber band. It hurt. Very quickly, she found that she could stop inflicting the snap on herself, and she had successfully confronted an unprofessional verbal habit.

Effective Physical Manipulation

In addition to using our voices effectively, a key to effective public speaking is physical manipulation, or the use of the body to emphasize meanings or convey meanings during a speech. While we will not attempt to give an entire discourse on nonverbal communication, we will discuss a few basic aspects of physical manipulation: posture, body movement, facial expressions, and dress. These aspects add up to the overall physical dimension of your speech, which we call self-presentation.

Posture

“Stand up tall!” I’m sure we’ve all heard this statement from a parent or a teacher at some point in our lives. The fact is, posture is actually quite important. When you stand up straight, you communicate to your audience, without saying a word, that you hold a position of power and take your position seriously. If however, you are slouching, hunched over, or leaning on something, you could be perceived as ill-prepared, anxious, lacking in credibility, or not serious about your responsibilities as a speaker. While speakers often assume more casual posture as a presentation continues (especially if it is a long one, such as a ninety-minute class lecture), it is always wise to start by standing up straight and putting your best foot forward. Remember, you only get one shot at making a first impression, and your body’s orientation is one of the first pieces of information audiences use to make that impression.

Body Movement

Unless you are stuck behind a podium because of the need to use a nonmovable microphone, you should never stand in one place during a speech. However, movement during a speech should also not resemble pacing. One of our authors once saw a speaker who would walk around a small table where her speaking notes were located. She would walk around the table once, toss her chalk twice, and then repeat the process. Instead of listening to what the speaker was saying, everyone became transfixed by her walk-and-chalk-toss pattern. As speakers, we must be mindful of how we go about moving while speaking. One common method for easily integrating some movement into your speech is to take a few steps any time you transition from one idea to the next. By only moving at transition points, not only do you help focus your audience’s attention on the transition from one idea to the next, but you also are able to increase your nonverbal immediacy by getting closer to different segments of your audience.

Body movement also includes gestures. These should be neither overdramatic nor subdued. At one extreme, arm-waving and fist-pounding will distract from your message and reduce your credibility. At the other extreme, refraining from the use of gestures is the waste of an opportunity to suggest emphasis, enthusiasm, or other personal connection with your topic.

There are many ways to use gestures. The most obvious are hand gestures, which should be used in moderation at carefully selected times in the speech. If you overuse gestures, they lose meaning. Many late-night comedy parodies of political leaders include patterned, overused gestures or other delivery habits associated with a particular speaker. However, the well-placed use of simple, natural gestures to indicate emphasis, direction, size is usually effective. Normally, a gesture with one hand is enough. Rather than trying to have a gesture for every sentence, use just a few well-planned gestures. It is often more effective to make a gesture and hold it for a few moments than to begin waving your hands and arms around in a series of gestures.

Finally, just as you should avoid pacing, you will also want to avoid other distracting movements when you are speaking. Many speakers have unconscious mannerisms such as twirling their hair, putting their hands in and out of their pockets, jingling their keys, licking their lips, or clicking a pen while speaking. As with other aspects of speech delivery, practicing in front of others will help you become conscious of such distractions and plan ways to avoid doing them.

Facial Expressions

Faces are amazing things and convey so much information. As speakers, we must be acutely aware of what our face looks like while speaking. While many of us do not look forward to seeing ourselves on videotape, often the only way you can critically evaluate what your face is doing while you are speaking is to watch a recording of your speech. If video is not available, you can practice speaking in front of a mirror.

There are two extremes you want to avoid: no facial expression and overanimated facial expressions. First, you do not want to have a completely blank face while speaking. Some people just do not show much emotion with their faces naturally, but this blankness is often increased when the speaker is nervous. Audiences will react negatively to the message of such a speaker because they will sense that something is amiss. If a speaker is talking about the joys of Disney World and his face doesn’t show any excitement, the audience is going to be turned off to the speaker and his message. On the other extreme end is the speaker whose face

looks like that of an exaggerated cartoon character. Instead, your goal is to show a variety of appropriate facial expressions while speaking.

Like vocalics and gestures, facial expression can be used strategically to enhance meaning. A smile or pleasant facial expression is generally appropriate at the beginning of a speech to indicate your wish for a good transaction with your audience. However, you should not smile throughout a speech on drug addiction, poverty, or the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. An inappropriate smile creates confusion about your meaning and may make your audience feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, a serious scowl might look hostile or threatening to audience members and become a distraction from the message. If you keep the meaning of your speech foremost in your mind, you will more readily find the balance in facial expression.

Another common problem some new speakers have is showing only one expression. One of our coauthors competed in speech in college. After one of his speeches (about how people die on amusement park rides), one of his judges pulled him aside and informed him that his speech was “creepy.” Apparently, while speaking about death, our coauthor smiled the entire time. The incongruity between the speech on death and dying and the coauthor’s smile just left the judge a little creeped out. If you are excited in a part of your speech, you should show excitement on your face. On the other hand, if you are at a serious part of your speech, your facial expressions should be serious.

Dress

While there are no clear-cut guidelines for how you should dress for every speech you’ll give, dress is still a very important part of how others will perceive you (again, it’s all about the first impression). If you want to be taken seriously, you must present yourself seriously. While we do not advocate dressing up in a suit every time you give a speech, there are definitely times when wearing a suit is appropriate.

One general rule you can use for determining dress is the “step-above rule,” which states that you should dress one step above your audience. If your audience is going to be dressed casually in shorts and jeans, then wear nice casual clothing such as a pair of neatly pressed slacks and a collared shirt or blouse. If, however, your audience is going to be wearing “business casual” attire, then you should probably wear a sport coat, a dress, or a suit. The goal of the step-above rule is to establish yourself as someone to be taken seriously. On the other hand, if you dress two steps above your audience, you may put too much distance between yourself and your audience, coming across as overly formal or even arrogant.

Another general rule for dressing is to avoid distractions in your appearance. Overly tight or revealing garments, over-the-top hairstyles or makeup, jangling jewelry, or a display of tattoos and piercings can serve to draw your audience’s attention away from your speech. Remembering that your message is the most important aspect of your speech, keep that message in mind when you choose your clothing and accessories.

Self-Presentation

When you present your speech, you are also presenting yourself. Self-presentation, sometimes also referred to as poise or stage presence, is determined by how you look, how you stand, how you walk to the lectern, and how you use your voice and gestures. Your self-presentation can either enhance your message or detract from it. Worse, a poor self-presentation can turn a good, well-prepared speech into a forgettable waste of time. You want your self-presentation to support your credibility and improve the likelihood that the audience will listen with interest.

Your personal appearance should reflect the careful preparation of your speech. Your personal appearance is the first thing your audience will see, and from it, they will make inferences about the speech you’re about to present.

Variety

One of the biggest mistakes novice public speakers make is to use the same gesture over and over again during a speech. While you don’t want your gestures to look fake, you should be careful to include a variety of different nonverbal components while speaking. You should make sure that your face, body, and words are all working in conjunction with each other to support your message.

Practice Effectively

You might get away with presenting a hastily practiced speech, but the speech will not be as good as it could be. In order to develop your best speech delivery, you need to practice—and use your practice time effectively. Practicing does not mean reading over your notes, mentally running through your speech, or even speaking your speech aloud over and over. Instead, you need to practice with the goal of identifying the weaknesses in your delivery, improving upon them, and building good speech delivery habits.

When you practice your speech, place both your feet in full, firm contact with the floor to keep your body from swaying side to side. Some new public speakers find that they don't know what to do with their hands during the speech. Your practice sessions should help you get comfortable. When you're not gesturing, you can rest your free hand lightly on a lectern or simply allow it to hang at your side. Since this is not a familiar posture for most people, it might feel awkward, but in your practice sessions, you can begin getting used to it.

Seek Input from Others

Because we can't see ourselves as others see us, one of the best ways to improve your delivery is to seek constructive criticism from others. This, of course, is an aspect of your public speaking course, as you will receive evaluations from your instructor and possibly from your fellow students. However, by practicing in front of others before it is time to present your speech, you can anticipate and correct problems so that you can receive a better evaluation when you give the speech "for real."

Ask your practice observers to be honest about the aspects of your delivery that could be better. Sometimes students create study groups just for this purpose. When you create a study group of classroom peers, everyone has an understanding of the entire creative process, and their feedback will thus be more useful to you than the feedback you might get from someone who has never taken the course or given a speech.

If your practice observers seem reluctant to offer useful criticisms, ask questions. How was your eye contact? Could they hear you? Was your voice well modulated? Did you mispronounce any words? How was your posture? Were your gestures effective? Did you have any mannerisms that you should learn to avoid? Because peers are sometimes reluctant to say things that could sound critical, direct questions are often a useful way to help them speak up.

If you learn from these practice sessions that your voice tends to drop at the ends of sentences, make a conscious effort to support your voice as you conclude each main point. If you learn that you have a habit of clicking a pen, make sure you don't have a pen with you when you speak or that you keep it in your pocket. If your practice observers mention that you tend to hide your hands in the sleeves of your shirt or jacket, next time wear short sleeves or roll your sleeves up before beginning your speech. If you learn through practice that you tend to sway or rock while you speak, you can consciously practice and build the habit of *not* swaying.

When it is your turn to give feedback to others in your group, assume that they are as interested in doing well as you are. Give feedback in the spirit of helping their speeches be as good as possible.

Use Audio and/or Video to Record Yourself

Technology has made it easier than ever to record yourself and others using the proliferation of electronic devices people are likely to own. Video, of course, allows you the advantage of being able to see yourself as others see you, while audio allows you to concentrate on the audible aspects of your delivery. As we mentioned earlier in the chapter, if neither video nor audio is available, you can always observe yourself by practicing your delivery in front of a mirror.

After you have recorded yourself, it may seem obvious that you should watch and listen to the recording. This can be intimidating, as you may fear that your performance anxiety will be so obvious that everyone will notice it in the recording. But students are often pleasantly surprised when they watch and listen to their recordings, as even students with very high anxiety may find out that they "come across" in a speech much better than they expected.

A recording can also be a very effective diagnostic device. Sometimes students believe they are making strong contact with their audiences, but their cards contain so many notes that they succumb to the temptation of reading. By finding out from the video that you misjudged your eye contact, you can be motivated to rewrite your notecards in a way that doesn't provide the opportunity to do so much reading.

It is most likely that in viewing your recording, you will benefit from discovering your strengths and finding weak areas you can strengthen.

Good Delivery Is a Habit

Luckily, public speaking is an activity that, when done conscientiously, strengthens with practice. As you become aware of the areas where your delivery has room for improvement, you will begin developing a keen sense of what "works" and what audiences respond to.

It is advisable to practice out loud in front of other people several times, spreading your rehearsals out over several days. To do this kind of practice, of course, you need to have your speech be finalized well ahead of the date when you are going to give it. During these practice sessions, you can time your speech to make sure it lasts the appropriate length of time. A friend of ours was the second student on the program in an event where each student's presentation was to last thirty to forty-five minutes. After the first student had been speaking for seventy-five minutes, the professor in charge asked, "Can we speed this up?" The student said yes, and proceeded to continue speaking for another seventy-five minutes before finally concluding his portion of the program. Although we might fault the professor for not "pulling the plug," clearly the student had not timed his speech in advance.

Your practice sessions will also enable you to make adjustments to your notecards to make them more effective in supporting your contact with your audience. This kind of practice is not just a strategy for beginners; it is practiced by many highly placed public figures with extensive experience in public speaking.

Your public speaking course is one of the best opportunities you will have to manage your performance anxiety, build your confidence in speaking extemporaneously, develop your vocal skills, and become adept at self-presentation. The habits you can develop through targeted practice are to build continuously on your strengths and to challenge yourself to find new areas for improving your delivery. By taking advantage of these opportunities, you will gain the ability to present a speech effectively whenever you may be called upon to speak publicly.

Key Takeaways

- Conversational style is a speaker's ability to sound expressive while being perceived by the audience as natural. Conversational quality is a speaker's ability to prepare a speech and rehearse a speech but still sound spontaneous when delivering it.
- Eye contact helps capture and maintain an audience's interest while contributing to the speaker's credibility.
- Vocalics are the nonverbal components of the verbal message. There are six important vocalic components for a speaker to be aware of: volume (loudness or softness), pitch (highness or lowness), rate (fastness or slowness), pauses (use of breaks to add emphasis), vocal variety (use of a range of vocalic strategies), and pronunciation (using conventional patterns of speech formation).
- Physical manipulation is the use of one's body to add meaning and emphasis to a speech. As such, excessive or nonexistent physical manipulation can detract from a speaker's speech.
- Good delivery is a habit that is built through effective practice.

Exercises

1. Find a speech online and examine the speaker's overall presentation. How good was the speaker's delivery? Make a list of the aspects of delivery in this chapter and evaluate the speaker according to the list. In what areas might the speaker improve?
2. Record a practice session of your speech. Write a self-critique, answering the following questions: What surprised you the most? What is an area of strength upon which you can build? What is *one* area for improvement?

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5.3.2: Performance- Nonverbal Communication is Key

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of nonverbal communication to the effectiveness of speech delivery
- Watch an informative or persuasive speech, then analyze how the speaker's nonverbal communication affected your perception of their credibility and effectiveness.

Nonverbal Communication and Effective Delivery

The more you care about your topic, the greater your motivation to present it well. Good delivery is a process of presenting a clear, coherent message in an interesting way. Communication scholar Stephen E. Lucas tells us:

Good delivery…conveys the speaker's ideas clearly, interestingly, and without distracting the audience. Most audiences prefer delivery that combines a certain degree of formality with the best attributes of good conversation—directness, spontaneity, animation, vocal and facial expressiveness, and a lively sense of communication (Lucas, 2009).

Many writers on the nonverbal aspects of delivery have cited the findings of psychologist Albert Mehrabian, asserting that the bulk of an audience's understanding of your message is based on nonverbal communication. Specifically, Mehrabian is often credited with finding that when audiences decoded a speaker's meaning, the speaker's face conveyed 55 percent of the information, the vocalics conveyed 38 percent, and the words conveyed just 7 percent (Mehrabian, 1972). Although numerous scholars, including Mehrabian himself, have stated that his findings are often misinterpreted (Mitchell), scholars and speech instructors do agree that nonverbal communication and speech delivery are extremely important to effective public speaking.

In this section of the chapter, we will explain six elements of good delivery: conversational style, conversational quality, eye contact, vocalics, physical manipulation, and variety. And since delivery is only as good as the practice that goes into it, we conclude with some tips for effective use of your practice time.

Conversational Style

Conversational style is a speaker's ability to sound expressive and to be perceived by the audience as natural. It's a style that approaches the way you normally express yourself in a much smaller group than your classroom audience. This means that you want to avoid having your presentation come across as didactic or overly exaggerated. You might not feel natural while you're using a conversational style, but for the sake of audience preference and receptiveness, you should do your best to appear natural. It might be helpful to remember that the two most important elements of the speech are the message and the audience. You are the conduit with the important role of putting the two together in an effective way. Your audience should be thinking about the message, not the delivery.

Stephen E. Lucas defines conversational quality as the idea that "no matter how many times a speech has been rehearsed, it still *sounds* spontaneous" [emphasis in original] (Lucas, 2009). No one wants to hear a speech that is so well rehearsed that it sounds fake or robotic. One of the hardest parts of public speaking is rehearsing to the point where it can appear to your audience that the thoughts are magically coming to you while you're speaking, but in reality you've spent a great deal of time thinking through each idea. When you can sound conversational, people pay attention.


Figure 5.3.2.1 Presentation Photo by Pavel Danilyuk on Pexels

Eye Contact

Eye contact is a speaker's ability to have visual contact with everyone in the audience. Your audience should feel that you're speaking to them, not simply uttering main and supporting points. If you are new to public speaking, you may find it intimidating to look audience members in the eye, but if you think about speakers you have seen who did not maintain eye contact, you'll realize why this aspect of speech delivery is important. Without eye contact, the audience begins to feel invisible and unimportant, as if the speaker is just speaking to hear her or his own voice. Eye contact lets your audience feel that your attention is on them, not solely on the cards in front of you.

Sustained eye contact with your audience is one of the most important tools toward effective delivery. O'Hair, Stewart, and Rubenstein note that eye contact is mandatory for speakers to establish a good relationship with an audience (O'Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2001). Whether a speaker is speaking before a group of five or five hundred, the appearance of eye contact is an important way to bring an audience into your speech.

Eye contact can be a powerful tool. It is not simply a sign of sincerity, a sign of being well prepared and knowledgeable, or a sign of confidence; it also has the power to convey meanings. Arthur Koch tells us that all facial expressions "can communicate a wide range of emotions, including sadness, compassion, concern, anger, annoyance, fear, joy, and happiness" (Koch, 2010).

If you find the gaze of your audience too intimidating, you might feel tempted to resort to "faking" eye contact with them by looking at the wall just above their heads or by sweeping your gaze around the room instead of making actual eye contact with individuals in your audience until it becomes easier to provide real contact. The problem with fake eye contact is that it tends to look mechanical. Another problem with fake attention is that you lose the opportunity to assess the audience's understanding of your message. Still, fake eye contact is somewhat better than gripping your cards and staring at them and only occasionally glancing quickly and shallowly at the audience.

This is not to say that you may never look at your notecards. On the contrary, one of the skills in extemporaneous speaking is the ability to alternate one's gaze between the audience and one's notes. Rehearsing your presentation in front of a few friends should help you develop the ability to maintain eye contact with your audience while referring to your notes. When you are giving a speech that is well prepared and well rehearsed, you will only need to look at your notes occasionally. This is an ability that will develop even further with practice. Your public speaking course is your best chance to get that practice.

Effective Use of Vocalics

Vocalics, also known as paralanguage, is the subfield of nonverbal communication that examines how we use our voices to communicate orally. This means that you speak loudly enough for all audience members (even those in the back of the room) to hear you clearly, and that you enunciate clearly enough to be understood by all audience members (even those who may have a hearing impairment or who may be English-language learners). If you tend to be soft-spoken, you will need to practice using a

louder volume level that may feel unnatural to you at first. For all speakers, good vocalic technique is best achieved by facing the audience with your chin up and your eyes away from your notecards and by setting your voice at a moderate speed. Effective use of vocalics also means that you make use of appropriate pitch, pauses, vocal variety, and correct pronunciation.

If you are an English-language learner and feel apprehensive about giving a speech in English, there are two things to remember: first, you can meet with a reference librarian to learn the correct pronunciations of any English words you are unsure of; and second, the fact that you have an accent means you speak more languages than most Americans, which is an accomplishment to be proud of.

If you are one of the many people with a stutter or other speech challenge, you undoubtedly already know that there are numerous techniques for reducing stuttering and improving speech fluency and that there is no one agreed-upon "cure." The Academy Award–winning movie *The King's Speech* did much to increase public awareness of what a person with a stutter goes through when it comes to public speaking. It also prompted some well-known individuals who stutter, such as television news reporter John Stossel, to go public about their stuttering (Stossel, 2011). If you have decided to study public speaking in spite of a speech challenge, we commend you for your efforts and encourage you to work with your speech instructor to make whatever adaptations work best for you.

Volume

Volume refers to the loudness or softness of a speaker's voice. As mentioned, public speakers need to speak loudly enough to be heard by everyone in the audience. In addition, volume is often needed to overcome ambient noise, such as the hum of an air conditioner or the dull roar of traffic passing by. In addition, you can use volume strategically to emphasize the most important points in your speech. Select these points carefully; if you emphasize everything, nothing will seem important. You also want to be sure to adjust your volume to the physical setting of the presentation. If you are in a large auditorium and your audience is several yards away, you will need to speak louder. If you are in a smaller space, with the audience a few feet away, you want to avoid overwhelming your audience with shouting or speaking too loudly.

Rate

Rate is the speed at which a person speaks. To keep your speech delivery interesting, your rate should vary. If you are speaking extemporaneously, your rate will naturally fluctuate. If you're reading, your delivery is less likely to vary. Because rate is an important tool in enhancing the meanings in your speech, you do not want to give a monotone drone or a rapid "machine-gun" style delivery. Your rate should be appropriate for your topic and your points. A rapid, lively rate can communicate such meanings as enthusiasm, urgency, or humor. A slower, moderated rate can convey respect, seriousness, or careful reasoning. By varying rapid and slower rates within a single speech, you can emphasize your main points and keep your audience interested.

Pitch

Pitch refers to the highness or lowness of a speaker's voice. Some speakers have deep voices and others have high voices. As with one's singing voice range, the pitch of one's speaking voice is determined to a large extent by physiology (specifically, the length of one's vocal folds, or cords, and the size of one's vocal tract). We all have a normal speaking pitch where our voice is naturally settled, the pitch where we are most comfortable speaking, and most teachers advise speaking at the pitch that feels natural to you.

While our voices may be generally comfortable at a specific pitch level, we all have the ability to modulate, or move, our pitch up or down. In fact, we do this all the time. When we change the pitch of our voices, we are using inflections. Just as you can use volume strategically, you can also use pitch inflections to make your delivery more interesting and emphatic. If you ordinarily speak with a soprano voice, you may want to drop your voice to a slightly lower range to call attention to a particular point. How we use inflections can even change the entire meaning of what we are saying. For example, try saying the sentence "I love public speaking" with a higher pitch on one of the words—first raise the pitch on "I," then say it again with the pitch raised on "love," and so on. "*I* love public speaking" conveys a different meaning from "I love *public* speaking," doesn't it?

There are some speakers who don't change their pitch at all while speaking, which is called monotone. While very few people are completely monotone, some speakers slip into monotone patterns because of nerves. One way to ascertain whether you sound monotone is to record your voice and see how you sound. If you notice that your voice doesn't fluctuate very much, you will need to be intentional in altering your pitch to ensure that the emphasis of your speech isn't completely lost on your audience.

Finally, resist the habit of pitching your voice “up” at the ends of sentences. It makes them sound like questions instead of statements. This habit can be disorienting and distracting, interfering with the audience’s ability to focus entirely on the message. The speaker sounds uncertain or sounds as though he or she is seeking the understanding or approval of the listener. It hurts the speaker’s credibility and it needs to be avoided.

The effective use of pitch is one of the keys to an interesting delivery that will hold your audience’s attention.

Pauses

Pauses are brief breaks in a speaker’s delivery that can show emphasis and enhance the clarity of a message. In terms of timing, the effective use of pauses is one of the most important skills to develop. Some speakers become uncomfortable very quickly with the “dead air” that the pause causes. And if the speaker is uncomfortable, the discomfort can transmit itself to the audience. That doesn’t mean you should avoid using pauses; your ability to use them confidently will increase with practice. Some of the best comedians use the well-timed pause to powerful and hilarious effect. Although your speech will not be a comedy routine, pauses are still useful for emphasis, especially when combined with a lowered pitch and rate to emphasize the important point you do not want your audience to miss. Avoiding vocal fillers is one of the advantages of getting comfortable with silence or pauses in your speech.

Avoid Vocal Fillers

Have you ever had a teacher or heard someone who uses the same repetitive word, phrase, or sound? Words or sounds that have no meaning, in the context of how and when they are uttered, are known as vocal fillers. "Um," "Uh," "You know," and "So" are just some examples of things a speaker might say to hold space in a conversation. When a speaker uses vocal fillers, they seem less prepared, nervous, and in some cases less intelligent. Audiences want to hear the speaker's important words. They will try to listen to understand the speaker's message. Repetitive or excessive vocal fillers get in the way of effective communication. The most important time to avoid vocal fillers is during the attention getter. Make sure to practice the attention getter exactly as you have written it repeatedly. The first note card you have in your hands should also contain the attention getter. Saying "So" or "You Know" or "OK" before the very first words you utter in your speech takes away the power of what you say. This is not only true in a public speech, but even when you raise your hand in class. This may seem like a simple and obvious instruction, but the best advice is to "think before you speak." Starting a statement, question, or attention getter without using a vocal filler will give more power and create the perception of good preparation and confidence.

Vocal Variety

Vocal variety has to do with changes in the vocalics we have just discussed: volume, pitch, rate, and pauses. No one wants to hear the same volume, pitch, rate, or use of pauses over and over again in a speech. Your audience should never be able to detect that you’re about to slow down or your voice is going to get deeper because you’re making an important point. When you think about how you sound in a normal conversation, your use of volume, pitch, rate, and pauses are all done spontaneously. If you try to overrehearse your vocalics, your speech will end up sounding artificial. Vocal variety should flow naturally from your wish to speak with expression. In that way, it will animate your speech and invite your listeners to understand your topic the way you do.

Pronunciation and Enunciation

The last major category related to vocalics is pronunciation, or the conventional patterns of speech used to form a word. Word pronunciation is important for two reasons: first, mispronouncing a word your audience is familiar with will harm your credibility as a speaker; and second, mispronouncing a word they are unfamiliar with can confuse and even misinform them. If there is any possibility at all that you don’t know the correct pronunciation of a word, find out. Many online dictionaries, such as the Wiktionary(opens in new window) (wiktionary.org), provide free sound files illustrating the pronunciation of words.

Many have commented on the mispronunciation of words such as “nuclear” and “cavalry” by highly educated public speakers, including US presidents. There have been classroom examples as well. For instance, a student giving a speech on the Greek philosopher Socrates mispronounced his name at least eight times during her speech. This mispronunciation created a situation of great awkwardness and anxiety for the audience. Everyone felt embarrassed and the teacher, opting not to humiliate the student in front of the class, could not say anything out loud, instead providing a private written comment at the end of class.

Another aspect of pronunciation in public speaking is avoiding the use of verbal surrogates or “filler” words used as placeholders

for actual words (like *er*, *um*, *uh*, etc.). You might be able to get away with saying “um” as many as two or three times in your speech before it becomes distracting, but the same cannot be said of “like.” We know of a student who trained herself to avoid saying “like.” As soon as the first speech was assigned, she began wearing a rubber band on her left wrist. Each time she caught herself saying “like,” she snapped herself with the rubber band. It hurt. Very quickly, she found that she could stop inflicting the snap on herself, and she had successfully confronted an unprofessional verbal habit.

Enunciation is how clearly a word is stated by a speaker. In order to increase enunciation, a speaker can open their mouth wider and slow down speech rate. Sloppy enunciation confuses and exhausts audience members, who try their best to understand the speaker's words. Audiences appreciate a speaker who enunciates clearly, with easily understood words. Whether you are a native English speaker or someone who speaks English as a 2nd (or 3rd or 4th) language, slowing down and enunciating each syllable of the words in the speech will have a positive effect on your message delivery.

Effective Physical Manipulation

In addition to using our voices effectively, a key to effective public speaking is physical manipulation, or the use of the body to emphasize meanings or convey meanings during a speech. While we will not attempt to give an entire discourse on nonverbal communication, we will discuss a few basic aspects of physical manipulation: posture, body movement, facial expressions, and dress. These aspects add up to the overall physical dimension of your speech, which we call self-presentation.

Posture

“Stand up tall!” I’m sure we’ve all heard this statement from a parent or a teacher at some point in our lives. The fact is, posture is actually quite important. When you stand up straight, you communicate to your audience, without saying a word, that you hold a position of power and take your position seriously. If however, you are slouching, hunched over, or leaning on something, you could be perceived as ill-prepared, anxious, lacking in credibility, or not serious about your responsibilities as a speaker. While speakers often assume more casual posture as a presentation continues (especially if it is a long one, such as a ninety-minute class lecture), it is always wise to start by standing up straight and putting your best foot forward. Remember, you only get one shot at making a first impression, and your body’s orientation is one of the first pieces of information audiences use to make that impression.



Figure 5.3.2.2 Neva's Lunch by Jason Unbound licensed as CC BY-NC 2.0 on Flickr

Body Movement

Unless you are stuck behind a podium because of the need to use a nonmovable microphone, you should never stand in one place during a speech. However, movement during a speech should also not resemble pacing. One of our authors once saw a speaker who would walk around a small table where her speaking notes were located. She would walk around the table once, toss her chalk twice, and then repeat the process. Instead of listening to what the speaker was saying, everyone became transfixed by her walk-and-chalk-toss pattern. As speakers, we must be mindful of how we go about moving while speaking. One common

method for easily integrating some movement into your speech is to take a few steps any time you transition from one idea to the next. By only moving at transition points, not only do you help focus your audience's attention on the transition from one idea to the next, but you also are able to increase your nonverbal immediacy by getting closer to different segments of your audience.

Body movement also includes gestures, which are movements of the hands and arms. It is important to use your hands and arms during your speech, as this is what people do when they are speaking to a friend, in a natural conversation. If you do not gesture naturally when you speak, you may want to plan out a few well-timed and appropriate gestures to include in your speech. Using gestures provides the audience with something interesting to look at, as well as demonstrating your enthusiasm for the subject. Practice gesturing in the mirror when you are preparing to give your speech. Make sure that your arm movements are large and high enough for the audience to see, whether you are speaking in person or online.

Finally, try to avoid distracting movements when you are speaking. Never chew gum when you give a speech - this is a pet peeve for many speech teachers. Besides chewing gum, we all have unconscious mannerisms such as twirling our hair, putting our hands in our pockets, or licking our lips. Recording yourself practicing your speech will help you to identify any distracting or repetitive movements you make. Then, you will need to focus on removing these movements from your presentation.

Facial Expressions

Faces are amazing things and convey so much information. As speakers, we must be acutely aware of what our face looks like while speaking. While many of us do not look forward to seeing ourselves on videotape, often the only way you can critically evaluate what your face is doing while you are speaking is to watch a recording of your speech. If video is not available, you can practice speaking in front of a mirror.

There are two extremes you want to avoid: no facial expression and overanimated facial expressions. First, you do not want to have a completely blank face while speaking. Some people just do not show much emotion with their faces naturally, but this blankness is often increased when the speaker is nervous. Audiences will react negatively to the message of such a speaker because they will sense that something is amiss. If a speaker is talking about the joys of Disney World and his face doesn't show any excitement, the audience is going to be turned off to the speaker and his message. On the other extreme end is the speaker whose face looks like that of an exaggerated cartoon character. Instead, your goal is to show a variety of appropriate facial expressions while speaking.

Like vocalics and gestures, facial expression can be used strategically to enhance meaning. A smile or pleasant facial expression is generally appropriate at the beginning of a speech to indicate your wish for a good transaction with your audience. However, you should not smile throughout a speech on drug addiction, poverty, or the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. An inappropriate smile creates confusion about your meaning and may make your audience feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, a serious scowl might look hostile or threatening to audience members and become a distraction from the message. If you keep the meaning of your speech foremost in your mind, you will more readily find the balance in facial expression.

Another common problem some new speakers have is showing only one expression. One of our coauthors competed in speech in college. After one of his speeches (about how people die on amusement park rides), one of his judges pulled him aside and informed him that his speech was "creepy." Apparently, while speaking about death, our coauthor smiled the entire time. The incongruity between the speech on death and dying and the coauthor's smile just left the judge a little creeped out. If you are excited in a part of your speech, you should show excitement on your face. On the other hand, if you are at a serious part of your speech, your facial expressions should be serious.

Dress

While there are no clear-cut guidelines for how you should dress for every speech you'll give, dress is still a very important part of how others will perceive you (again, it's all about the first impression). If you want to be taken seriously, you must present yourself seriously. While we do not advocate dressing up in a suit every time you give a speech, there are definitely times when wearing a suit is appropriate.

One general rule you can use for determining dress is the "step-above rule," which states that you should dress one step above your audience. If your audience is going to be dressed casually in shorts and jeans, then wear nice casual clothing such as a pair of neatly pressed slacks and a collared shirt or blouse. If, however, your audience is going to be wearing "business casual" attire, then you should probably wear a sport coat, a dress, or a suit. The goal of the step-above rule is to establish yourself as someone to be taken seriously. On the other hand, if you dress two steps above your audience, you may put too much distance between yourself and your audience, coming across as overly formal or even arrogant.

Another general rule for dressing is to avoid distractions in your appearance. Overly tight or revealing garments, over-the-top hairstyles or makeup, jangling jewelry, or a display of tattoos and piercings can serve to draw your audience's attention away from your speech. Remembering that your message is the most important aspect of your speech, keep that message in mind when you choose your clothing and accessories.

Finally, make sure that the clothes you wear when you speak do not take away from your message. For example, if you are giving a "pitch" or trying to become a consultant for a clothing company, you should wear the clothes that company sells (assuming it's not lingerie or swimsuits) during your meeting. Be careful if you have writing or a specific message on your clothes, to ensure the slogan or words are consistent with the speech. For example, if you are trying to persuade your audience to eat a vegan diet, you should not wear a hat or shirt from a company that sells hamburgers.

Self-Presentation

When you present your speech, you are also presenting yourself. Self-presentation, sometimes also referred to as poise or stage presence, is determined by how you look, how you stand, how you walk to the lectern, and how you use your voice and gestures. Your self-presentation can either enhance your message or detract from it. Worse, a poor self-presentation can turn a good, well-prepared speech into a forgettable waste of time. You want your self-presentation to support your credibility and improve the likelihood that the audience will listen with interest.

Your personal appearance should reflect the careful preparation of your speech. Your personal appearance is the first thing your audience will see, and from it, they will make inferences about the speech you're about to present.

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5.3.3: Types of Presentation Aids

With a little forethought and adequate practice, you can choose presentation aids that enhance your message and boost your professional appearance in front of an audience. One principle to keep in mind is to use only as many presentation aids as necessary to present your message or to fulfill your classroom assignment. Although the maxim “less is more” may sound like a cliché, it really does apply in this instance. The number and the technical sophistication of your presentation aids should never overshadow your speech.

Another important consideration is technology. Keep your presentation aids within the limits of the working technology available to you. Whether or not your classroom technology works on the day of your speech, you will still have to present. What will you do if the computer file containing your slides is corrupted? What will you do if the easel is broken? What if you had counted on stacking your visuals on a table that disappears right when you need it? You must be prepared to adapt to an uncomfortable and scary situation. This is why we urge students to go to the classroom at least fifteen minutes ahead of time to test the equipment and ascertain the condition of things they’re planning to use. As the speaker, you are responsible for arranging the things you need to make your presentation aids work as intended. Carry a roll of duct tape so you can display your poster even if the easel is gone. Find an extra chair if your table has disappeared. Test the computer setup, and have an alternative plan prepared in case there is some glitch that prevents your computer-based presentation aids from being usable. The more sophisticated the equipment is, the more you should be prepared with an alternative, even in a “smart classroom.”

More important than the method of delivery is the audience’s ability to see and understand the presentation aid. It must deliver clear information, and it must not distract from the message. Avoid overly elaborate presentation aids because they can distract the audience’s attention from your message. Instead, simplify as much as possible, emphasizing the information you want your audience to understand.

Another thing to remember is that presentation aids do not “speak for themselves.” When you display a visual aid, you should explain what it shows, pointing out and naming the most important features. If you use an audio aid such as a musical excerpt, you need to tell your audience what to listen for. Similarly, if you use a video clip, it is up to you as the speaker to point out the characteristics in the video that support the point you are making.

Although there are many useful presentation tools, you should not attempt to use every one of these tools in a single speech. Your presentation aids should be designed to look like a coherent set. For instance, if you decide to use three slides and a poster, all four of these visual aids should make use of the same type font and basic design.

Now that we’ve explored some basic hints for preparing visual aids, let’s look at the most common types of visual aids: charts, graphs, representations, objects/models, and people.

Charts

A chart is commonly defined as a graphical representation of data (often numerical) or a sketch representing an ordered process. Whether you create your charts or do research to find charts that already exist, it is important for them to exactly match the specific purpose in your speech. Figure 14.3.1 $5.3.3.1$ shows one chart related to acupuncture. This chart might not be useful in a speech about the history and development of acupuncture, but it would be useful for showing the locations of meridians, or the lines along which energy is thought to flow, and the acupuncture points.



Figure 5.3.3.1 Acupuncture Charts (public domain; Wikimedia Commons)

In the rest of this section, we're going to explore three common types of charts: statistical charts, sequence-of-steps chart, and decision trees.

Statistical Charts

For most audiences, statistical presentations must be kept as simple as possible, and they must be explained. Unless you are familiar with statistics, statistical charts may be very confusing. When visually displaying information from a quantitative study, you need to make sure that you understand the material and can successfully and simply explain how one should interpret the data. If you are unsure about the data yourself, then you should probably not use this type of information. This is surely an example of a visual aid that, although it delivers a limited kind of information, does not speak for itself.

Sequence-of-Steps Charts

Table 5.3.3.1 Steps in Cell Reproduction (Wikimedia Commons – public domain)

Congenital Anomalies	Relative Risk	Number of Smokers N = 1,943	Number of Nonsmokers N = 16,073	95% CI	p-Value
Cardiovascular System	1.56	43	217	1.12-2.19	p <.01
Skeletal System	1.11	19	139	0.68-1.82	NS
Hematologic System	1.39	20	121	0.86-2.25	NS
Nervous System	1.30	4	25	0.91-1.86	NS
Pulmonary System	1.25	7	39	0.55-2.84	NS
Gastrointestinal System	0.54	1	17	0.07-4.11	NS

Charts are also useful when you are trying to explain a process that involves several steps. The visual aids in Table 5.3.3.1 "Steps in Cell Reproduction" both depict the process of cell division called mitosis using a sequence-of-steps chart, but they each deliver different information. The first chart lacks labels to indicate the different phases of cell division. Although the first chart may have more color and look more polished, the missing information may confuse your audience. In the second chart, each phase is labeled with a brief explanation of what is happening, which can help your audience understand the process.

Decision Trees

Sometimes a photograph or a drawing is the best way to show an unfamiliar but important detail. Figure 5.3.3.2 A (left) “Wigwam Picture” is a photograph of a wigwam, a wigwam was a living dwelling used by Native Americans in the North East. In this photograph you can see the curved birchbark exterior, which makes this dwelling ideal for a variety of weather conditions. The photograph of the tall ship in Figure 5.3.3.2 B (right) “Ship’s Rigging” emphasizes the sheer amount and complexity of the ship’s rigging.



Figure 5.3.3.2 (A) Wigwams –Iheartpandas-CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. Figure 5.3.3.2 (B) Ship’s Rigging Wikimedia Commons – public domain.

Video or Audio Recordings

Another very useful type of presentation aid is a video or audio recording. Whether it is a short video from a website such as YouTube or Vimeo, a segment from a song, or a piece of a podcast, a well-chosen video or audio recording may be a good choice to enhance your speech.

Imagine, for example, that you’re giving a speech on how “Lap-Band” surgeries help people lose weight. One of the sections of your speech could explain how the Lap-Band works, so you could easily show the following forty-three-second video to demonstrate the medical part of the surgery: Lap-Band Procedure.

There is one major caveat to using audio and video clips during a speech: do not forget that they are supposed to be aids to your speech, not the speech itself! In addition, be sure to avoid these three mistakes that speakers often make when using audio and video clips:

1. Avoid choosing clips that are too long for the overall length of the speech. If you are giving a five-minute speech, then any audio or video clip you use should be under thirty seconds in length.
2. Don’t fail to practice with the audio or video equipment prior to speaking. If you are unfamiliar with the equipment, you’ll look foolish trying to figure out how it works. This fiddling around will not only take your audience out of your speech but also have a negative impact on your credibility.
3. Don’t fail to cue the clip to the appropriate place prior to beginning your speech. We cannot tell you the number of times we’ve seen students spend valuable speech time trying to find a clip on YouTube or a DVD. You need to make sure your clip is ready to go before you start speaking.

Objects or Models

Objects and models are another form of presentation aid that can be very helpful in getting your audience to understand your message. Objects refer to anything you could hold up and talk about during your speech. If you’re talking about the importance

of not using plastic water bottles, you might hold up a plastic water bottle and a stainless steel water bottle as examples. If you're talking about the percussion family of musical instruments and you own (and can play) several different percussion instruments, you can show your audience in person what they look like and how they sound.

Models, on the other hand, are re-creations of physical objects that you cannot have readily available with you during a speech. If you're giving a speech on heart murmurs, you may be able to show how heart murmurs work by holding up a model of the human heart.

People and Animals

The next category of presentation aids are people and animals. We can often use ourselves or other people to adequately demonstrate an idea during our speeches.

Animals as Presentation Aids

When giving a speech on a topic relating to animals, it is often tempting to bring an animal to serve as your presentation aid. While this can sometimes add a very engaging dimension to the speech, it carries some serious risks that you need to consider.

- The first risk is that animal behavior tends to be unpredictable. You may think this won't be a problem if your presentation aid animal is a small enough to be kept confined throughout your speech—for example, a goldfish in a bowl or a lizard or bird in a cage. However, even caged animals can be very distracting to your audience if they run about, chirp, or exhibit other agitated behavior. The chances are great that an animal will react to the stress of an unfamiliar situation by displaying behavior that does not contribute positively to your speech.
- The second risk is that some audience members may respond negatively to a live animal. In addition to common fears and aversions to animals like snakes, spiders, and mice, many people have allergies to various animals.
- The third risk is that some locations may have regulations about bringing animals onto the premises. If animals are allowed, the person bringing the animal may be required to bring a veterinary certificate or may be legally responsible for any damage caused by the animal.

For these reasons, before you decide to use an animal as a presentation aid, ask yourself if you could make your point equally well with a picture, model, diagram, or other representation of the animal in question.

Speaker as Presentation Aid

Speakers can often use their own bodies to demonstrate facets of a speech. If your speech is about ballroom dancing or ballet, you might use your body to demonstrate the basic moves in the cha-cha or the five basic ballet positions.

Other People as Presentation Aids

In many speeches, it can be cumbersome and distracting for the speaker to use their own body to illustrate a point. In such cases, the best solution is to ask someone else to serve as your presentation aid.

You should arrange ahead of time for a person (or persons) to be an effective aid—do not assume that an audience member will volunteer on the spot. If you plan to demonstrate how to immobilize a broken bone, your volunteer must know ahead of time that you will touch him or her as much as necessary to splint their foot. You must also make certain that they will arrive dressed presentably and that they will not draw attention away from your message through their appearance or behavior.

The transaction between you and your human presentation aid must be appropriate, especially if you are going to demonstrate something like a dance step. Use your absolute best judgment about behavior, and make sure that your human presentation aid understands this dimension of the task.

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5.3.4: Speech Feedback and Evaluation

Feedback as an Audience Member

Audience members are vital in helping speakers understand how they are doing both during and after the presentation. In the public speaking rounds you will have the chance to practice your active listening skills. Knowing what it feels like to be on stage is often motivation enough for many people to give nonverbal feedback or verbal feedback.

Your instructor will guide the evaluation sessions and will provide some prompting questions to help you give some constructive feedback to your classmates. Part of your assignment points will be determined by your participation in being a good audience member for your classmates' speeches.

Let's look at how you can provide nonverbal and verbal feedback to a speaker.

Nonverbal Feedback

Effective listening is more than just using your ears. In fact, Boothman (2008) recommends listening with your whole body, not just your ears. Consider how confident you would feel speaking to a room full of people with their eyes closed, arms and legs crossed, and bodies bent in slouches. These listeners are presenting non-verbal cues communicating that they are uninterested and unimpressed. Meanwhile, listeners sitting up straight, facing you with an intent look on their face, are more likely to offer reassurance that the speaker's words are being understood.

Eye contact is another nonverbal cue to the speaker that you are paying attention. You don't want to be bug-eyed and unblinking; the speaker might assume there is a tiger behind them and begin to panic as you seem to be doing. However, attentive eye contact can indicate you are listening and help you to stay focused too. There are some cultures where maintaining eye contact would cause discomfort, so keep that in mind. Also, you may be someone who listens better with eyes closed to visualize what is being said. This can be difficult for a speaker to recognize, so if this is you, consider incorporating one of the following non-verbals while you listen with eyes closed.

Nodding your head affirmatively and making responses such as "Yes," "Umhum," or "OK" can help the speaker gauge your interest. Even the speed of your head nod can signal your level of patience or understanding (Pease & Pease, 2006). Leaning in as a listener is far more encouraging than slumping in your seat. Nevertheless, sending too many non-verbal responses to the speaker can go wrong, too. After all, a conference room full of people shifting in their seats and nodding their heads may translate as a restless audience that the speaker needs to recapture.

Verbal Feedback

While speakers sometimes want all questions held until the end of a presentation, asking questions when the opportunity presents itself can help you as a listener. For one, you have to listen in order to be able to ask a question. Your goal should be to ask open-ended questions ("What do you think about....?" rather than "We should do ..., right?"). You can use questions to confirm your understanding of the speaker's message. If you're not entirely sure of a significant point, you might ask a clarifying question. These are questions such as "What did you mean?" "Can you be more specific?" or "What is a concrete example of your point?" Such questions can help your comprehension while also offering the speaker feedback. When asking questions, approach the speaker in a positive, non-threatening way. A good listener doesn't seek to put the speaker on the defensive. You want to demonstrate your objectivity and willingness to listen to the speaker's response.

Finally, paraphrasing what has been said in your interactions with the speaker can be another useful tool for a good listener. Imagine the difference if, before you respond to an upset colleague, you take a moment to say, "I understand you are disappointed we didn't consult you before moving forward with the product release..." before you say, "we didn't have time to get everyone's input." Reflecting back the speaker's point of view before responding allows the speaker to know you were listening and helps foster trust that everyone's voice is being heard.

Table 5.3.4.1

Non-Verbal Feedback (constructive)	**Verbal Feedback (constructive)**
Listen with whole body	Ask open-ended questions
Use appropriate eye contact	Questions confirm understanding of message
Nod affirmatively (mmm hmm, yes, OK)	Ask clarifying questions (can you give an example of/did you mean...)
Use **listener's lean**	Use paraphrasing to demonstrate accurate understanding
Non-Verbal Feedback (not constructive)	**Verbal Feedback (not constructive)**
Closed body position	Asking closed questions
No eye contact	Asking questions that don't relate to speaker's message
Inattentive, distracted (playing with phones, engaging in side conversations etc.)	Asking rhetorical questions
Slumping, yawning	Making your own speech instead of asking a question

Receiving Feedback

Being open to receiving feedback is the only way to have a better picture of your performance as a presenter or speaker. Combining self-analysis with the feedback of your audience or peers is your opportunity to better understand your strengths as a presenter and what resonated well with your audience.

It may be a bit more uncomfortable to look at things that did not go well or receive feedback that's judgemental, biased, or otherwise laden with emotion. When receiving and making sense of feedback, it is very important to be self-aware and honest with yourself. This honesty will help you distinguish between an environmental situation, a situation that lies with the audience member, or a situation with the presenter.

Watch this video from Toastmasters.org to gain some helpful tips for providing feedback:

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

Watch this video to learn about conscious listening:

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

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5.3.5: Speaking Contexts That Affect Delivery

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how the physical setting of a speech is an element that calls for preparation.
2. Examine some tips and strategies for common speaking situations.

Speaking Contexts That Affect Delivery



Figure 5.3.5.1 Mad Mou – Empty – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at a gigantic civil rights rally on an August afternoon in 1963. His lectern was bristling with microphones placed there for news coverage and for recording the historic event. His audience, estimated to number a quarter of a million people, extended as far as the eye could see. He was the last speaker of the day, delivering his speech after more than a dozen civil rights leaders and world-famous performers such as Joan Baez, Mahalia Jackson, and Charlton Heston had occupied the stage (Ross, 2007). King gave us his speech in the assertive ringing tones of inspired vision. Nothing less would have worked that day.

Most of us will never speak to so many people at once. Even an appearance on television will probably command a much smaller audience than the crowd that heard King’s speech. Even though you don’t expect an audience of such size or a setting of such symbolic importance, you should still be prepared to adapt to the setting in which you will speak.

Our audiences, circumstances, and physical contexts for public speaking will vary. At some point in your life you may run for public office or rise to a leadership role in a business or volunteer organization. Or you may be responsible for informing coworkers about a new policy, regulation, or opportunity. You may be asked to deliver remarks in the context of a worship service, wedding, or funeral. You may be asked to introduce a keynote speaker or simply to make an important announcement in some context. Sometimes you will speak in a familiar environment, while at other times you may be faced with an unfamiliar location and very little time to get used to speaking with a microphone. These are contexts and situations we address in the following subsections.

Using Lecterns

A lectern is a small raised surface, usually with a slanted top, where a speaker can place notes during a speech. While a lectern adds a measure of formality to the speaking situation, it allows speakers the freedom to do two things: to come out from behind the lectern to establish more immediate contact with the audience and to use both hands for gestures.

However, for new speakers who feel anxious, it is all too tempting to grip the edges of the lectern with both hands for security. You might even wish you could hide behind it. Be aware of these temptations so you can manage them effectively and present yourself to your audience in a manner they will perceive as confident. One way to achieve this is by limiting your use of the lectern to simply a place to rest your notes. Try stepping to the side or front of the lectern when speaking with free hands, only occasionally standing at the lectern to consult your notes. This will enhance your eye contact as well as free up your hands for gesturing.

Speaking in a Small or Large Physical Space

If you are accustomed to being in a classroom of a certain size, you will need to make adjustments when speaking in a smaller or larger space than what you are used to.

A large auditorium can be intimidating, especially for speakers who feel shy and “exposed” when facing an audience. However, the maxim that “proper preparation prevents poor performance” is just as true here as anywhere. If you have prepared and practiced well, you can approach a large-venue speaking engagement with confidence. In terms of practical adjustments, be aware that your voice is likely to echo, so you will want to speak more slowly than usual and make use of pauses to mark the ends of phrases and sentences. Similarly, your facial expressions and gestures should be larger so that they are visible from farther away. If you are using visual aids, they need to be large enough to be visible from the back of the auditorium.

Limited space is not as disconcerting for most speakers as enormous space, but it has the advantage of minimizing the tendency to pace back and forth while you speak. We have all seen dramatic soliloquies in the movies and plays where an actor makes use of the space on the stage, but this is generally not a good strategy for a speech. A small space also calls for more careful management of notecards and visual aids, as your audience will be able to see up close what you are doing with your hands. Do your best to minimize fumbling, including setting up in advance or arriving early to decide how to organize your materials in the physical space. We will discuss visual aids further in Chapter 13 “Presentation Aids: Design and Usage”.

Speaking Outdoors

Outdoor settings can be charming, but they are prone to distractions. If you’re giving a speech in a setting that is picturesquely beautiful, it may be difficult to maintain the audience’s attention. If you know this ahead of time, you might plan your speech to focus more on mood than information and perhaps to make reference to the lovely view.

More typically, outdoor speech venues can pose challenges with weather, sun glare, and uninvited guests, such as ants and pigeons. If the venue is located near a busy highway, it might be difficult to make yourself heard over the ambient noise. You might lack the usual accommodations, such as a lectern or table. Whatever the situation, you will need to use your best efforts to project your voice clearly without sounding like you’re yelling.

Using a Microphone

Most people today are familiar with microphones that are built into video recorders and other electronic devices, but they may be new at using a microphone to deliver a speech. One overall principle to remember is that a microphone only amplifies, it does not clarify. If you are not enunciating clearly, the microphone will merely enable your audience to hear amplified mumbling.

Microphones come in a wide range of styles and sizes. Generally, the easiest microphone to use is the clip-on style worn on the front of your shirt. If you look closely at many television personalities and news anchors, you will notice these tiny microphones clipped to their clothing. They require very little adaptation. You simply have to avoid looking down—at your notes, for instance—because your voice will be amplified when you do so.

Lectern and handheld microphones require more adaptation. If they’re too close to your mouth, they can screech. If they’re too far away, they might not pick up your voice. Some microphones are directional, meaning that they are only effective when you speak directly into them. If there is any opportunity to do so, ask for tips about how to use a particular microphone and practice with it for a few minutes while you have someone listen from a middle row in the audience and signal whether you can be heard well. The best plan, of course, would be to have access to the microphone for practice ahead of the speaking date.

Often a microphone is provided when it isn’t necessary. If the room is small or the audience is close to you, do not feel obligated to use the microphone. Sometimes an amplified voice can feel less natural and less compelling than a direct voice. However, if you forgo the microphone, make sure to speak loudly enough for all audience members to hear you—not just those in front.

Audience Size

A small audience is an opportunity for a more intimate, minimally formal tone. If your audience has only eight to twelve people, you can generate greater audience contact. Make use of all the preparation you have done. You do not have to revamp your speech just because the audience is small. When the presentation is over, there will most likely be opportunities to answer questions and have individual contact with your listeners.

Your classroom audience may be as many as twenty to thirty students. The format for an audience of this size is still formal but conversational. Depending on how your instructor structures the class, you may or may not be asked to leave time after your speech for questions and answers.

Some audiences are much larger. If you have an audience that fills an auditorium, or if you have an auditorium with only a few people in it, you still have a clearly formal task, and you should be guided as much as possible by your preparation.

Key Takeaways

- Not every speaking setting happens in a classroom. As such, different environments call for speakers to think through their basic speaking strategies.
- Speakers need to be prepared to deal with five common challenges in speaking contexts: using a lectern, large or small space, speaking in the outdoors, using a microphone, and audience size.

Exercises

1. Get permission from your instructor and announce a campus event to the class. Make sure your details are complete and accurate. How does your physical space affect the way you present the information?
2. Watch a speech that takes place indoors or outside. How do you think this speech would be different if the speech occurred in the other location? What changes would you recommend for the speaker?
3. If you were suddenly asked to give your next classroom speech in front of two hundred of your peers, how would adjust your speech? Why?

References

Ross, S. (2007). Civil rights march on Washington. *Infoplease*. Retrieved from http://www.infoplease.com/spot/marchonwashington.html

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5.4: INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

5.4.1: Objectives of an Informative Speech
5.4.2: Selecting a Topic for an Informative Speech
5.4.3: Organizing the Informative Speech
5.4.4: Supporting the Informative Speech
5.4.5: Language in an Informative Speech
5.4.6: Putting It Together- Informative Speaking

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5.4.1: Objectives of an Informative Speech

Learning Objectives

- Name at least one objective of an informative speech.
- List two examples of informative speech topics.

In an informative speech, the goal of the speaker is to provide the audience with information about a topic they are unfamiliar with or to provide more information about a topic with which they are already familiar. This distinction is important because the key to a successful information speech is to understand how much your audience already knows about the topic. Informative speeches must be carefully calibrated to the audience's level of understanding. This section looks at how speakers analyze the audience and then adjust their speech content to better serve their audience.



Figure 5.4.1.1 Speaker holding microphone by Pavel Danilyuk on Pexels

Ideally, speakers have a goal or objective in mind when speaking to an audience. In the case of an informative speech, the goal or objective is to inform the audience or to increase the information the audience has about a topic. In a way, speakers who deliver an informative speech are acting as a teacher and the audience are the students.

There are endless examples of informative speeches. Here are a few:

- Sleep expert explains to an audience of therapists how lack of sleep might affect mental health
- AI programmer details the way technology in an airport can identify passengers using facial recognition to an audience of TSA Agents
- Professor of Biology lectures about photosynthesis to a first-year college class
- Student speaker delivers a speech in public speaking class about the life and works of her favorite musician

To Watch: How to Spot a Liar/Pamela Meyer TED TALK

In this speech, lie detection expert Pamela Meyer provides information and evidence to show the audience "How to Spot a Liar." From the title alone, it may be obvious that Meyer's speech is primarily intended to be informative. The audience is supposed to come away with new knowledge about something: in this case, how to delineate when someone is being truthful with us, as opposed to telling us a lie.

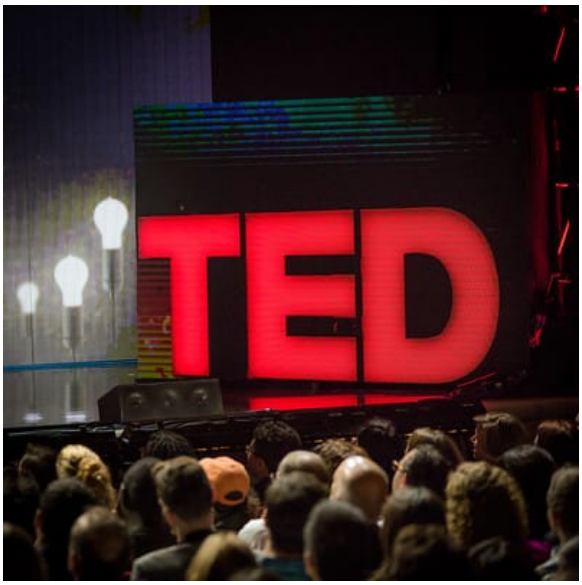


Figure 5.4.1.2 TED Talk by Ryan Lash licensed as CC-BY NC 2.0 on Flickr

You can view the speech online here: How to spot a Liar TEDTalk(opens in new window) (YouTube)

What to watch for:

Objectives for giving an informative presentation might be explaining, teaching, or describing. To illustrate, think about a time when you were asked to explain a concept or idea, describe an event, explain how a process works, or teach someone to do something. In each of those cases, you were providing information to an audience.

In order to accomplish these objectives, when we develop and deliver an informative speech, we want to make sure the information we are presenting contains accurate communication, uses clear language that our audience will understand, and provides evidence and information relevant to the audience to ensure the speech is meaningful for those listening.

> An informative speech is **not** trying to persuade the listeners to change their thinking or behavior. (That would be a persuasive speech.)

There is one objective we are not trying to achieve when we give an informative speech: persuasion. When we speak to inform, we are trying to help our audience better understand the topic we are speaking about, but we are not advocating that our audience change their beliefs or their behaviors. When a speaker tries to convince someone to change a belief or motivate them to take a particular action, they are engaged in persuasive rather than informative speaking.

We'll cover persuasive speaking elsewhere in the course, so for now let's focus on how to convey knowledge and understanding to an audience rather than think about how to convince or persuade them.

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5.4.2: Selecting a Topic for an Informative Speech

Learning Objectives

- Explain how knowledge of the audience helps the speaker to choose an informative speech topic.

Now lets turn our focus to topic selection. How does a speaker select a specific and appropriate topic for a speech.



Figure 5.4.2.1 Choice is hard.

Choosing a topic can sometimes be the most difficult step. You want to choose a topic that is of interest to the audience and yourself. You also want to make sure that you have met the assignment expectations. If you think finding a topic is a challenge, you are not alone. There are many (even professional speakers) who think this can be one of the hardest parts of a speech!

As you think about topic choices, recall that the purpose in an informative speech is to share information with an audience, not to persuade them to believe something or take some kind of action.

As an example, you may want to give a speech about affordable housing options. You will want to keep your focus on explaining the options available to your audience rather than offering your opinion on the best options. You do not want to ask your audience to try and persuade their local legislators. You only want to stick to the research you have done about what constitutes affordable housing and nothing more. It is important to select a topic you understand well, is of interest to you, and can be explained to your audience easily. You do not have to be an expert on your topic, but you should be familiar enough with it that you can talk about it with confidence. You also want to keep your audience in mind and select a topic they are unlikely to know a lot about and that they would be interested in learning more about.

When determining a topic, keep the following in mind:

- Know your speech purpose. In this case, it would be to inform or explain. Focus on topics that lend themselves to that purpose.
- Who is your specific audience? Would they be interested in your topic? What knowledge might they already have about your topic? What might they want to know about your topic?
- What constraints have you been given? For example, what kind of room are you speaking in? How much time will you have to speak? How many sources do you need to cite? Are you required to use visual aids?

Find the right scope

One common error students in public speaking classes have is selecting a topic that is too large or broad in scope for the time they have been given to deliver their speech. To illustrate, you might be interested in developing a speech that informs your audience about the Black Lives Matter movement. Even though Black Lives Matter is a specific social justice movement, it is still a broad subject with many different facets, many of which might be a good subject for an informative speech. For example, you could devote the speech to the particular events in 2013 that were the genesis of the movement. Or you might focus your speech on explaining how the #BlackLivesMatter social media hashtag helped spread awareness of the movement. Or, you could talk about how Black Lives Matter started.

As you think about selecting a topic, ask yourself whether you can reasonably hope to inform or educate your audience in the time frame you have for the speech. If you think it might be too broad in scope, try and brainstorm aspects of the topic that would be focused and narrow enough to fit the time parameters you have been given.

Once you have selected your topic and narrowed it to fit the assignment parameters, you can start organizing the speech.

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5.4.3: Organizing the Informative Speech

Learning Objectives

Discern the best organizational approach for types of informative speeches.

Like an essay, a speech should have a clear organizational structure with a recognizable beginning, middle, and end. But unlike an essay where your reader can go back and re-read sections they may not understand or follow, in a speech in front of a live audience your audience can't stop, rewind, and re-listen to parts of your speech they didn't follow. For that reason it is especially important to have a clear and easy-to-follow structure to a speech.

In this section, we introduce the characteristic organizational structures of an informative speech. Later on, we'll explore each of the organizational structural elements in greater detail.

An informative speech can be broken up into three sections:

- **Section 1: Introduction.** The first section of the speech contains an attention-getter to grab the interest of the audience and orient them to the topic of the speech, a clear thesis that states the purpose of the speech, and a preview of the main points of the speech.
- **Section 2: Body.** The heart of the speech is the body. The body is where you provide your audience all the information they will need to understand your topic. To make the body of the speech easier for the audience to follow, divide it up into **at least two but no more than five main points**. Organize the main points in a clear structure appropriate to the topic and thesis and provide supporting examples and/or evidence for each main point.
- **Section 3: Conclusion.** The conclusion is a short section that reinforces the thesis, summarizes the main points, and provides a sense of closure.

Video example

To see an example of an informative speech with a clear introduction, body, and conclusion, watch this speech where the speaker informs her audience how to manage the stress that comes with being a college student.



Figure 5.4.3.1 Image of a woman giving a speech

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pb.libretexts.org/publicspeaking/?p=464

You can view the transcript for “Stress Informative Speech (with captions)” here (opens in new window).

Specific Purpose Statement

Once you have a speech topic selected, develop a specific purpose statement. Your purpose statement describes what you want your audience to know as a result of listening to your speech. Here are some examples of informative speech purpose statements:

- To inform my audience about different types of coffee makers.
- To inform my audience about the historical significance of Harriet Tubman.
- To inform my audience about how to prune roses.

Central Idea

Your purpose statement helps you determine the thesis or central idea of your speech. You will present your central idea in the introduction to the speech and everything you say in the speech will support that central idea.

For example, if your purpose is to inform your audience about different types of coffee makers you could develop a central idea like this:

- There are two main types of coffee makers, automatic drip machines and manual coffee makers.

Main Points

Once you have a purpose statement you want to develop your main points. The body of the speech is where you will present and provide support for the main points of the speech. Remember that you should generally aim to have at least two but no more than five main points. Keep time constraints in mind when developing your main points. If you are given four minutes to speak, for instance, trying to have four main points might be too ambitious, so you might instead focus on two or at the most three main points.

You’ll want to organize the body of the speech in a way that helps you present your main points in the most effective order. Your purpose statement helps you decide what kind of organizational pattern would make the most sense for your topic.

Organizational Patterns

There are many types of organizational patterns you can use for an informative speech, as you can see in more detail in Module 6: Organizing and Outlining Your Speech. Here are a few examples:



Figure 5.4.3.2 Image of an organized silverware drawer. In a topical organization structure, each point fits into one of a few topic categories.

Topical: This is a good, all-purpose organizational pattern where you divide your main points into topics. It works well for speeches where the main points are clearly distinct from each other and the order they are placed in isn’t critical like it would be for some other organizational patterns. The example above about coffee makers, for example, could be divided into two topical main points: 1) automatic drip coffee makers and 2) manual coffee makers. Each main point would be supported by subpoints that elaborate on the characteristics of each type of coffee maker.

Compare/contrast: With compare/contrast organizational patterns, you explain the similarities and differences between two or more things. A speech about the similarities and differences between video game consoles PlayStation and Xbox would fit this type of organizational pattern. You could devote one main point to the qualities they share in common and a second point to how they differ from each other.



Figure 5.4.3.3 Image of a map-A spatially organized speech about the Mississippi River might follow the river from north to south.

Spatial: Do you have a topic that lends itself to being explained in a directional order such as from top to bottom, left to right, or east to west? If so, you could organize your speech in a spatial pattern. This can be a good organizational pattern to use when you want to describe a place to an audience. For instance, if you gave a speech about the major cities the Mississippi River passes through you could start in the north by describing its origin in Minnesota near Minneapolis and St. Paul, then work south and explain how it flows through other cities like St. Louis before it empties into the Gulf of Mexico in New Orleans.

Chronological: This is a speech that follows a time order. This is a good choice for speeches where you want to explain a sequence of events. For example, you could use a chronological pattern for a speech explaining the steps Apple took in developing the iPhone or the significant decisions made by the Supreme Court affecting rights of the LGBTQIA community. Chronological can also be a good organizational choice for speeches where you are explaining a process or demonstrating how to do something.

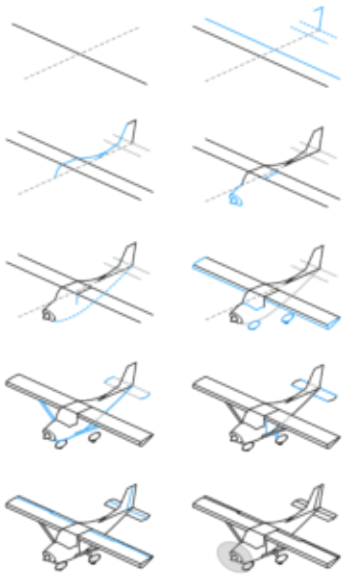


Figure 5.4.3.4 Image of how to draw a plane - To describe or demonstrate a process, step by step may be the best structure.

Step-by-Step: When you're speaking about a process, the most logical organizational structure may be step by step. Step-by-

step organization is useful for “how-to” or demonstration speeches where you are teaching or showing how to do a task. If you were speaking about how to spray-paint a mural, you might describe each layer of the painting step by step.

Biographical: A biographical organization tells the story of a person’s life. The person could be a well-known person or someone who is not. The subject of the speech could even be the speaker themselves. It can be similar to the chronological pattern in that it can be organized by time but it doesn’t have to be. A biographical speech could start by focusing on an important event late in someone’s life and then going back in time to explain how the person got to that point.



Figure 5.4.3.5 Image of dominoes falling - A causal structure talks about why something happened.

Causal: If you want to explain a cause/effect relationship, you want to use the causal organizational pattern. Typically with this pattern, you would have two main points: one focused on the causes of an event, the second about its effects. A speech about hurricanes might be organized this way, for example. One main point could be devoted to oceanic and atmospheric causes of hurricanes and the second main point about the effects of hurricanes such as storm surge, strong winds, and flooding.

We cover outlining in detail elsewhere, but at this point once you have a purpose statement, general idea, main points, and an organizational pattern, you are ready to develop an outline.

Outlines

Some important reminders about outlines:

- Working outlines are what you start with and they help you with speech preparation and planning. This isn’t the outline you will use for speaking.
- The full-sentence outline develops the full details of the message. But, again, it is not the outline you use to speak.
- The speaking outline includes key words or phrases and helps you stay organized in front of the audience without reading to them. This is the outline you will speak from so that you are speaking extemporaneously rather than reading your outline word for word.
- Tip: Using notecards for your speaking outline helps with delivery and makes it easier to find information if you lose your place or draw a blank.

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5.4.4: Supporting the Informative Speech

Learning Objectives

- Describe the importance of vetting facts and data in an informative speech.

We live in a world where we are bombarded by information every day. Some of the information is based upon careful research where facts and data are collected from reliable sources. Some of this information is all opinion based without credible sources to support the claims made. It is important to be able to distinguish between the two. For details on how to conduct and cite evidence, please make sure to read page 2.5: Choosing and Researching a Topic in this document.



Figure 5.4.4.1 Virtual Meeting by LinkedIn Sales Navigator on Pexels

Facts and data are what is called supporting material. You can obtain supporting materials by doing research. This research is essential for creating a credible, informative speech that your audience will want to give their attention to. Why provide supporting material in a speech?

- Clarify the ideas and content you are sharing
- Build your credibility as a speaker
- Emphasize key ideas and
- Make speech more impactful and memorable
- Demonstrate knowledge and use of trustworthy sources

The type of supporting material you use and how you present it will impact the effectiveness of your speech and it will reflect upon your credibility as a speaker (or your ethos) as stated in the list above. Credibility is very important to build. The audience will not want to listen to a speaker who uses either poor or no sources. They want to trust that the person speaking knows what they are talking about. How you show this trustworthiness is by using supporting materials. Therefore, your speech is going to be effective only if the audience trusts what you say.

When creating your speech, you should carefully vet—or examine—the facts and data in your supporting materials. The supporting material you cite should be:

- **Accurate**. The materials should be free from factual errors or inaccurate statements. Especially if the claims seem outside of the norm, too good to be true, or controversial in some way, it's important to cross-check the data with other sources.
- **Authoritative**. The materials should come from sources that are reliable, knowledgeable, and credible about the subject.
- **Current**. In most cases, more recent research is better than older research. Exceptions exist for some types of historical

research, but in general for most speech topics try to draw from current research.
- **Unbiased**. In most cases, you want to draw supporting materials from sources that don't have a particular agenda or bias behind them. These types of sources can be okay to use for certain speech topics, but generally for informative speeches they should be avoided.

You will want to tell your audience the source of the research you are citing in your speech by verbally citing your sources. Verbal citations are similar to what you would do in writing a paper when you cite your source. It works a bit differently in a speech, however, because in speeches, unlike written source citations, don't follow a standard pattern. How you cite the source will depend on your speaking style, your audience, the kind of information you are citing, and where in the speech you are placing the cited information.

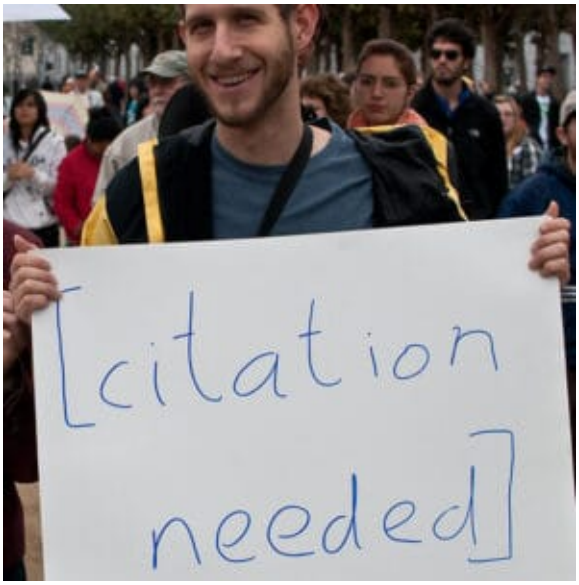


Figure 5.4.4.2 Citation Needed by Max Braun licensed as CC BY-SA on Flickr

Generally, when citing a source you will want to let your audience know the name of the document itself (book, website, publication, etc.), the author who wrote the document you are citing or the organization that published it, the qualifications of the source, and the date (or year) the document was posted or published. This information is what you include when making any citation. However, when giving a speech, you will want to verbalize the citation.

Tim needs to give citations for his speech on changing a tire. He decided to use information from the Bridgestone Tire website. When speaking, Tim will tell the audience what he learned from the Bridgestone Tire website. Here is what he might say: "I learned from the Bridgestone Tire website that the best tools to use when changing a tire are . . . . The first step in changing a tire is to pull over and make sure you are in a safe place. Safety should always be the first consideration according to AAA." These citations will really bolster the trust the audience has in Tim's information.

There are different ways to make citations. You can paraphrase what was said by the source or you can directly quote the source. Above, Tim paraphrased what he learned in his citation. To deliver a direction quotation in the speech, Tim might say this: "Bridgestone Tires agrees with AAA when they write the first step is 'find a safe location' on their updated 2020 website."

Always keep in mind that, when citing supporting materials, it's not enough just to provide the citation. You must also explain why the information you are citing is relevant to the topic of your speech. If connections are not made between your speech content and supporting materials, it only serves to make the audience confused and lose confidence in you as a speaker.

Video: How to Cite a Source in your Speech

For a video example of how to cite a source properly in your speech, you can watch the Youtube video: "Orally Citing a Source in a Speech" by Janine Davison.

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5.4.5: Language in an Informative Speech

Learning Objectives

Identify effective language for an informative speech.

Words are important! It is essential in any speech to be cognizant of your word choice. People will be listening to you and what you say will stick in the minds of many. So, careful consideration of language is important.

When presenting information, the main difference is that you are not trying to persuade or impassion your group. You can take a more casual and conversational approach. You want to hook them by making sure that the information and language are interesting and directly speaking to them.



Figure 5.4.5.1 Image-Recording yourself-It is a good idea to record yourself so that you can listen to the language and decide if it sounds conversational.

Speaking, Not Writing: It is important to keep in mind that speaking and writing are different in the language choices you will be making to present your ideas. Oral language is designed to be listened to and to sound **conversational**, which means that word choice must be simpler, more informal, and more repetitive. **Repetition** is a strategy that helps the audience remember a point you find particularly important for them to know. Written language uses a larger vocabulary and is more formal. When you choose words for your speech, think about how your words will sound to your audience.

As you practice your speech out loud, **listen to how the words sound**. Are they clear and easy to understand? You might even record yourself giving the speech on your phone or computer so you can listen to how the language you are using sounds and flows.

Audience Knowledge: In thinking about language to use in your speech, don't assume your audience knows a lot about your topic. Are there **terms**, **concepts**, **places**, **people**, or **events** you will be speaking about that your **audience might not be familiar with** or only know a little about? Probably! So present any content that is likely to be unfamiliar to your audience in a clear, simple, and complete way so they'll be sure to understand the information you are presenting.

Target Audience: Likewise, **be careful with obscure or highly technical language and jargon**—remember your audience. It's perfectly fine to speak using the technical terminology of a structural engineer if you are speaking to an audience of engineers. But if you are speaking to a group of first- and second-grade teachers, you want to put technical engineering terms into everyday language that your audience is more likely to understand. If you do need to use words your audience may not be familiar with due to the nature of your topic, define those words for your audience.

Understandable: Informative speeches should contain clear, easy-to-understand language. Speeches aren't generally the best occasion to pull out complex, multi-syllable words your audience may not know. Your goal is to inform your audience, not to confuse them with language they may not understand, so use language you think your audience finds familiar and relatable. Be

conversational. As much as possible, **use concrete rather than abstract language**. Abstract language usually refers to ideas, qualities, or concepts. Concrete language, in contrast, appeals to our senses by describing things or ideas in vivid, specific language.

Effectively Communicate Complex Information: 4 SIMPLE STEPS

In this video, communication professor Bruce L. Lambert offers four tips about communicating complex information, such as in an informative speech.

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.

You can view the transcript for "Effectively Communicate Complex Information: 4 Simple Steps" here (opens in new window).

To reiterate, the language you chose is contingent upon the audience you are addressing. Gauge your language by the audience's knowledge, use language familiar to your audience, and structure your language to be understandable to the majority of audience members.

Try It

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5.4.6: Putting It Together- Informative Speaking

Whenever you're teaching someone something, you're speaking to inform.

Just like in a teaching scenario, it's important to consider what your audience already knows about the topic to avoid boring or overwhelming them. Most importantly, you'll be able to connect new information to pre-existing knowledge in order to help your audience learn and retain the new material.

Informative speeches usually fall into one of five categories: speeches about objects, people, events, concepts, or processes. Depending on the category, there are various considerations about how you shape and deliver the speech. The most important thing to remember is that the information speech is a speech *to inform your audience*, not to demonstrate your own knowledge. Whether the speech is about a process, an event, a person, or even yourself, the question you need to ask is, how can this information benefit *my audience*?

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5.5: PERSUASIVE SPEAKING

5.5.1: What is Persuasion?

5.5.1.1: Please see 5.5.6 (Aristotelian Proofs - Persuasive Techniques)

5.5.1.2: What is Persuasive Speaking?

5.5.1.3: Types of Persuasive Speeches

5.5.2: Theoretical Frameworks for Persuasion

5.5.3: Critical Thinking Traits and Skills

5.5.4: Logic and the Role of Arguments

5.5.5: Maintaining Ethics in Persuasive Speaking

5.5.6: Persuasive Strategies (Aristotilian Proofs)

5.5.7: Monroe's Motivated Sequence

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5.5.1: What is Persuasion?

What does persuasion mean to you? Can you think of any times that you have tried to persuade someone to do something? Some examples may include college students trying to persuade their instructors to provide them with an extension on an assignment, to accept an already late project, or to change a poor grade. College students persuade their friends to take specific classes or recommend specific instructors. They may even persuade one another to live in a specific part of town, attend a particular party, or eat at a certain restaurant.

Persuasion is a facet of communication that is seen across many interpersonal and familial relationships. Parents may try to persuade their children to clean up their room, pick a certain major, or abide by a curfew. Romantic partners persuade one another to decorate their home in a particular way, apply to a new job, or move to a new city. Persuasion is also pervasive in professional environments. Potential employees need to persuade future employers of their skills and abilities to secure a job offer. Conversely, employers need to persuade potential employees of the benefits of working at their organization to ensure they accept the job. Many professions, including advertising, sales, and politics are dependent on the ability to leverage persuasion to achieve desired outcomes.

We also need to consider the channels of persuasion that are influencing our choices. The advent of print media (e.g., newspapers, magazines), electronic media (e.g., radio, television, the Internet), and, more recently, social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) provide additional avenues through which persuasion occurs. These mediated sources of persuasion include specific appeals to buy products or services (e.g., advertising), as well as the more nuanced persuasion to adopt and promote a particular lifestyle, behavior, or popular opinion abounding on different platforms.

This all suggests that persuasion is utilized in almost all areas of our lives. However, most of us have never specifically thought about how much time we spend persuading others and being persuaded ourselves. It is important to realize, however, that this does not mean you are already persuasion experts. You have likely learned quite a bit about what works and what does not by trial and error; however, there is a long, rich history of the academic study of persuasion. Scholars across philosophy, psychology, communication, advertising, political science, health, and others have systematically studied persuasion for centuries. Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher who lived nearly 2,400 years ago, wrote extensively about how to persuade others. Around 300 years later, Cicero, a Roman statesman and philosopher, wrote several books on his beliefs about persuasion and rhetoric. Another 100 years after that, Quintilian, a Roman educator and rhetorician, opened a school on rhetoric and oral persuasion. More recently, social scientists have conducted thousands of experiments over decades to study persuasion and have developed rich theories to describe, explain, predict, and control persuasion phenomenon.

This open-educational resource is designed to survey the social-scientific approach to persuasive communication; thus, it will focus on the social science theory, research, and application of persuasion. This study of persuasion naturally begins with a discussion of the social scientific concept of persuasion itself.

Definitions are typically used to clarify a concept. These definitions provide distinctions about what is included in a concept and what is not. Definitions, however, can be troublesome as it is always possible to provide objections to any given definition. Some people may find a specific definition too broad, while others may find that same definition too narrow. This is because there are always gray areas in which the application of the concept is arguable (see O'Keefe, 2016). For example, with any concept, there are some cases that almost everyone agrees are cases of the concept (for example, ketchup is a condiment), and there are some cases that almost everyone agrees are not cases of the concept (for example, a burger bun is not a condiment). There are also some cases that fall into a gray area wherein many people disagree (for example, is hummus a condiment? or is it a dip?).

O'Keefe (2016) argues that, instead of definitions, focusing on the shared features of paradigm cases of a concept can be used to clarify the concept. These paradigm cases are "the sorts of instances that nearly everyone would agree were instances of the concept in question; they are straightforward, uncontroversial examples" (O'Keefe, 2016, p. 2). Identifying the common features of paradigm cases provides the opportunity to understand a concept's ordinary application without requiring the rigid distinctions required in a definition.

A paradigm case of persuasion would therefore be shared features that are usually involved when we say that someone has persuaded someone else. O'Keefe (2016) provides five common features of paradigm cases of persuasion:

#1: When we say that one person has persuaded someone else, we are usually referring to instances in which there was a successful attempt to influence.

The concept of persuasion inherently includes the notion of success. For example, it does not make sense to say, "I persuaded her, but I failed." It does make sense to say, "I tried to persuade her, but I failed." This distinction indicates that simply saying "I persuaded her" implies a successful attempt to influence her.

#2: When we say that one person has persuaded someone else, we are usually referring to instances in which one person intends to persuade the other.

The concept of persuasion inherently includes the notion of intent. For example, if I say "I persuaded Casey to take Intercultural Communication," you will likely conclude that I intended to procure that outcome. If I instead said "I accidentally persuaded Casey to take Intercultural Communication," you would likely conclude that I did not intend to do so. The inclusion of the word "accidentally" is necessary to negate intent, which implies that usual use of the term assumes that the persuasion was deliberate.

#3: When we say that one person has persuaded someone else, we are usually referring to cases in which the person being persuaded has some measure of freedom (e.g., free will, free choice, and/or voluntary action).

The concept of persuasion inherently includes the notion of freedom of choice for the person being persuaded. For example, if I steal my roommate's textbook to study for an exam, one would not say that I "persuaded" my roommate to lend me their textbook. By contrast, asking my roommate to borrow her textbook by convincing her that doing so was necessary for me to pass my exam is ordinarily recognized as an instance of persuasion.

When the person being persuaded has minimal or questionable freedom, it becomes debatable whether it is an instance of persuasion or not. For example, if I told my roommate that if she does not lend me her textbook I would evict her from the apartment and she complies, is this an instance of persuasion? There is no simple answer to this question, but this is an example of a borderline case of persuasion because the person's freedom is not as obvious as the paradigm case example.

#4: When we say that one person has persuaded someone else, we are usually referring to instances in which the influence was achieved through some mode of communication.

The concept of persuasion inherently includes the notion that communication was used to achieve the outcome. For example, if I pushed my roommate down the stairs to get them to clean up a mess they left in the kitchen, this would not be an instance of persuasion. If I talked to my roommate and convinced them to go downstairs to clean up the mess they left in the kitchen, this would be considered persuasion. These two examples are distinct because the second uses communication, whereas the first does not.

#5: When we say that one person has persuaded someone else, we are usually referring to instances in which the person being persuaded has a change in mental state (that may or may not lead to a change in behavior).

The concept of persuasion inherently includes the notion that the person being persuaded has had a change in mental state. Some paradigm cases may be described only as changes in a mental state. For example, I could say "I persuaded Alex that adding a Communication Minor was helpful for his career goals." This statement implies a change only in what Alex thinks about adding the minor. Some paradigm cases may be described as behavioral changes, which imply an underlying change in a mental state. For example, I could say "I persuaded Alex to add a Communication Minor." This statement indicates that Alex changed his behavior, which has an underlying assumption that Alex's thoughts towards adding the Communication Minor also changed as a precursor to the behavior change. This indicates that even when a persuader's eventual goal is to influence what someone does, persuasion is usually accomplished by first changing what someone thinks. Persuasion thus ordinarily means that one person has influenced another by influencing their mental state, not directly influencing their behavior.

In persuasion theory and research, the relevant mental state has traditionally been an individual's attitudes. Even when the ultimate goal is to persuade someone to change their behavior, the presumption is that that goal will be achieved by changing the person's attitudes. As we will see later on when we examine individual persuasion theories, there are a wide variety of mental state precursors to behavior change beyond just attitudes.

What is Persuasion?

O'Keefe (2016) connects these five paradigm cases of persuasion into something that looks roughly like a definition of persuasion: "a successful intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the [person being persuaded] has some measure of freedom" (p. 4). This definition does not eliminate the gray areas of the concept of persuasion as it leaves open questions around how much success is needed or how intentional the effort needs to be. These shared features of paradigm cases of persuasion can, however, clarify the concept of persuasion and thus center the

study of persuasion on instances that meet these criteria.

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5.5.1.1: Please see 5.5.6 (Aristotelian Proofs - Persuasive Techniques)

Learning Objectives

- Provide an example of each appeal (Ethos, Pathos, Logos) for a given persuasive topic
- Explain how appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos increase the effectiveness of a persuasive speech

Any time we want to persuade an audience to change their behaviors or thinking, we can go back to the writings of Aristotle. Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, also known as the Rhetorical Triangle, were ways that Aristotle suggested a speaker could appeal to the audience.

Ethos

In addition to understanding how your audience feels about the topic you are addressing, you will need to take steps to help them see you as credible and interesting. The audience's perception of you as a speaker is influential in determining whether or not they will choose to accept your proposition. Aristotle called this element of the speech **ethos**, "a Greek word that is closely related to our termsethical and ethnic" (Campbell & Huxman, 2009, p. 232). He taught speakers to establish credibility with the audience by appearing to have good moral character, common sense, and concern for the audience's well-being (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Campbell & Huxman (2009) explain that ethos is not about conveying that you, as an individual, are a good person. It is about "mirror[ing] the characteristics idealized by [the] culture or group" (ethnic) (p.232), and demonstrating that you make good moral choices with regard to your relationship within the group (ethics).



Figure 5.5.1.1.1 Man holding a sign saying don't believe anyone including me

While there are many things speakers can do to build their ethos throughout the speech, "assessments of ethos often reflect superficial first impressions," and these first impressions linger long after the speech has concluded (Zarefsky, 2005, p.14). This means that what you wear and how you behave, even before opening your mouth, can go far in shaping your ethos. Be sure to dress appropriately for the occasion and setting in which you speak. Also work to appear confident, but not arrogant, and be sure to maintain enthusiasm about your topic throughout the speech. Give great attention to the crafting of your opening sentences because they will set the tone for what your audience should expect of your personality as you proceed.

I covered two presidents, LBJ and Nixon, who could no longer convince, persuade, or govern, once people had decided they had no credibility; but we seem to be more tolerant now of what I think we should not tolerate. ~ Helen Thomas

Logos

Another way to enhance your ethos, and your chances of persuading the audience, is to use sound arguments. In a persuasive speech, the **argument** will focus on the reasons for supporting your specific purpose statement. This argumentative approach is what Aristotle referred to as **logos**, or the logical means of proving an argument (Braet, 1992).

When offering an argument you begin by making an assertion that requires a logical leap based on the available evidence (Campbell & Huxman, 2009). One of the most popular ways of understanding how this process works was developed by British philosopher Stephen Toulmin (Herrick, 2011). Toulmin explained that basic arguments tend to share three common elements: claim, data, and warrant. The **claim** is an assertion that you want the audience to accept. **Data** refers to the preliminary evidence on which the claim is based. For example, if I saw large gray clouds in the sky, I might make the claim that "it is going to rain today." The gray clouds (data) are linked to rain (claim) by the **warrant**, an often unstated general connection, that large gray clouds tend to produce rain. The warrant is a connector that, if stated, would likely begin with "since" or "because." In our rain example, if we explicitly stated all three elements, the argument would go something like this: There are large gray clouds in the sky today (data). Since large gray clouds tend to produce rain (warrant), it is going to rain today (claim). However, in our regular encounters with argumentation, we tend to only offer the claim and (occasionally) the warrant.

To strengthen the basic argument, you will need **backing** for the claim. Backing provides foundational support for the claim (Herrick, 2011) by offering examples, statistics, testimony, or other information which further substantiates the argument. To substantiate the rain argument we have just considered, you could explain that the color of a cloud is determined by how much light the water in the cloud is reflecting. A thin cloud has tiny drops of water and ice crystals which scatter light, making it appear white. Clouds appear gray when they are filled with large water droplets which are less able to reflect light (Brill, 2003).

Logic is the beginning of wisdom, not the end. ~ Leonard Nimoy

Table 5.5.1.1.1 Toulmin Model Basic Argument Example

The Toulmin Model Basic Argument	
Basic Argument	
data I had a hard time finding a place to park on campus today.	claim The school needs more parking spaces.
warrant If I can't find a place to park, there must be a shortage of spaces.	
Argument With Backing	
data Obesity is a serious problem in the U.S.	claim U.S. citizens should be encouraged to eat less processed foods.

The Toulmin Model Basic Argument
warrant Processed foods contribute to obesity more than natural, or unprocessed, foods.
backing “As a rule processed foods are more ‘energy dense’ than freshfoods: they contain less water and fiber but more added fat and sugar, which makes them both less filling and more fattening”(Pollan, 2007).

The elements that Toulmin identified (see Table 16.1) may be arranged in a variety of ways to make the most logical argument. As you reason through your argument you may proceed inductively, deductively, or causally, toward your claim. **Inductive reasoning** moves from specific examples to a more general claim. For example, if you read online reviews of a restaurant chain called Walt’s Wine & Dine and you noticed that someone reported feeling sick after eating at a Walt’s, and another person reported that the Walt’s they visited was understaffed, and another commented that the tables in the Walt’s they ate at had crumbs left on them, you might conclude (or claim) that the restaurant chain is unsanitary. To test the validity of a general claim, Beebe and Beebe (2003) encourage speakers to consider whether there are “enough specific instances to support the conclusion,” whether the specific instances are typical, and whether the instances are recent (p.384).



Figure 5.5.1.1.2 Image of a diner

The opposite of inductive reasoning is deductive reasoning, moving from a general principle to a claim regarding a specific instance. In order to move from general to specific we tend to usesyllogisms. A syllogism begins with a major (or general) premise, then moves to a minor premise, then concludes with a specific claim. For example, if you know that all dogs bark (major premise), and your neighbor has a dog (minor premise), you could then conclude that your neighbor’s dog barks (specific claim). To verify the accuracy of your specific claim, you must verify the truth and applicability of the major premise. What evidence do you have that all dogs bark? Is it possible that only most dogs bark? Next, you must also verify the accuracy of the minor premise. If the major premise is truly generalizable, and both premises are accurate, your specific claim should also be accurate.


Figure 5.5.1.1.3 Image of a fire at sea

Your reasoning may also proceed causally. **Causal reasoning** examines related events to determine which one caused the other. You may begin with a cause and attempt to determine its effect. For example, when the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, scientists explained that because many animals in the Gulf were nesting and reproducing at the time, the spill could wipe out "an entire generation of hundreds of species" (Donovan, 2010, para. 2). Their argument reasoned that the spill (cause) would result in species loss (effect). Two years later, the causal reasoning might be reversed. If we were seeing species loss in the Gulf (effect), we could reason that it was a result of the oil spill (cause). Both of these claims rely on the evidence available at the time. To make the first claim, scientists not only offered evidence that animals were nesting and reproducing, but they also looked at the effects of an oil spill that occurred 21 years earlier in Alaska (Donovan, 2010). To make the second claim, scientists could examine dead animals washing up on the coast to determine whether their deaths were caused by oil.

Pathos

While we have focused heavily on logical reasoning, we must also recognize the strong role that emotions play in the persuasive process. Aristotle called this element of the speech **pathos**. Pathos draws on the emotions, sympathies, and prejudices of the audience to appeal to their non-rational side (Beebe & Beebe 2003; Reike, Sillars, & Peterson, 2009). Human beings are constantly in some emotional state, which means that tapping into an audience's emotions can be vital to persuading them to accept your proposition (Dillard & Meijnders, 2002).

One of the most helpful strategies in appealing to your audience's emotions is to use clear examples that illustrate your point. Illustrations can be crafted verbally, nonverbally, or visually. To offer a verbal illustration, you could tell a compelling story. For example, when fundraising for breast cancer research, Nancy Brinker, creator of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, has plenty of compelling statistics and examples to offer. Yet, she regularly talks about her sister, explaining:


Figure 5.5.1.1.4 Image of a Susan G. Komen speaking

Susan G. Komen fought breast cancer with her heart, body and soul. Throughout her diagnosis, treatments, and endless days in the hospital, she spent her time thinking of ways to make life better for other women battling breast cancer instead of worrying about her own situation. That concern for others continued even as Susan neared the end of her fight (Komen National, n.d.).

Brinker promised her sister that she would continue her fight against breast cancer. This story compels donors to join her fight.

Speakers can also tap into emotions using nonverbal behaviors to model the desired emotion for their audience. In the summer of 2012, the U.S. House of Representatives debated holding the Attorney General in contempt for refusing to release documents concerning a controversial gun-tracking operation. Arguing for a contempt vote, South Carolina Representative Trey Gowdy did not simply state his claim, instead he raised his voice, slowed his pace, and used hand motions to convey anger with what he perceived as deception on the part of the Attorney General (Gowdy, 2012). His use of volume, tone, pace, and hand gestures enhanced the message and built anger in his audience.

Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

In addition to verbal and nonverbal illustrations, visual imagery can enhance the emotional appeal of a message. For example, we have all heard about the dangers of drugs, and there are multiple campaigns that attempt to prevent people from even trying them. However, many young adults experiment with drugs under the assumption that they are immune from the negative effects if they only use the drug recreationally. To counter this assumption regarding methamphe- tamines, the Montana Meth project combines controversial statements with graphic images on billboards to evoke fear of the drug (see www.methproject. org /ads/ print/ for some disturbing examples). Young adults may have heard repeated warnings that meth is addictive and that it has the potential to cause sores, rotten teeth, and extreme weight loss, but Montana Meth Project's visual display is more compelling because it turns the audience's stomach, making the message memorable. This image, combined with the slogan, "not even once," conveys the persuasive point without the need for other forms of evidence and rational argument.

Appeals to fear, like those in the Montana Meth Project ads, have proven effective in motivating people to change a variety of behaviors. However, speakers must be careful with their use of this emotion. Fear appeals tend to be more effective when they

appeal to a high-level fear, such as death, and they are more effective when offered by speakers with a high level of perceived credibility (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Fear appeals are also more persuasive when the speaker can convince the audience they have the ability to avert the threat. If audiences doubt their ability to avoid or minimize the threat, the appeal may backfire (Witte & Allen, 2000).

I would rather try to persuade a man to go along, because once I have persuaded him, he will stick. If I scare him, he will stay just as long as he is scared, and then he is gone. ~ Dwight D. Eisenhower

David Brooks (2011) argues that, "emotions are not separate from reason, but they are the foundation of reason because they tell us what to value" (para. 2). Those values are at the core of fostering a credible ethos. All of Aristotle's strategies, ethos, logos, and pathos, are interdependent. The most persuasive speakers will combine these strategies to varying degrees based on their specific purpose and audience.

In addition to considering their topic and persuasive strategy, speakers must take care to ensure that their message is ethical. Persuasion is often confused with another kind of communication that has similar ends, but different methods—coercion. Like persuasion, **coercion** is a process whereby thoughts or behaviors are altered. But in coercive acts, deceptive or harmful methods propel the intended changes, not reason. Strong and Cook (1992) contrasted the two: "persuasion uses argument to compel power to give way to reason while coercion uses force to compel reason to give way to power" (p. 7). The "force" that Strong and Cook mention frequently manifests as promises for reward or punishment, but sometimes it arises as physical or emotional harm. Think of almost any international crime film you have seen, and you are likely to remember a scene where someone was compelled to out their compatriots by way of force. Jack Bauer, the protagonist in the American television series 24, became an infamous character by doing whatever it took to get captured criminals to talk. Although dramatic as an example, those scenes where someone is tortured in an effort to produce evidence offer a familiar reference when thinking about coercion. To avoid coercing an audience, speakers should use logical and emotional appeals responsibly.

The pendulum of the mind alternates between sense and nonsense, not between right and wrong. ~ Carl Jung

Persuasive speakers must be careful to avoid using **fallacies** in their reasoning. Fallacies are errors in reasoning that occur when a speaker fails to use appropriate or applicable evidence for their argument. There are a wide variety of fallacies, and it is not possible to list them all here. However,

speakers should watch for four common categories of fallacies: "fallacies of faulty assumption," which occur when the speaker reasons based on a problematic assumption; "fallacies directed to the person," which occur when the speaker focuses on the attributes of an individual opponent rather than the relevant arguments; "fallacies of case presentation," which occur when the speaker mischaracterizes the issue; and "fallacies of suggestion," which occur when the speaker implies or suggests an argument without fully developing it (Herrick, 2011, p. 256). See the Table 16.2 on the following page for examples of each of these types of fallacies. To learn more about fallacies, see Chapter 6 by Russ (Critical Thinking and Reasoning), or see the supplemental handout found on the Persuasive Speaking chapter homepage (www.publicspeaking project.org/persuasive.html)



Figure 5.5.1.1.5 Image of a man speaking with his hands up

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5.5.1.2: What is Persuasive Speaking?

You are used to experiencing persuasion in many forms, and may have an easy time identifying examples of **persuasion**, but can you explain how persuasion works? Osborn and Osborn (1997) define persuasion this way: "the art of convincing others to give favorable attention to our point of view" (p. 415). There are two components that make this definition a useful one. First, it acknowledges the artfulness, or skill, required to persuade others. Whether you are challenged with convincing an auditorium of 500 that they should sell their cars and opt for a pedestrian lifestyle or with convincing your friends to eat pizza instead of hamburgers, persuasion does not normally just happen. Rather it is planned and executed in a thoughtful manner. Second, this definition delineates the ends of persuasion—to convince others to think favorably of our point of view. Persuasion "encompasses a wide range of communication activities, including advertising, marketing, sales, political campaigns, and interpersonal relations" (German, Gronbeck, Ehninger, & Monroe, 2004, p. 242). Because of its widespread utility, persuasion is a pervasive part of our everyday lives.



Figure 5.5.1.2.1 Image of man using a microphone to speak

Although persuasion occurs in nearly every facet of our day-to-day lives, there are occasions when more formal acts of persuasion—persuasive speeches—are appropriate. Persuasive speeches "intend to influence the beliefs, attitudes, values, and acts of others" (O'Hair & Stewart, 1999, p. 337). Unlike an informative speech, where the speaker is charged with making some information known to an audience, in a persuasive speech the speaker attempts to influence people to think or behave in a particular way. This art of convincing others is propelled by reasoned argument, the cornerstone of persuasive speeches. Reasoned arguments, which might consist of facts, statistics, personal testimonies, or narratives, are employed to motivate audiences to think or behave differently than before they heard the speech.

There are particular circumstances that warrant a persuasive approach. As O'Hair and Stewart point out, it makes sense to engage strategies of persuasion when your end goal is to influence any of these things—"beliefs, attitudes, values, and acts"—or to reinforce something that already exists. For instance, safe sex advocates often present messages of reinforcement to already safe sexual actors, reminding them that wearing condoms and asking for consent are solid practices with desirable outcomes. By the same token, safer sex advocates also routinely spread the message to populations who might be likely to engage in unsafe or nonconsensual sexual behavior.

In a nutshell, persuasive speeches must confront the complex challenge of influencing or reinforcing peoples' beliefs, attitudes, values, or actions, all characteristics that may seem natural, ingrained, or unchangeable to an audience. Because of this, rhetors (or speakers) must motivate their audiences to think or behave differently by presenting reasoned arguments.

> The triumph of persuasion over force is the sign of a civilized society. ~ Mark Skousen

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5.5.1.3: Types of Persuasive Speeches

Persuasive speeches revolve around propositions that can be defended through the use of data and reasoning. Persuasive propositions respond to one of three types of questions: questions of fact, questions of value, and questions of policy. These questions can help the speaker determine what forms of argument and reasoning are necessary to support a specific purpose statement.

Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth. ~ Marcus Aurelius

propositions of fact

Questions of fact ask whether something "can potentially be verified as either true or false" (Herrick, 2011, p. 20). These questions can seem very straightforward—something is or it is not—but in reality, the search for truth is a complex endeavor. Questions of fact rarely address simple issues such as, "is the sky blue?" They tend to deal with deep-seated controversies such as the existence of global warming, the cause of a major disaster, or someone's guilt or innocence in a court of law. To answer these questions, a proposition of fact may focus on whether or not something exists. For example, in the U.S. there is a debate over the prevalence of racial profiling, the practice of law enforcement officers targeting people for investigation and arrest based on skin color. On one hand, the American Civil Liberties Union advances the proposition: "Racial profiling continues to be a prevalent and egregious form of discrimination in the United States" (ACLU, 2012, para. 2). They verify this claim using data from government studies, crime statistics, and personal narratives. However, journalist Heather MacDonald (2002) proposes that studies confirming racial profiling are often based in "junk science"; in fact she says, "there's no credible evidence that racial profiling exists" (para. 1). To substantiate her proposition, MacDonald relies on a study of traffic stops on the New Jersey turnpike along with personal narratives, policy analysis, and testimony from a criminologist. The claim that racial profiling exists is either true or false, but there is evidence for and against both propositions; therefore no consensus exists.

While some propositions of fact deal with the existence of a particular phenomenon or the accuracy of a theory, others focus on causality. For example, the U.S. government appointed a commission to evaluate the causes of the nation's recent economic crisis. In their report the commission concluded by proposing that recklessness in the financial industry and failures on the part of government regulators caused the economic crisis. However, Congressman Paul Ryan has proposed that Medicare is to blame, and the chief investment officer at JP Morgan has proposed that U.S. housing policy is the root cause of the problem (Angelides, 2011). Each of these three propositions of fact is backed by its own set of historical and economic analysis.



Figure 5.5.1.3.1 Image of a freeway with cars driving on it

Propositions of fact may also be used to make predictions concerning what will happen in the future. In the summer of 2011, ten miles of a popular Southern California freeway were closed for an entire weekend. Motorists, news outlets, and government

officials called the closure “Carmageddon” because they proposed there would be an “inevitable and likely epic traffic tie-up” (Kandel, 2011, para. 1). As a result of the predictions motorists stayed off the roads and made alternative plans that weekend resulting in much lighter traffic than expected. The proposition may have been true, but the prediction was not fulfilled because people were persuaded to stay off the freeway.

When advancing propositions of fact, you should focus on the evidence you can offer in support of your proposition. First, make sure that your speech contains sufficient evidence to back up your proposition. Next, take the time to interpret that evidence so that it makes sense to your audience. Last, emphasize the relationship between your evidence and your proposition as well as its relevance to the audience (Herrick, 2011).

Bitter experience has taught us how fundamental our values are and how great the mission they represent. ~ Jan Peter Balkenende

propositions of value

Persuasive speakers may also be called to address questions of value, which call for a proposition judging the (relative) worth of something. These propositions make an evaluative claim regarding morality, aesthetics, wisdom, or desirability. For example, some vegetarians propose that eating meat is immoral because of the way that animals are slaughtered. Vegetarians may base this claim in a philosophy of utilitarianism or animal rights (DeGrazia, 2009).

Sometimes a proposition of valuecompares multiple options to determine which is best. Consumers call for these comparisons regularly to determine which products to buy. Car buyers may look to the most recent Car and Driver “10 Best Cars” list to determine their next purchase. In labeling a car one of the best on the market for a given year Car and Driver (2011) says that the cars “don’t have to be the newest, and they don’t have to be expensive . . . They just have to meet our abundant needs while satisfying our every want” (para. 1).



Figure 5.5.1.3.2 Image of a Corvette car

Both the vegetarian and car examples offer standards for evaluating the proposition. Since propositions of value tend to be more subjective, speakers need to establish **evaluation criteria** by which the audience can judge and choose to align with their position. When advancing a proposition of value, offer a clear set of criteria, offer evidence for your evaluation, and apply the evidence to demonstrate that you have satisfied the evaluation criteria (Herrick, 2011).

An inner process stands in need of outward criteria.~ Ludwig Wittgenstein

The 2005 disagreement between family members over removing a woman’s feeding tube after she had been in a coma for 15 years sparked a national debate over the value of life that highlights the importance of evaluation criteria. After years of failed medical treatments and rehabilitation attempts, Terri Schiavo’s husband petitioned the court to remove her feeding tube, initiating a legal battle with her parents that went all the way to the President of the United States (Cerminara & Goodman, 2012). Opposing sides in the debate both claimed to value life. To support his proposition that his wife had a right to die, Mr. Schaivo

applied the evaluation criteria of quality of life and argued that she would not want to continue to live in a vegetative state (Caplan, 2005). Ms. Schiavo's parents vehemently disagreed with his argument. They also claimed to value life and, with the support of religious groups, relied on the evaluation criteria of the sanctity of life to contend that she should be kept alive (Catholic Culture, 2005). Both sides gained widespread support based on people's agreement or disagreement with their evaluation criteria. Despite intervention on behalf of both state and federal legislators, the courts eventually ruled that Mr. Schiavo had the right to have his wife's feeding tube removed and allow her to die.

A policy is a temporary creed liable to be changed, but while it holds good, it has got to be pursued with apostolic zeal.~ Mahatma Gandhi

propositions of policy

Although the Schiavo case was rooted in a question of value, the debate resulted in a question of policy.Questions of policy ask the speaker to advocate for an appropriate course of action. This form of persuasive speech is used every day in Congress to determine laws, but it is also used interpersonally to determine how we ought to behave. A proposition of policy may call for people to stop a particular behavior, or to start one. For example, some U.S. cities have started banning single use plastic bags in grocery stores. Long before official public policy on this issue was established, organizations such as The Surfrider Foundation and the Earth Resource Foundation advocated that people stop using these bags because of the damage plastic bags cause to marine life. In this case local governments and private organizations attempted to persuade people to stop engaging in a damaging behavior— shopping with single use plastic bags. However, the organizations also attempted to persuade people to start a new behavior—shopping with reusable bags.

When answering a question of policy, speakers will typically begin by describing the status quo. If you are arguing that a change must be made, you must first identify the problem inherent in the current behavior, and then demonstrate that the problem is significant enough to warrant immediate consideration. Once you have established that there is a problem which the audience ought to consider, you can then offer your proposal for a preferable course of action (Herrick, 2011). Then, it is up to you to demonstrate that your proposed policy will have more benefits than costs.


Figure 5.5.1.3.3 Image of mailboxes

In 2011 the U.S. Postal Service, the nation's second-largest employer, told Congress it was facing an $8.3 billion budget shortfall (Bingham, 2011). To solve the problem, the Postal Service proposed that be permitted to end Saturday mail delivery and close some post offices. To make their argument, they first described the status quo saying that the demand for their service had dramatically decreased with the popularity of email and online bill-pay services. They explained that in preceding years they laid off workers and cut spending to help with the shortfall of revenue, but now another plan was necessary to avoid defaulting on their financial obligations. They offered evidence that people preferred ending Saturday mail to alternatives such as paying more for stamps or allocating more tax money to post offices (Bingham, 2011). Although they made a compelling case, the USPS still needed to overcome perceived disadvantages to their proposition such as the negative impact on businesses and rural towns (Bingham, 2011; Stephenson, 2012). A full year later, the policy proposition passed the U.S. Senate but continues to await approval in the House (Stephenson, 2012).

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5.5.2: Theoretical Frameworks for Persuasion

We use theories to interpret the complex and ambiguous world around us. For example, theories help us understand health and illness, self-control, creativity, religion, spirituality, biology, physics, psychology, sociology, and, yes, persuasion. This chapter distinguishes between three types of commonly used theories: lay theories, folk theories, and scientific theories.

Lay and folk theories are informal, common-sense explanations used to understand various phenomena. Lay theories tend to be individual and idiosyncratic, whereas folk theories are shared by specific subgroups of people. Let's start with an example that illustrates lay theories: Obesity is a prevalent global public health concern. Each of you may have your own lay theory about what causes obesity as well as how to treat obesity. You might believe that obesity is caused by a lack of knowledge, and therefore you might believe it is necessary to educate individuals to treat obesity. Someone else might believe that obesity is caused by a lack of access to healthy foods, and therefore might believe it is necessary to increase access to affordable healthy foods to treat obesity. These are lay theories, as they are based on our individual experiences and beliefs.

Now, let's use the same topic, obesity, to explore example scenarios of folk theories. Some groups of people in the United States may believe that obesity is caused by individuals making poor choices and therefore would be solved by individuals making better choices. Other groups of people in the United States believe that obesity is caused by environmental factors and therefore would be solved by changing the environmental characteristics (e.g., unsafe neighborhoods, lack of access to healthy food) that promote obesity. As these are beliefs held by subgroups of the larger population, they would be considered folk theories.

Conversely, scientific theories are derived and tested from empirical observations. They are used to produce hypotheses, generate discoveries, and offer practical guidance. To continue with the above examples, there are many scientific theories used to understand obesity. For example, the biomedical perspective focuses on the pathophysiology and other biological approaches to the health condition. Examining obesity using this biomedical perspective would include observing the biological underpinnings of the disease (e.g., metabolism, cholesterol levels, thyroid functioning). The biopsychosocial perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding human health and wellness from a more holistic point of view that includes the biological, psychological, and social determinants of health. Examining obesity using this biopsychosocial perspective would include observing various psychological determinants of obesity (e.g., depression, anxiety) and/or social determinants of obesity (e.g., cultural food preferences, access to healthy foods).

Now that we've introduced lay, folk, and scientific theories generally, let's turn to looking specifically at the discipline of persuasion. There are lay, folk, and scientific theories regarding how to best persuade someone to adopt a particular mental state or behavior. For example, you might personally believe that people do not know enough about factors that cause obesity, and, therefore, you may try to provide them with information in order to persuade them to adopt healthy behaviors (a lay theory of persuasion). Many public health organizations (a subgroup of people) hold a similar folk theory and have disseminated public health campaigns designed to increase knowledge about obesity and persuade people to adopt health behaviors (a folk theory of persuasion); however, scholars who study persuasion from a scientific perspective recognize that persuading someone to change their behaviors is not always as simple as these lay and folk theories suggest and instead apply scientific theories to understand persuasion.

A scientific theory used in persuasion can be defined as an abstract system of concepts and their relationships that help us understand a phenomenon. For instance, persuasion researchers have observed that many people know that exercise and healthy foods would prevent and treat obesity, yet they still do not engage in those behaviors. Persuasion researchers therefore use these observations, and others, to create scientific theories about persuasion. For example, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) is shown in the diagram below.

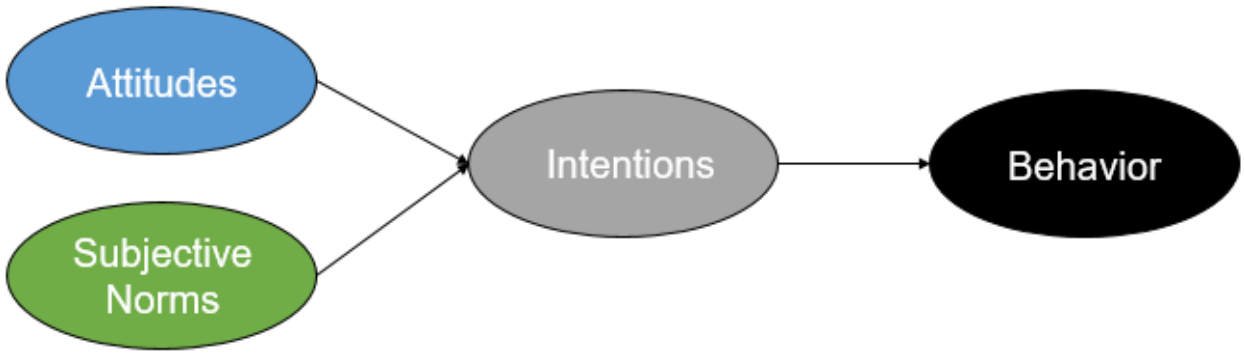


Figure 5.5.2.1 Diagram of Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action predicts that **behavior** is directly determined by an individual's **intentions** to engage in the behavior. The arrow that goes from intentions to behavior shows this relationship. Intentions, in turn, are directly predicted by (1) an individual's **attitudes** towards the behavior (i.e., the individual's evaluation of the behavior as positive or negative) and (2) **subjective norms** (i.e., an individual's perceptions of whether or not important others think they should engage in the behavior). The arrows that go from attitudes and subjective norms to intentions depict these relationships.

Let's focus on one behavior related to obesity: exercising daily. The Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that an individual's exercising daily (**behavior**) is directly predicted by their intentions to exercise daily (**intentions**). These intentions, in turn, are predicted by the individual's **attitudes** towards exercising daily (e.g., "I think exercising daily is important/important") and **subjective norms** (e.g., "I think my spouse thinks I should exercise daily). In order to persuade someone to start exercising daily, the Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that you would need to change the individual's attitudes and subjective norms about exercising daily. This change in attitudes and subjective norms is predicted to positively influence intentions to exercise daily, which then positively influence their performance of the behavior itself.

Remember that a scientific theory can be defined as an abstract system of concepts and their relationships that help us understand a phenomenon. The Theory of Reasoned Action includes four concepts (attitudes, subjective norms, intentions, and behavior), as well as the relationships between those concepts (behavior is predicted by intentions, and intentions are predicted by attitudes and subjective norms). The Theory of Reasoned Action is just one example of the many different scientific theories used when studying persuasion. More broadly, a scientific theory should meet five basic characteristics:

#1: Testable: Scientific theories are tested through a series of scientific studies. Sometimes the evidence supports the theory, and sometimes the evidence fails to support the theory. The important thing is that it has to be possible to gather empirical evidence to test the theory's proposed relationships.

#2: Replicable: Scientific studies that examine scientific theories should be able to be copied or reproduced exactly. This means that there must be enough information readily available about the theory so that others can test the theory as well.

#3: Stable: Scientific theories should stand the test of time. In other words, when other people test the theories, they should get the same results. If they do not, the theory may need to be revised based on the newly acquired evidence.

#4: Simple (aka Parsimonious): Scientific theories should be as simple as possible. The principle of parsimony states that a scientific theory should provide the simplest possible explanation for the phenomenon. As we will see later in this book, persuasion researchers noticed that the Theory of Reasoned Action failed to explain several aspects of intentions and behaviors and therefore added additional concepts to the theory, which later became the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1988, 1991). This made the theory less simple, but it is now better able to predict behavior.

#5: Consistent: Scientific theories should agree with other scientific theories, meaning that a principle in one theory should not directly contradict another. When inconsistencies do occur, scientific studies should be used to gather evidence to address and amend the discrepancy.

What is Persuasion Theory?

Using this understanding of scientific theory, we can apply it to persuasion. “Persuasion theory” can be defined as an abstract system of concepts and their relationships that help us understand persuasion. Additionally, considering our previously arrived upon paradigm cases of persuasion in Chapter 1, **persuasion theory is defined as an abstract system of concepts and their relationships that help us understand a successful, intentional effort at influencing another’s mental state through communication in a situation in which the person being influenced has some measure of freedom.**

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5.5.3: Critical Thinking Traits and Skills

Critical thinking has been defined in numerous ways. At its most basic, we can think of critical thinking as active thinking in which we evaluate and analyze information in order to determine the best course of action. We will look at more expansive definitions of critical thinking and its components in the following pages. Before we get there, though, let's consider a hypothetical example of critical thinking in action.

> We are approaching a new age of synthesis. Knowledge cannot be merely a degree or a skill... it demands a broader vision, capabilities in critical thinking and logical deduction, without which we cannot have constructive progress. ~ Li Ka Shing



Figure 5.5.3.1 Image of a glass of wine being poured

Shonda was researching information for her upcoming persuasive speech. Her goal with the speech was to persuade her classmates to drink a glass of red wine every day. Her argument revolved around the health benefits one can derive from the antioxidants found in red wine. Shonda found an article reporting the results of a study conducted by a Dr. Gray. According to Dr. Gray's study, drinking four or more glasses of wine a day will help reduce the chances of heart attack, increase levels of good cholesterol, and help in reducing unwanted fat. Without conducting further research, Shonda changed her speech to persuade her classmates to drink four or more glasses of red wine per day. She used Dr. Gray's study as her primary support. Shonda presented her speech in class to waves of applause and support from her classmates. She was shocked when, a few weeks later, she received a grade of "D". Shonda's teacher had also found Dr. Gray's study and learned it was sponsored by a multi- national distributor of wine. In fact, the study in question was published in a trade journal targeted to wine and alcohol retailers. If Shonda had taken a few extra minutes to critically examine the study, she may have been able to avoid the dreaded "D."

Shonda's story is just one of many ways that critical thinking impacts our lives. Throughout this chapter we will consider the importance of critical thinking in all areas of communication, especially public speaking. We will first take a more in-depth look at what critical thinking is – and isn't.

Before we get too far into the specifics of what critical thinking is and how we can do it, it's important to clear up a common misconception. Even though the phrase critical thinking uses the word "critical," it is not a negative thing. Being critical is not the same thing as criticizing. When we criticize something, we point out the flaws and errors in it, exercising a negative value judgment on it. Our goal with criticizing is less about understanding than about negatively evaluating. It's important to remember that critical thinking is not just criticizing. While the process may involve examining flaws and errors, it is much more.

critical thinking defined

Just what is critical thinking then? To help us understand, let's consider a common definition of critical thinking. The philosopher John Dewey, often considered the father of modern day critical thinking, defines critical thinking as:

"Active, persistent, careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9).

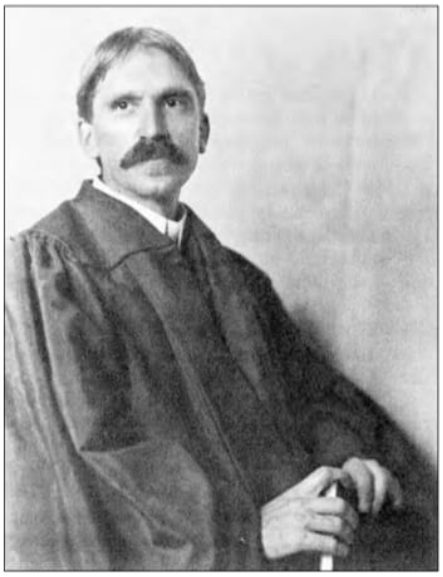


Figure 5.5.3.2 John Dewey -- Eva Watson-Schütze – John Dewey at the University of Chicago, 1902 – Public Domain.

The first key component of Dewey's definition is that critical thinking is *active*. Critical thinking must be done by choice. As we continue to delve deeper into the various facets of critical thinking, we will learn how to engage as critical thinkers.

Probably one of the most concise and easiest to understand definitions is that offered by Barry Beyer: "Critical thinking... means making reasoned judgments" (Beyer, 1995, p. 8). In other words, we don't just jump to a conclusion or a judgment. We rationalize and justify our conclusions. A second primary component of critical thinking, then, involves questioning. As critical thinkers, we need to question everything that confronts us. Equally important, we need to question ourselves and ask how our own biases or assumptions influence how we judge something.

In the following sections we will explore how to do critical thinking more in depth. As you read through this material, reflect back on Dewey's and Beyer's definitions of critical thinking.

Critical thinking traits and skills

Critical thinkers tend to exhibit certain traits that are common to them. These traits are summarized in Table 6.1 (adapted from Facione, 1990, p. 6):

Recall that critical thinking is an active mode of thinking. Instead of just receiving messages and accepting them as is, we consider what they are saying. We ask if messages are well-supported. We determine if their logic is sound or slightly flawed. In other words, we act on the messages before we take action based on them. When we enact critical thinking on a message, we engage a variety of skills including: listening, analysis, evaluation, inference and interpretation or explanation, and self- regulation (adapted from Facione, 1990, p. 6)

Next, we will examine each of these skills and their role in critical thinking in greater detail. As you read through the explanation of and examples for each skill, think about how it works in conjunction with the others. It's important to note that while our discussion of the skills is presented in a linear manner, in practice our use of each skill is not so straightforward. We may exercise different skills simultaneously or jump forward and backward.



Figure 5.5.3.3. Martha Stewart speaking into a microphone

Without an open-minded mind, you can never be a great success. ~ Martha Stewart

Listening

In order to understand listening, we must first understand the difference between ***listening*** and ***hearing***. At its most basic, hearing refers to the *physiological process* of receiving sounds, while listening refers to the *psychological process* of interpreting or making sense of those sounds.

Every minute of every day we are surrounded by hundreds of different noises and sounds. If we were to try to make sense of each different sound we would probably spend our day just doing this. While we may hear all of the noises, we filter out many of them. They pass through our lives without further notice. Certain noises, however, jump to the forefront of our consciousness. As we listen to them, we make sense of these sounds. We do this every day without necessarily thinking about the process. Like many other bodily functions, it happens without our willing it to happen.

Critical thinking requires that we consciously listen to messages. We must focus on what is being said – and not said. We must strive not to be distracted by other outside noises or the internal noise of our own preconceived ideas. For the moment we only need to take in the message.

Listening becomes especially difficult when the message contains highly charged information. Think about what happens when you try to discuss a controversial issue such as abortion. As the other person speaks, you may have every good intention of listening to the entire argument.

However, when the person says something you feel strongly about you start formulating a counter-argument in your head. The end result is that both sides end up talking past each other without ever really listening to what the other says.

Table 5.5.3.1 Traits of Critical Thinkers

Open-Mindedness	Critical thinkers are open and receptive to all ideas and arguments, even those with which they may disagree. Critical thinkers reserve judgment on a message until they have examined the claims, logic, reasoning, and evidence used. Critical thinkers are fair-minded and understand that a message is not inherently wrong or flawed if it differs from their own thoughts. Critical thinkers remain open to the possibility of changing their view on an issue when logic and evidence supports doing so.
Analytic Nature	Critical thinkers are interested in understanding what is happening in a message. Critical thinkers ask questions of the message, breaking it into its individual components and examining each in turn. Critical thinkers dissect these components looking for sound logic and reasoning.
Systematic by Method	Critical thinkers avoid jumping to conclusions. Critical thinkers take the time to systematically examine a message. Critical thinkers apply accepted criteria or conditions to their analyzes.

Table 5.5.3.1 Traits of Critical Thinkers	
Inquisitive	Critical thinkers are curious by nature. Critical thinkers ask questions of what is going on around them and in a message. Critical thinkers want to know more and take action to learn more.
Judicious	Critical thinkers are prudent in acting and making judgments.Critical thinkers are sensible in their actions. That is, they don'tjust jump on the bandwagon of common thought because it looks good or everyone else is doing it.
Truth-Seeking	Critical thinkers exercise an ethical foundation based in Ethos searching for the truth. Critical thinkers understand that even the wisest people may be wrong at times.
Confident in Reasoning	Critical thinkers have faith in the power of logic and sound reasoning. Critical thinkers understand that it is in everyone'sbest interest to encourage and develop sound logic. More importantly, critical thinkers value the power of letting others draw their own conclusions.

Analysis

Once we have listened to a message, we can begin to analyze it. In practice we often begin analyzing messages while still listening to them. When we analyze something, we consider it in greater detail, separating out the main components of the message. In a sense, we are acting like a surgeon on the message, carving out all of the different elements and laying them out for further consideration and possible action.



Americans today are some of the unhealthiest people on Earth. It seems like not a week goes by without some news story relating how we are the fattest country in the world. In addition to being overweight, we suffer from a number of other health problems. When I was conducting research for my speech, I read somewhere that heart attacks are the number one killer of men and the number two killer of women. Think about that. My uncle had a heart attack and had to be rushed to the hospital. They hooked him up to a bunch of different machines to keep him alive. We all thought he was going to die. He's ok now, but he has to take a bunch of pills every day and eat a special diet. Plus he had to pay thousands of dollars in medical bills. Wouldn't you like to know how to prevent this from happening to you?

Let's return to Shonda's persuasive speech to see analysis in action. As part of the needs section of her speech, Shonda makes the following remarks:

If we were to analyze this part of Shonda's speech (see Table 5.5.3.2), we could begin by looking at the claims she makes. We could then look at the evidence she presents in support of these claims. Having parsed out the various elements, we are then ready to evaluate them and by extension the message as a whole.

Table 5.5.3.2 Analysis of Shonda's Speech

Claims	Evidence
◈ Americans are unhealthy	
◈ America is the fattest country	◈ Some news stories about America as the fattest country
◈ Americans suffer from many health problems	◈ Research about heart attacks
◈ Heart attacks are the number one killer of men	◈ Story of her uncle's heart attack
◈ Heart attacks are the number two killer of women	

Evaluation

When we evaluate something we continue the process of analysis by assessing the various claims and arguments for validity. One way we evaluate a message is to ask questions about what is being said and who is saying it. The following is a list of typical questions we may ask, along with an evaluation of the ideas in Shonda's speech.

Is the speaker credible?

Yes. While Shonda may not be an expert per se on the issue of health benefits related to wine, she has made herself a mini-expert through conducting research.

Does the statement ring true or false based on common sense?

It sounds kind of fishy. Four or more glasses of wine in one sitting doesn't seem right. In fact, it seems like it might be bordering on binge drinking.

Does the logic employed hold up to scrutiny?

Based on the little bit of Shonda's speech we see here, her logic does seem to be sound. As we will see later on, she actually commits a few fallacies.

What questions or objections are raised by the message?

In addition to the possibility of Shonda's proposal being binge drinking, it also raises the possibility of creating alcoholism or causing other long term health problems.

How will further information affect the message?

More information will probably contradict her claims. In fact, most medical research in this area contradicts the claim that drinking 4 or more glasses of wine a day is a good thing.

Will further information strengthen or weaken the claims?

Most likely Shonda's claims will be weakened.

What questions or objections are raised by the claims?

In addition to the objections we've already discussed, there is also the problem of the credibility of Shonda's expert "doctor."

A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence. ~ David Hume

Inference and interpretation or explanation

The next step in critically examining a message is to interpret or explain the conclusions that we draw from it. At this phase we consider the evidence and the claims together. In effect we are reassembling the components that we parsed out during analysis. We are continuing our evaluation by looking at the evidence, alternatives, and possible conclusions.

Before we draw any inferences or attempt any explanations, we should look at the evidence provided. When we consider evidence we must first determine what, if any, kind of support is provided. Of the evidence we then ask:

1. Is the evidence sound?
2. Does the evidence say what the speaker says it does?
3. Does contradictory evidence exist?
4. Is the evidence from a valid credible source?

Even though these are set up as yes or no questions, you'll probably find in practice that your answers are a bit more complex. For example, let's say you're writing a speech on why we should wear our seatbelts at all times while driving. You've researched the topic and found solid, credible information setting forth the numerous reasons why wearing a seatbelt can help save your life and decrease the number of injuries experienced during a motor vehicle accident. Certainly, there exists contradictory evidence arguing seat belts can cause more injuries. For example, if you're in an accident where your car is partially submerged in water, wearing a seatbelt may impede your ability to quickly exit the vehicle. Does the fact that this evidence exists negate your claims? Probably not, but you need to be thorough in evaluating and considering how you use your evidence.



Figure 5.5.3.5. Seat Belt

"Imply" or "Infer"?

For two relatively small words, imply and infer seem to generate an inordinately large amount of confusion. Understanding the difference between the two and knowing when to use the right one is not only a useful skill, but it also makes you sound a lot smarter!

Let's begin with imply. Imply means to suggest or convey an idea. A speaker or a piece of writing implies things. For example, in Shonda's speech, she implies it is better to drink more red wine. In other words, she never directly says that we need to drink more red wine, but she clearly hints at it when she suggests that drinking four or more glasses a day will provide us with health benefits.

Now let's consider infer. Infer means that something in a speaker's words or a piece of writing helps us to draw a conclusion outside of his/her words. We infer a conclusion. Returning to Shonda's speech, we can infer she would want us to drink more red wine rather than less. She never comes right out and says this. However, by considering her overall message, we can draw this conclusion.

- Another way to think of the difference between imply and infer is:
- A speaker (or writer for that matter) implies.
- The audience infers.

Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that Shonda infers we should drink more rather than less wine. She implies this. To help you differentiate between the two, remember that an inference is something that comes from outside the spoken or written text.

A man who does not think for himself does not think at all. ~ Oscar Wilde

Self-regulation

The final step in critically examining a message is actually a skill we should exercise throughout the entire process. With self-regulation, we consider our pre-existing thoughts on the subject and any biases we may have. We examine how what we think on an issue may have influenced the way we understand (or think we understand) the message and any conclusions we have drawn. Just as contradictory evidence doesn't automatically negate our claims or invalidate our arguments, our biases don't necessarily make our conclusions wrong. The goal of practicing self- regulation is not to disavow or deny our opinions. The goal is to create distance between our opinions and the messages we evaluate.


Figure 5.5.3.6. Critical Thinking and Self-Regulation

The value of critical thinking

In public speaking, the value of being a critical thinker cannot be overstressed. Critical thinking helps us to determine the truth or validity of arguments. However, it also helps us to formulate strong arguments for our speeches. Exercising critical thinking at all steps of the speech writing and delivering process can help us avoid situations like Shonda found herself in. Critical thinking is not a magical panacea that will make us super speakers. However, it is another tool that we can add to our speech toolbox.

As we will learn in the following pages, we construct arguments based on logic. Understanding the ways logic can be used and possibly misused is a vital skill. To help stress the importance of it, the Foundation for Critical Thinking has set forth universal standards of reasoning. These standards can be found in Table 5.5.3.3.

When the mind is thinking, it is talking to itself. ~ Plato

Table 5.5.3.3 Universal Standards of Reasoning

All reasoning has a purpose.
All reasoning is an attempt to figure something out, to settle some question, to solve some problem.
All reasoning is based on assumptions.
All reasoning is done from some point of view.
All reasoning is based on data, information, and evidence.
All reasoning is expressed through, and shaped by, concepts and ideas.
All reasoning contains inferences or interpretations by which we draw conclusions and give meaning to data.
All reasoning leads somewhere or has implications and consequences.

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5.5.4: Logic and the Role of Arguments

We use logic every day. Even if we have never formally studied logical reasoning and fallacies, we can often tell when a person's statement doesn't sound right. Think about the claims we see in many advertisements today – Buy product X, and you will be beautiful/thin/happy or have the carefree life depicted in the advertisement. With very little critical thought, we know intuitively that simply buying a product will not magically change our lives. Even if we can't identify the specific fallacy at work in the argument (non causa in this case), we know there is some flaw in the argument.



Figure 5.5.4.1. Sharia Law Billboard

By studying logic and fallacies we can learn to formulate stronger and more cohesive arguments, avoiding problems like that mentioned above. The study of logic has a long history. We can trace the roots of modern logical study back to Aristotle in ancient Greece. Aristotle's simple definition of logic as the means by which we come to know anything still provides a concise understanding of logic (Aristotle, 1989). Of the classical pillars of a core liberal arts education of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, logic has developed as a fairly independent branch of philosophical studies. We use logic everyday when we construct statements, argue our point of view, and in myriad other ways. Understanding how logic is used will help us communicate more efficiently and effectively.

Defining arguments

When we think and speak logically, we pull together statements that combine reasoning with evidence to support an assertion, arguments. A logical argument should not be confused with the type of argument you have with your sister or brother or any other person. When you argue with your sibling, you participate in a conflict in which you disagree about something. You may, however, use a logical argument in the midst of the argument with your sibling. Consider this example:

> *Brother and sister, Sydney and Harrison are arguing about whose turn it is to clean their bathroom. Harrison tells Sydney she should do it because she is a girl and girls are better at cleaning. Sydney responds that being a girl has nothing to do with whose turn it is. She reminds Harrison that according to their work chart, they are responsible for cleaning the bathroom on alternate weeks. She tells him she cleaned the bathroom last week; therefore, it is his turn this week. Harrison, still unconvinced, refuses to take responsibility for the chore. Sydney then points to the work chart and shows him where it specifically says it is his turn this week. Defeated, Harrison digs out the cleaning supplies.*

Throughout their bathroom argument, both Harrison and Sydney use logical arguments to advance their point. You may ask why Sydney is successful and Harrison is not. This is a good question. Let's critically think about each of their arguments to see why one fails and one succeeds.

Let's start with Harrison's argument. We can summarize it into three points:

1. Girls are better at cleaning bathrooms than boys.
2. Sydney is a girl.
3. Therefore, Sydney should clean the bathroom.

Harrison's argument here is a form of deductive reasoning, specifically a syllogism. We will consider syllogisms in a few minutes. For our purposes here, let's just focus on why Harrison's argument fails to persuade Sydney. Assuming for the moment that we agree with Harrison's first two premises, then it would seem that his argument makes sense. We know that Sydney is a girl, so the second premise is true. This leaves the first premise that girls are better at cleaning bathrooms than boys. This is the exact point where Harrison's argument goes astray. The only way his entire argument will work is if we agree with the assumption girls are better at cleaning bathrooms than boys.

Let's now look at Sydney's argument and why it works. Her argument can be summarized as follows:

1. The bathroom responsibilities alternate weekly according to the work chart.
2. Sydney cleaned the bathroom last week.
3. The chart indicates it is Harrison's turn to clean the bathroom this week.
4. Therefore, Harrison should clean the bathroom.

Sydney's argument here is a form of inductive reasoning. We will look at inductive reasoning in depth below. For now, let's look at why Sydney's argument succeeds where Harrison's fails. Unlike Harrison's argument, which rests on assumption for its truth claims, Sydney's argument rests on evidence. We can define evidence as anything used to support the validity of an assertion. Evidence includes: testimony, scientific findings, statistics, physical objects, and many others. Sydney uses two primary pieces of evidence: the work chart and her statement that she cleaned the bathroom last week. Because Harrison has no contradictory evidence, he can't logically refute Sydney's assertion and is therefore stuck with scrubbing the toilet.





Defining deduction

Deductive reasoning refers to an argument in which the truth of its premises guarantees the truth of its conclusions. Think back to Harrison's argument for Sydney cleaning the bathroom. In order for his final claim to be valid, we must accept the truth of his claims that girls are better at cleaning bathrooms than boys. The key focus in deductive arguments is that it must be impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false. The classic example is:

All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

We can look at each of these statements individually and see each is true in its own right. It is virtually impossible for the first two propositions to be true and the conclusion to be false. Any argument which fails to meet this standard commits a logical error or

fallacy. Even if we might accept the arguments as good and the conclusion as possible, the argument fails as a form of deductive reasoning.

> A few observations and much reasoning lead to error; many observations and a little reasoning to truth. ~ Alexis Carrel

Another way to think of deductive reasoning is to think of it as moving from a general premise to a specific premise. The basic line of reasoning looks like this:



Figure 5.5.4.2. Diagram Deductive Reasoning

This form of deductive reasoning is called a syllogism. A syllogism need not have only three components to its argument, but it must have at least three. We have Aristotle to thank for identifying the syllogism and making the study of logic much easier. The focus on syllogisms dominated the field of philosophy for thousands of years. In fact, it wasn't until the early nineteenth century that we began to see the discussion of other types of logic and other forms of logical reasoning. It is easy to fall prey to missteps in reasoning when we focus on syllogisms and deductive reasoning. Let's return to Harrison's argument and see what happens.

> Logic: The art of thinking and reasoning in strict accordance with the limitations and incapacities of the human misunderstanding. ~ Ambrose Bierce



Figure 5.5.4.3. Example of Deductive Reasoning

Considered in this manner, it should be clear how the strength of the conclusion depends upon us accepting as true the first two statements. This need for truth sets up deductive reasoning as a very rigid form of reasoning. If either one of the fast two

premises isn't true, then the entire argument fails. Let's turn to recent world events for another example: In the debates over whether the United States should take military action in Iraq, this was the basic line of reasoning used to justify an invasion. This logic was sufficient for the United States to invade Iraq; however, as we have since learned, this line of reasoning also shows how quickly logic can go bad. We subsequently learned that the "experts" weren't quite so confident, and their "evidence" wasn't quite as concrete as originally represented.

Defining induction

Inductive reasoning is often thought of as the opposite of deductive reasoning; however, this approach is not wholly accurate. Inductive reasoning does move from the specific to the general. However, this fact alone does not make it the opposite of deductive reasoning. An argument which fails in its deductive reasoning may still stand inductively. Unlike deductive reasoning, there is no standard format inductive arguments must take, making them more flexible. We can define an inductive argument as one in which the truth of its propositions lends support to the conclusion. The difference here in deduction is the truth of the propositions establishes with absolute certainty the truth of the conclusion. When we analyze an inductive argument, we do not focus on the truth of its premises. Instead we analyze inductive arguments for their strength or soundness.



Figure 5.5.4.4. Inductive Reasoning

Another significant difference between deduction and induction is inductive arguments do not have a standard format. Let's return to Sydney's argument to see how induction develops in action:

1. Bathroom cleaning responsibilities alternate weekly according to the work chart.
2. Sydney cleaned the bathroom last week.
3. The chart indicates it is Harrison's turn to clean the bathroom this week.
4. Therefore, Harrison should clean the bathroom.

What Sydney does here is build to her conclusion that Harrison should clean the bathroom. She begins by stating the general house rule of alternate weeks for cleaning. She then adds in evidence before concluding her argument. While her argument is strong, we don't know if it is true. There could be other factors Sydney has left out. Sydney may have agreed to take Harrison's week of bathroom cleaning in exchange for him doing another one of her chores. Or there may be some extenuating circumstances preventing Harrison from bathroom cleaning this week.

> You should carefully study the Art of Reasoning, as it is what most people are very deficient in, and I know few things more disagreeable than to argue, or even converse with a man who has no idea of inductive and deductive philosophy.
> ~ William John Wills

Let's return to the world stage for another example. After the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, we heard variations of the following arguments:

1. The terrorists were Muslim (or Arab or Middle Eastern).

2. The terrorists hated America.
3. Therefore, all Muslims (or Arabs or Middle Easterners) hate America.

Clearly, we can see the problem in this line of reasoning. Beyond being a scary example of hyperbolic rhetoric, we can all probably think of at least one counter example to disprove the conclusion. However, individual passions and biases caused many otherwise rational people to say these things in the weeks following the attacks. This example also clearly illustrates how easy it is to get tripped up in your use of logic and the importance of practicing self-regulation.



Figure 5.5.4.5. World Trade Center After the September 11 Attacks

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5.5.5: Maintaining Ethics in Persuasive Speaking

Learning Objectives

- Discuss at least one unethical fallacy used in persuasive speaking and the reason this is not an ethical practice
- Compare and contrast the following types of fallacies: Faulty Assumption, Directed to the Person, Suggestion, Case Presentation

There are some positive steps you can take to avoid some of the pitfalls of persuasive speaking and ensure that you are presenting your message in the most ethical manner. We have already discussed some of these, such as offering credible evidence for your arguments and showing concern for the audience's well being. However, you should also offer a transparent goal for your speech. Even with a hostile audience, where you may wait until later in the speech to provide the specific purpose statement, you should be forthcoming about your specific purpose. In fact, be truthful with your audience throughout the speech.



Figure 5.5.5.1 Fraud Alert by Nataliya Vaitkevich on Pexels

Rhetorical Fallacies and Examples

TABLE: 5.5.5.1 Rhetorical Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Causal Fallacy	It is cloudy outside, and I feel sick. Cloudy days make me sick. The school board voted to buy new picnic tables for the lunch room. Many students were out sick the following day. The students must be upset about the picnic tables.
Bandwagon Fallacy	Everyone takes out a loan to buy a car, so you should too. None of the cool kids wear helmets when they ride bikes. You should take yours off.

TABLE: 5.5.5.1 Rhetorical Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Begging the Question	Lion King is an excellent film because it has excellent animation. Marijuana is good for you because it is natural.
Fallacies Directed to the Person	
Ad Hominem	We should reject President Obama's health care legislation because it is socialism. We should ignore Donald Trump's opposition to tax hikes because he's just rich andselfish.
Poisoning the Well	Before the defense makes their closing statement, keep in mind that their client has not said one truthful word throughout the trial. My opponent is going to try to manipulate you into thinking her plan is better for the city.
Appeal to Flattery	First, I wanted to tell you that this is my favorite class. I tell all my friends how much I love it. I just think I deserve a better grade on my exam. You are such a generous person, I know you'll want to donate to this cause.
Fallacies of Case Presentation	
Non Sequitur	I don't plan to vote today because I am moving next week. You should clean your room because I am going to do the laundry.
Red Herring	I should not be fined for parking in a red zone when there are so many people out there committing real crimes like robbery and murder. War is wrong, but in times of crisis we should support the president.
Appeal to Misplaced Authority	This diet is the best one for people with my health condition, Oprah said so. I want to visit the Museum of Modern Art. My English professor says they have the best collection anywhere!
Fallacies of Suggestion	
Paralepsis	I'm not saying he cheated; he just did uncharacteristically well on that exam. If she wants to work for a crook, that's her business.

TABLE: 5.5.5.1 Rhetorical Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Either-Or	Either you're with us or against us. Love it or leave it.
Arrangement	I have so much to do today. I have to get my car fixed, finish a paper, take a nap, and pick my mom up from the airport. So many highly respected musicians will be there: Paul McCartney, Elton John, LMFAO, Billy Joel . . .

It is appropriate to use fictional scenarios to demonstrate your point, but tell the audience that is what you are doing. You can accomplish this by introducing fictional examples with the phrase, "hypothetically," or "imagine," to signal that you are making it up (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Additionally, be sure to offer a mix of logical and emotional appeals. Blending these strategies insures that you have evidence to back up emotional claims, and that you are sensitive to the audiences' emotional reactions to your logical claims. Attending to both aspects will help you be more ethical and more persuasive.

The most important persuasion tool you have in your entire arsenal is integrity. ~ Zig Ziglar

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5.5.6: Persuasive Strategies (Aristotilian Proofs)

Ethos

In addition to understanding how your audience feels about the topic you are addressing, you will need to take steps to help them see you as credible and interesting. The audience's perception of you as a speaker is influential in determining whether or not they will choose to accept your proposition. Aristotle called this element of the speech **ethos**, "a Greek word that is closely related to our termsethical and ethnic" (Campbell & Huxman, 2009, p. 232). He taught speakers to establish credibility with the audience by appearing to have good moral character, common sense, and concern for the audience's well-being (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Campbell & Huxman (2009) explain that ethos is not about conveying that you, as an individual, are a good person. It is about "mirror[ing] the characteristics idealized by [the] culture or group" (ethnic) (p.232), and demonstrating that you make good moral choices with regard to your relationship within the group (ethics).



Figure 5.5.6.1 Man holding a sign saying don't believe anyone including me

While there are many things speakers can do to build their ethos throughout the speech, "assessments of ethos often reflect superficial first impressions," and these first impressions linger long after the speech has concluded (Zarefsky, 2005, p.14). This means that what you wear and how you behave, even before opening your mouth, can go far in shaping your ethos. Be sure to dress appropriately for the occasion and setting in which you speak. Also work to appear confident, but not arrogant, and be sure to maintain enthusiasm about your topic throughout the speech. Give great attention to the crafting of your opening sentences because they will set the tone for what your audience should expect of your personality as you proceed.

I covered two presidents, LBJ and Nixon, who could no longer convince, persuade, or govern, once people had decided they had no credibility; but we seem to be more tolerant now of what I think we should not tolerate. ~ Helen Thomas

Logos

Another way to enhance your ethos, and your chances of persuading the audience, is to use sound arguments. In a persuasive speech, the **argument** will focus on the reasons for supporting your specific purpose statement. This argumentative approach is what Aristotle referred to as **logos**, or the logical means of proving an argument (Braet, 1992).

When offering an argument you begin by making an assertion that requires a logical leap based on the available evidence (Campbell & Huxman, 2009). One of the most popular ways of understanding how this process works was developed by British philosopher Stephen Toulmin (Herrick, 2011). Toulmin explained that basic arguments tend to share three common elements: claim, data, and warrant. The **claim** is an assertion that you want the audience to accept. **Data** refers to the preliminary evidence on which the claim is based. For example, if I saw large gray clouds in the sky, I might make the claim that "it is going to rain

today." The gray clouds (data) are linked to rain (claim) by the **warrant**, an often unstated general connection, that large gray clouds tend to produce rain. The warrant is a connector that, if stated, would likely begin with "since" or "because." In our rain example, if we explicitly stated all three elements, the argument would go something like this: There are large gray clouds in the sky today (data). Since large gray clouds tend to produce rain (warrant), it is going to rain today (claim). However, in our regular encounters with argumentation, we tend to only offer the claim and (occasionally) the warrant.

To strengthen the basic argument, you will need **backing** for the claim. Backing provides foundational support for the claim (Herrick, 2011) by offering examples, statistics, testimony, or other information which further substantiates the argument. To substantiate the rain argument we have

just considered, you could explain that the color of a cloud is determined by how much light the water in the cloud is reflecting. A thin cloud has tiny drops of water and ice crystals which scatter light, making it appear white. Clouds appear gray when they are filled with large water droplets which are less able to reflect light (Brill, 2003).

Logic is the beginning of wisdom, not the end. ~ Leonard Nimoy

Table 5.5.6.1 The Toulmin Model Basic Argument

Basic Argument	
data I had a hard time finding a place to park on campus today.	claim The school needs more parking spaces.
warrant If I can't find a place to park, there must be a shortage of spaces.	
Argument With Backing	
data Obesity is a serious problem in the U.S.	claim U.S. citizens should be encouraged to eat less processed foods.
warrant Processed foods contribute to obesity more than natural, or unprocessed, foods.	
backing "As a rule processed foods are more 'energy dense' than freshfoods: they contain less water and fiber but more added fat and sugar, which makes them both less filling and more fattening"(Pollan, 2007).	

The elements that Toulmin identified (see Table 16.1) may be arranged in a variety of ways to make the most logical argument. As you reason through your argument you may proceed inductively, deductively, or causally, toward your claim. **Inductive reasoning** moves from specific examples to a more general claim. For example, if you read online reviews of a restaurant chain called Walt's Wine & Dine and you noticed that someone reported feeling sick after eating at a Walt's, and another person reported that the Walt's they visited was understaffed, and another commented that the tables in the Walt's they ate at had crumbs left on them, you might conclude (or claim) that the restaurant chain is unsanitary. To test the validity of a general claim, Beebe and Beebe (2003) encourage speakers to consider whether there are "enough specific instances to support the conclusion," whether the specific instances are typical, and whether the instances are recent (p.384).



Figure 5.5.6.2 Image of a diner

The opposite of inductive reasoning is deductive reasoning, moving from a general principle to a claim regarding a specific instance. In order to move from general to specific we tend to usesyllogisms. A syllogism begins with a major (or general) premise, then moves to a minor premise, then concludes with a specific claim. For example, if you know that all dogs bark (major premise), and your neighbor has a dog (minor premise), you could then conclude that your neighbor's dog barks (specific claim). To verify the accuracy of your specific claim, you must verify the truth and applicability of the major premise. What evidence do you have that all dogs bark? Is it possible that only most dogs bark? Next, you must also verify the accuracy of the minor premise. If the major premise is truly generalizable, and both premises are accurate, your specific claim should also be accurate.



Figure 5.5.6.3

Your reasoning may also proceed causally. **Causal reasoning** examines related events to determine which one caused the other. You may begin with a cause and attempt to determine its effect. For example, when the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, scientists explained that because many animals in the Gulf were nesting and reproducing at the time, the spill could wipe out "an entire generation of hundreds of species" (Donovan, 2010, para. 2). Their argument reasoned that the spill (cause) would result in species loss (effect). Two years later, the causal reasoning might be reversed. If we were seeing species loss in the Gulf (effect), we could reason that it was a result of the oil spill (cause). Both of these claims rely on the evidence available at the time. To make the first claim, scientists not only offered evidence that animals were nesting and reproducing, but they also looked at the effects of an oil spill that occurred 21 years earlier in Alaska (Donovan, 2010). To make the second claim, scientists could examine dead animals washing up on the coast to determine whether their deaths were caused by oil.

pathos

While we have focused heavily on logical reasoning, we must also recognize the strong role that emotions play in the persuasive process. Aristotle called this element of the speech **pathos**. Pathos draws on the emotions, sympathies, and prejudices of the audience to appeal to their non-rational side (Beebe & Beebe 2003; Reike, Sillars, & Peterson, 2009). Human beings are constantly in some emotional state, which means that tapping into an audience's emotions can be vital to persuading them to accept your proposition (Dillard & Meijnders, 2002).

One of the most helpful strategies in appealing to your audience's emotions is to use clear examples that illustrate your point. Illustrations can be crafted verbally, nonverbally, or visually. To offer a verbal illustration, you could tell a compelling story. For example, when fundraising for breast cancer research, Nancy Brinker, creator of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, has plenty of compelling statistics and examples to offer. Yet, she regularly talks about her sister, explaining:


Figure 5.5.6.4 Image of a Susan G Komen speaking

Susan G. Komen fought breast cancer with her heart, body and soul. Throughout her diagnosis, treatments, and endless days in the hospital, she spent her time thinking of ways to make life better for other women battling breast cancer instead of worrying about her own situation. That concern for others continued even as Susan neared the end of her fight (Komen National, n.d.).

Brinker promised her sister that she would continue her fight against breast cancer. This story compels donors to join her fight.

Speakers can also tap into emotions using nonverbal behaviors to model the desired emotion for their audience. In the summer of 2012, the U.S. House of Representatives debated holding the Attorney General in contempt for refusing to release documents concerning a controversial gun-tracking operation. Arguing for a contempt vote, South Carolina Representative Trey Gowdy did not simply state his claim, instead he raised his voice, slowed his pace, and used hand motions to convey anger with what he perceived as deception on the part of the Attorney General (Gowdy, 2012). His use of volume, tone, pace, and hand gestures enhanced the message and built anger in his audience.

Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

In addition to verbal and nonverbal illustrations, visual imagery can enhance the emotional appeal of a message. For example, we have all heard about the dangers of drugs, and there are multiple campaigns that attempt to prevent people from even trying them. However, many young adults experiment with drugs under the assumption that they are immune from the negative effects if they only use the drug recreationally. To counter this assumption regarding methamphe- tamines, the Montana Meth project combines controversial statements with graphic images on billboards to evoke fear of the drug (see www.methproject. org /ads/ print/ for some disturbing examples). Young adults may have heard repeated warnings that meth is addictive and that it has the potential to cause sores, rotten teeth, and extreme weight loss, but Montana Meth Project's visual display is more compelling because it turns the audience's stomach, making the message memorable. This image, combined with the slogan, "not even once," conveys the persuasive point without the need for other forms of evidence and rational argument.

Appeals to fear, like those in the Montana Meth Project ads, have proven effective in motivating people to change a variety of behaviors. However, speakers must be careful with their use of this emotion. Fear appeals tend to be more effective when they appeal to a high-level fear, such as death, and they are more effective when offered by speakers with a high level of perceived credibility (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Fear appeals are also more persuasive when the speaker can convince the audience they have the ability to avert the threat. If audiences doubt their ability to avoid or minimize the threat, the appeal may backfire (Witte & Allen, 2000).

I would rather try to persuade a man to go along, because once I have persuaded him, he will stick. If I scare him, he will stay just as long as he is scared, and then he is gone. ~ Dwight D. Eisenhower

David Brooks (2011) argues that, "emotions are not separate from reason, but they are the foundation of reason because they tell us what to value" (para. 2). Those values are at the core of fostering a credible ethos. All of Aristotle's strategies, ethos, logos, and pathos, are interdependent. The most persuasive speakers will combine these strategies to varying degrees based on their specific purpose and audience.

In addition to considering their topic and persuasive strategy, speakers must take care to ensure that their message is ethical. Persuasion is often confused with another kind of communication that has similar ends, but different methods—coercion. Like persuasion, **coercion** is a process whereby thoughts or behaviors are altered. But in coercive acts, deceptive or harmful methods propel the intended changes, not reason. Strong and Cook (1992) contrasted the two: "persuasion uses argument to compel power to give way to reason while coercion uses force to compel reason to give way to power" (p. 7). The "force" that Strong and Cook mention frequently manifests as promises for reward or punishment, but sometimes it arises as physical or emotional harm. Think of almost any international crime film you have seen, and you are likely to remember a scene where someone was compelled to out their compatriots by way of force. Jack Bauer, the protagonist in the American television series 24, became an infamous character by doing whatever it took to get captured criminals to talk. Although dramatic as an example, those scenes where someone is tortured in an effort to produce evidence offer a familiar reference when thinking about coercion. To avoid coercing an audience, speakers should use logical and emotional appeals responsibly.

The pendulum of the mind alternates between sense and nonsense, not between right and wrong. ~ Carl Jung

Persuasive speakers must be careful to avoid using **fallacies** in their reasoning. Fallacies are errors in reasoning that occur when a speaker fails to use appropriate or applicable evidence for their argument. There are a wide variety of fallacies, and it is not possible to list them all here. However,

speakers should watch for four common categories of fallacies: "fallacies of faulty assumption," which occur when the speaker reasons based on a problematic assumption; "fallacies directed to the person," which occur when the speaker focuses on the attributes of an individual opponent rather than the relevant arguments; "fallacies of case presentation," which occur when the speaker mischaracterizes the issue; and "fallacies of suggestion," which occur when the speaker implies or suggests an argument without fully developing it (Herrick, 2011, p. 256). See the Table 16.2 on the following page for examples of each of these types of fallacies. To learn more about fallacies, see Chapter 6 by Russ (Critical Thinking and Reasoning), or see the supplemental handout found on the Persuasive Speaking chapter homepage (www.publicspeaking project.org/persuasive.html)



Figure 5.5.6.5 Image of a man speaking with his hands up

There are some positive steps you can take to avoid these pitfalls of persuasive speaking and ensure that you are presenting your message in the most ethical manner. We have already discussed some of these, such as offering credible evidence for your arguments and showing concern for the audience's well being. However, you should also offer a transparent goal for your speech. Even with a hostile audience, where you may wait until later in the speech to provide the specific purpose statement, you should be forthcoming about your specific purpose. In fact, be truthful with your audience throughout the speech.

Table 5.5.6.12 Examples of Fallacies Fallacies of Faulty Assumption

Causal Fallacy	It is cloudy outside, and I feel sick. Cloudy days make me sick. The school board voted to buy new picnic tables for the lunch room. Many students were out sick the following day. The students must be upset about the picnic tables.
Bandwagon Fallacy	Everyone takes out a loan to buy a car, so you should too. None of the cool kids wear helmets when they ride bikes. You should take yours off.
Begging the Question	Lion King is an excellent film because it has excellent animation. Marijuana is good for you because it is natural.
Fallacies Directed to the Person	
Ad Hominem	We should reject President Obama's health care legislation because it is socialism. We should ignore Donald Trump's opposition to tax hikes because he's just rich andselfish.
Poisoning the Well	Before the defense makes their closing statement, keep in mind that their client has not said one truthful word throughout the trial. My opponent is going to try to manipulate you into thinking her plan is better for the city.

Table 5.5.6.12 Examples of Fallacies Fallacies of Faulty Assumption	
Appeal to Flattery	First, I wanted to tell you that this is my favorite class. I tell all my friends how much I love it. I just think I deserve a better grade on my exam. You are such a generous person, I know you'll want to donate to this cause.
Fallacies of Case Presentation	
Non Sequitur	I don't plan to vote today because I am moving next week. You should clean your room because I am going to do the laundry.
Red Herring	I should not be fined for parking in a red zone when there are so many people out there committing real crimes like robbery and murder. War is wrong, but in times of crisis we should support the president.
Appeal to Misplaced Authority	This diet is the best one for people with my health condition, Oprah said so. I want to visit the Museum of Modern Art. My English professor says they have the best collection anywhere!
Fallacies of Suggestion	
Paralepsis	I'm not saying he cheated; he just did uncharacteristically well on that exam. If she wants to work for a crook, that's her business.
Either-Or	Either you're with us or against us. Love it or leave it.
Arrangement	I have so much to do today. I have to get my car fixed, finish a paper, take a nap, and pick my mom up from the airport. So many highly respected musicians will be there: Paul McCartney, Elton John, LMFAO, Billy Joel . . .

It is appropriate to use fictional scenarios to demonstrate your point, but tell the audience that is what you are doing. You can accomplish this by introducing fictional examples with the phrase, "hypothetically," or "imagine," to signal that you are making it up (Beebe & Beebe, 2003). Additionally, be sure to offer a mix of logical and emotional appeals. Blending these strategies insures that you have evidence to back up emotional claims, and that you are sensitive to the audiences' emotional reactions to your logical claims. Attending to both aspects will help you be more ethical and more persuasive.

The most important persuasion tool you have in your entire arsenal is integrity. ~ Zig Ziglar

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5.5.7: Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Learning Objectives

- Explain the use of Monroe's motivated sequence to motivate listeners.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Monroe's motivated sequence is the best-known organizational pattern focused on motivational appeals. It is especially useful in situations where the speaker is proposing a solution to an existing problem.

If you use Monroe's motivated sequence, you're asking your audience to visualize the consequences of what will happen if they are persuaded to engage in the action you are arguing for. Health-related appeals often use this strategy: for example, smoking, seat belts, mask-wearing in a pandemic, etc.

Alan H. Monroe was a Purdue University psychology professor who used what he knew about the psychology of persuasion to write a book called "Monroe's Principles of Speech." He outlines a speech organizational pattern which is most effective in speeches of persuasion. It involves five key steps for which to order the speech.

1. **Get attention.** This involves calling the audience's attention to a problem. It may occur in the introduction part of the speech or as the first point in the body of the speech. For example, according to the New England Medical Journal in their 2018 June article, four out of five people do not get more than five quality hours of sleep per night.
2. **Establish the need.** Show that there is a problem or a need for something to be done. Use statistics, evidence, etc., to prove the need. This establishment may occur in the introduction or the body of the speech. For example, lack of sleep depletes productivity.
3. **Satisfy the need.** Offer a solution to the issue and explain how the solution would work. This usually is in the body of the speech as a main point. Take a sleep workshop.
4. **Visualize the future.** Paint a picture of what the world would be like if the need is satisfied using your proposed solution. For example, how productive the world would be on seven hours of sleep per night? The visualization could be in the body or conclusion.
5. **Action/Actualization.** Call the audience to take action and commit to doing something such as signing a pledge to get better sleep, going to a sleep workshop, etc. The call for action is usually in the conclusion.

Recap

In this video, Eric Robertson breaks down the components of Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

A link to an interactive elements can be found at the bottom of this page.

You can view the transcript for "Monroe's Motivated Sequence | COMMUNICATION STUDIES" here (opens in new window).

To watch: Ron Finley, "A guerilla gardener in South Central LA"

In this TED talk, fashion designer and urban gardener Ron Finley talks about creating gardens in a South Central food desert.



Figure 5.5.7.1. Ron Finley: A Guerrilla Gardener in South Central LA

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pb.libretexts.org/publicspeaking/?p=486

You can view the transcript for "A guerilla gardener in South Central LA | Ron Finley" here (opens in new window).

What to watch for:

Finley's speech is a good example of Monroe's Motivated Sequence. Here's how it fits into the five steps:

Attention: "I live in South Central. This is South Central: liquor stores, fast food, vacant lots."

Need: "Just like 26.5 million other Americans, I live in a food desert, South Central Los Angeles, home of the drive-thru and the drive-by. Funny thing is, the drive-thrus are killing more people than the drive-bys."

Satisfaction: "So me and my group, L.A. Green Grounds, we got together and we started planting my food forest, fruit trees, you know, the whole nine, vegetables. . . . I have witnessed my garden become a tool for the education, a tool for the transformation of my neighborhood. To change the community, you have to change the composition of the soil. We are the soil."

Visualization: "Now this is one of my plans. This is what I want to do. I want to plant a whole block of gardens where people can share in the food in the same block. I want to take shipping containers and turn them into healthy cafes."

Action: "If you want to meet with me, come to the garden with your shovel so we can plant some sh*t."

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6: LISTENING AND DISCLOSURE

Human relationships are built on communication. As we speak and listen, learn about each other, and get to know each other in personal ways, relationships grow and thrive. Our relationships are defined by how we communicate, including what we talk about, when we talk about it, and how we respond. The substance of relationships is how we communicate. Interaction is comprised of what we tell each other (disclosure) and how we attend to each other's disclosure (listening).

6.1: The Importance of Listening

6.2: Steps of Listening Process

6.3: Barriers to Listening

6.4: Ineffective Listening Practices

6.5: Becoming a Mindful Listener

6.6: Communicating the Self

6.7: Theories and Measurement of Self-Disclosure

6.8: Self-Disclosure in Romantic Relationhips and the Johari Window

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6.1: The Importance of Listening

Learning Objectives

- Define active listening and list the five stages of the listening process
- Illustrate the relationship between critical thinking and listening
- Give examples of the four main barriers to effective listening

Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

Listening Is More than Just Hearing

Listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of our lives–from maintaining our personal relationships, to getting our jobs done, to taking notes in class, to figuring out which bus to take to the airport. Regardless of how we're engaged with listening, it's important to understand that listening involves more than just hearing the words that are directed at us. Listening is an active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.

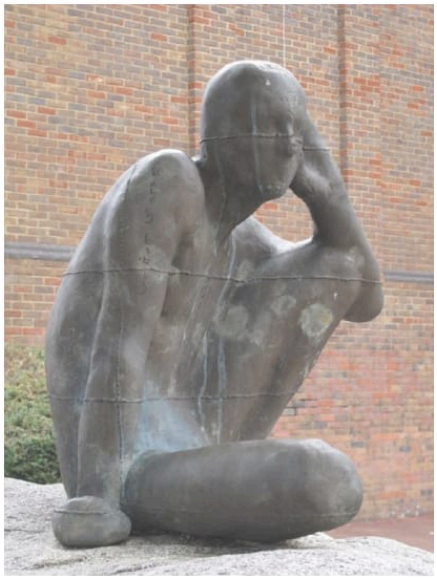


Figure 6.1.1 Learning to Listen: Antony Gormley's statue "Untitled [Listening]," Maygrove Peace Park. Image is under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding. These stages will be discussed in more detail in later sections. Basically, an effective listener must hear and identify the speech sounds directed toward them, understand the message of those sounds, critically evaluate or assess that message, remember what's been said, and respond (either verbally or nonverbally) to information they've received.

Effectively engaging with all five stages of the listening process lets us best gather the information we need from the world around us.

Active Listening

Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker, by way of restating or paraphrasing what they have heard in their own words. The goal of this repetition is to confirm what the listener has heard and to confirm the understanding of both parties. The ability to actively listen demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships,

reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding.

When engaging with a particular speaker, a listener can use several degrees of active listening, each resulting in a different quality of communication with the speaker. This active listening chart shows three main degrees of listening: repeating, paraphrasing, and reflecting.

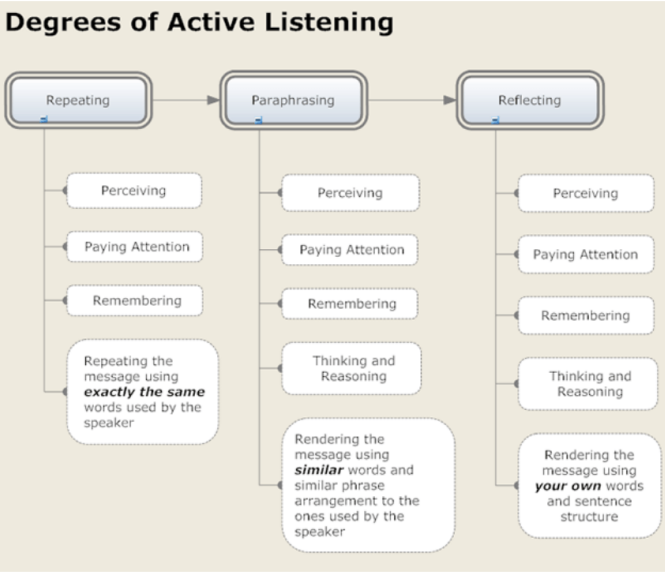


Figure 6.1.2 Degree of Active Listening. Image is under a CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike license.

Degrees of Active Listening

There are several degrees of active listening.

Active listening can also involve paying attention to the speaker's behavior and body language. Having the ability to interpret a person's body language lets the listener develop a more accurate understanding of the speaker's message.

Listening and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking skills are essential and connected to the ability to listen effectively and process the information that one hears.

Critical Thinking

One definition for critical thinking is "the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. "



Figure 6.1.3 Roosevelt and Churchill in Conversation: Effective listening leads to better critical understanding. Image is under a CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike license.

In other words, critical thinking is the process by which people qualitatively and quantitatively assess the information they have accumulated, and how they in turn use that information to solve problems and forge new patterns of understanding. Critical thinking clarifies goals, examines assumptions, discerns hidden values, evaluates evidence, accomplishes actions, and assesses conclusions.

Critical thinking has many practical applications, such as formulating a workable solution to a complex personal problem, deliberating in a group setting about what course of action to take, or analyzing the assumptions and methods used in arriving at a scientific hypothesis. People use critical thinking to solve complex math problems or compare prices at the grocery store. It is a process that informs all aspects of one's daily life, not just the time spent taking a class or writing an essay.

Critical thinking is imperative to effective communication, and thus, public speaking.

Connection of Critical Thinking to Listening

Critical thinking occurs whenever people figure out what to believe or what to do, and do so in a reasonable, reflective way. The concepts and principles of critical thinking can be applied to any context or case, but only by reflecting upon the nature of that application. Expressed in most general terms, critical thinking is "a way of taking up the problems of life. " As such, reading, writing, speaking, and listening can all be done critically or uncritically insofar as core critical thinking skills can be applied to all of those activities. Critical thinking skills include observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and metacognition.

Critical thinkers are those who are able to do the following:

- Recognize problems and find workable solutions to those problems
- Understand the importance of prioritization in the hierarchy of problem solving tasks
- Gather relevant information
- Read between the lines by recognizing what is not said or stated
- Use language clearly, efficiently, and with efficacy
- Interpret data and form conclusions based on that data
- Determine the presence of lack of logical relationships
- Make sound conclusions and/or generalizations based on given data
- Test conclusions and generalizations
- Reconstruct one's patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience
- Render accurate judgments about specific things and qualities in everyday life

Therefore, critical thinkers must engage in highly active listening to further their critical thinking skills. People can use critical

thinking skills to understand, interpret, and assess what they hear in order to formulate appropriate reactions or responses. These skills allow people to organize the information that they hear, understand its context or relevance, recognize unstated assumptions, make logical connections between ideas, determine the truth values, and draw conclusions. Conversely, engaging in focused, effective listening also lets people collect information in a way that best promotes critical thinking and, ultimately, successful communication.

Causes of Poor Listening

Listening is negatively affected by low concentration, trying too hard, jumping ahead, and/or focusing on style instead of substance.



Figure 6.1.4 There are many barriers that can impede effective listening. Image is under a CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike license.

The act of "listening" may be affected by barriers that impede the flow of information. These barriers include distractions, an inability to prioritize information, a tendency to assume or judge based on little or no information (i.e., "jumping to conclusions), and general confusion about the topic being discussed. Listening barriers may be psychological (e.g., the listener's emotions) or physical (e.g., noise and visual distraction). However, some of the most common barriers to effective listening include low concentration, lack of prioritization, poor judgement, and focusing on style rather than substance.

Low Concentration

Low concentration, or not paying close attention to speakers, is detrimental to effective listening. It can result from various psychological or physical situations such as visual or auditory distractions, physical discomfort, inadequate volume, lack of interest in the subject material, stress, or personal bias. Regardless of the cause, when a listener is not paying attention to a speaker's dialogue, effective communication is significantly diminished. Both listeners and speakers should be aware of these kinds of impediments and work to eliminate or mitigate them.

When listening to speech, there is a time delay between the time a speaker utters a sentence to the moment the listener comprehends the speaker's meaning. Normally, this happens within the span of a few seconds. If this process takes longer, the listener has to catch up to the speaker's words if he or she continues to speak at a pace faster than the listener can comprehend. Often, it is easier for listeners to stop listening when they do not understand. Therefore, a speaker needs to know which parts of a speech may be more comprehension intensive than others, and adjust his or her speed, vocabulary, and sentence structure accordingly.

Lack of Prioritization

Just as lack of attention to detail in a conversation can lead to ineffective listening, so can focusing too much attention on the least important information. Listeners need to be able to pick up on social cues and prioritize the information they hear to identify

the most important points within the context of the conversation.

Often, the information the audience needs to know is delivered along with less pertinent or irrelevant information. When listeners give equal weight to everything they hear, it makes it difficult to organize and retain the information they need. For instance, students who take notes in class must know which information to writing down within the context of an entire lecture. Writing down the lecture word for word is impossible as well as inefficient.

Poor Judgement

When listening to a speaker's message, it is common to sometimes overlook aspects of the conversation or make judgments before all of the information is presented. Listeners often engage in confirmation bias, which is the tendency to isolate aspects of a conversation to support one's own preexisting beliefs and values. This psychological process has a detrimental effect on listening for several reasons.

First, confirmation bias tends to cause listeners to enter the conversation before the speaker finishes her message and, thus, form opinions without first obtaining all pertinent information. Second, confirmation bias detracts from a listener's ability to make accurate critical assessments. For example, a listener may hear something at the beginning of a speech that arouses a specific emotion. Whether anger, frustration, or anything else, this emotion could have a profound impact on the listener's perception of the rest of the conversation.

Focusing on Style, Not Substance

The vividness effect explains how vivid or highly graphic an individual's perception of a situation. When observing an event in person, an observer is automatically drawn toward the sensational, vivid or memorable aspects of a conversation or speech.

In the case of listening, distracting or larger-than-life elements in a speech or presentation can deflect attention away from the most important information in the conversation or presentation. These distractions can also influence the listener's opinion. For example, if a Shakespearean professor delivered an entire lecture in an exaggerated Elizabethan accent, the class would likely not take the professor seriously, regardless of the actual academic merit of the lecture.

Cultural differences (including speakers' accents, vocabulary, and misunderstandings due to cultural assumptions) can also obstruct the listening process. The same biases apply to the speaker's physical appearance. To avoid this obstruction, listeners should be aware of these biases and focus on the substance, rather than the style of delivery, or the speaker's voice and appearance.

Key Takeaways

Key Points

- The listening process involves five stages: receiving, understanding, evaluating, remembering, and responding.
- Active listening is a particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker.
- Three main degrees of active listening are repeating, paraphrasing, and reflecting.
- Critical thinking is the process by which people qualitatively and quantitatively assess the information they accumulate.
- Critical thinking skills include observation, interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, and metacognition.
- The concepts and principles of critical thinking can be applied to any context or case, including the process of listening.
- Effective listening lets people collect information in a way that promotes critical thinking and successful communication.
- Low concentration can be the result of various psychological or physical situations such as visual or auditory distractions, physical discomfort, inadequate volume, lack of interest in the subject material, stress, or personal bias.
- When listeners give equal weight to everything they hear, it makes it difficult to organize and retain the information they need. When the audience is trying too hard to listen, they often cannot take in the most important information they need.
- Jumping ahead can be detrimental to the listening experience; when listening to a speaker's message, the audience overlooks aspects of the conversation or makes judgments before all of the information is presented.
- Confirmation bias is the tendency to pick out aspects of a conversation that support one's own preexisting beliefs and values.
- A flashy speech can actually be more detrimental to the overall success and comprehension of the message because a speech that focuses on style offers little in the way of substance.
- Recognizing obstacles ahead of time can go a long way toward overcoming them.

Key Terms

- **listening**: The active process by which we make sense of, assess, and respond to what we hear.
- **active listening**: A particular communication technique that requires the listener to provide feedback on what he or she hears to the speaker.
- **Critical thinking**: The process by which people qualitatively and quantitatively assess the information they have accumulated.
- **Metacognition**: “Cognition about cognition”, or “knowing about knowing. ” It can take many forms, including knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or for problem solving.
- **Confirmation bias**: The tendency to pick out aspects of a conversation that support our one’s own preexisting beliefs and values.
- **Vividness effect**: The phenomenon of how vivid or highly graphic and dramatic events affect an individual’s perception of a situation.

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6.2: Steps of Listening Process

Learning Objectives

- Describe the stages of the listening process.
- Discuss the four main types of listening.
- Compare and contrast the four main listening styles.

Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this section we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

The Listening Process

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

Receiving

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

Perception can affect 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 sub consciousness, and others are filtered into various levels of consciousness based on their salience. Recall that salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context and that we tend to find salient things that are visually or audibly stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Think about how it's much easier to listen to a lecture on a subject that you find very interesting.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music 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. I remember earning perfect scores on exams in my anatomy class in college because I was able to memorize and recall, for example, all the organs in the digestive system. In fact, I might still be able to do that now over a decade later. But neither then nor now could I tell you the significance or function of most of those organs, meaning I didn't really get to a level of understanding but simply stored the information for later recall.

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 189–99. Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 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 and in which information can be stored indefinitely.

Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 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 and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind and process it and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there isn't a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities and can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle, who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, "Are you listening?" Belle inevitably replies, "Yes," since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, "Well, what did I just say?"

Evaluating

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker's statements are correct and/or true. In terms of completeness, we try to "read between the lines" and evaluate the message in relation to what we know about the topic or situation being discussed. We

evaluate the worth of a message by making a value judgment about whether we think the message or idea is good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable. All these aspects of evaluating require critical thinking skills, which we aren't born with but must develop over time through our own personal and intellectual development.

Studying communication is a great way to build your critical thinking skills, because you learn much more about the taken-for-granted aspects of how communication works, which gives you tools to analyze and critique messages, senders, and contexts. Critical thinking and listening skills also help you take a more proactive role in the communication process rather than being a passive receiver of messages that may not be credible, complete, or worthwhile. One danger within the evaluation stage of listening is to focus your evaluative lenses more on the speaker than the message. This can quickly become a barrier to effective listening if we begin to prejudge a speaker based on his or her identity or characteristics rather than on the content of his or her message. We will learn more about how to avoid slipping into a person-centered rather than message-centered evaluative stance later in the chapter.

Responding

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

We send verbal and nonverbal feedback while another person is talking and after they are done. Back-channel cues are the verbal and nonverbal signals we send while someone is talking and can consist of verbal cues like "uh-huh," "oh," and "right," and/or nonverbal cues like direct eye contact, head nods, and leaning forward. Back-channel cues are generally a form of positive feedback that indicates others are actively listening. People also send cues intentionally and unintentionally that indicate they aren't listening. If another person is looking away, fidgeting, texting, or turned away, we will likely interpret those responses negatively.



Figure 6.2.1 Listeners respond to speakers nonverbally during a message using back-channel cues and verbally after a message using paraphrasing and clarifying questions. Image by Mimi Thian on Unsplash.

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 that made you think he was 'playing favorites?'" Make sure to paraphrase and/or ask questions once a person's turn is over, because interrupting can also be interpreted as a sign of not listening. Paraphrasing is also a good tool to use in computer-mediated communication, especially since miscommunication can

occur due to a lack of nonverbal and other contextual cues.

The Importance of Listening

Understanding how listening works provides the foundation we need to explore why we listen, including various types and styles of listening. In general, listening helps us achieve all the communication goals and 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. Wendy S. Zabava and Andrew D. Wolvin, "The Differential Impact of a Basic Communication Course on Perceived Communication Competencies in Class, Work, and Social Contexts," Communication Education 42 (1993): 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. National Association of Colleges and Employers, Job Outlook 2011 (2010): 25.

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. Vincent S. DiSalvo, "A Summary of Current Research Identifying Communication Skills in Various Organizational Contexts," Communication Education 29 (1980), 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. Robert M. Milardo and Heather Helms-Erikson, "Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 37. The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

The main purposes of listening are:

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people's communication;
- to critically evaluate other people's messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and
- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel "heard" and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively. Graham D. Bodie and William A. Villaume, "Aspects of Receiving Information: The Relationships between Listening Preferences, Communication Apprehension, Receiver Apprehension, and Communicator Style," International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 48. The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic. Kittie W. Watson, Larry L. Barker, and James B. Weaver III, "The Listening Styles Profile (LS-16): Development and Validation of an Instrument to Assess Four Listening Styles," International Journal of Listening 9 (1995): 1–13.

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 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 recreate nuanced behavior. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, "A Listening Taxonomy," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 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, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college, but will be expected to have mastered once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college. Most college professors provide detailed instructions and handouts with assignments so students can review them as needed, but many supervisors and managers will expect you to take the initiative to remember or record vital information. Additionally, many bosses are not as open to questions or requests to repeat themselves as professors are.

Critical Listening

Critical listening entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various persuasive appeals and faulty logic (known as fallacies). 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 remember that individuals can often disguise inferences as facts. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech in this class and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily. You can see judges employ critical listening, with varying degrees of competence, on talent competition shows like Rupaul's Drag Race, America's Got Talent, and The Voice. While the exchanges between judge and contestant on these shows is expected to be subjective and critical, critical listening is also important when listening to speakers that 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. Tom Bruneau, "Empathy and Listening," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 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.



Figure 6.2.2 We support others through empathetic listening by trying to "feel with" them. Image by Toimetaja tõlkebüroo on Unsplash.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position. An excellent example of critical and empathetic listening in action is the international Truth and Reconciliation movement. The most well-known example of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) occurred in South Africa as a way to address the various conflicts that occurred during apartheid. Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, 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. The Greensboro TRC states its purpose as such: "About," Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, 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 acknowledgement, appropriate public mourning, forgiveness and healing...The focus often is on giving victims, witnesses and even perpetrators a chance to publicly tell their stories without fear of prosecution.

Listening Styles

Just as there are different types of listening, there are also different styles of listening. People may be categorized as one or more of the following listeners: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented listeners. Research finds that 40 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation. Graham D. Bodie and William A. Villaume, "Aspects of Receiving Information: The Relationships between Listening Preferences, Communication Apprehension, Receiver Apprehension, and Communicator Style," International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 50. Other research finds that people often still revert back to a single preferred style in times of emotional or cognitive stress, even if they know a different style of listening would be better. Debra L. Worthington, "Exploring the Relationship between Listening Style Preference and Personality," International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 82. Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated 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. Interestingly, such fields are typically feminized, in that people often associate the characteristics of people-oriented listeners with roles filled by women.

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. Margarete Imhof, "Who Are We as We Listen? Individual Listening Profiles in Varying Contexts," International Journal of Listening 18, no. 1 (2004): 39. 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.

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.

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Listening is a learned process and skill that we can improve on with concerted effort. Improving our listening skills can benefit us in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- Listening is the process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. In the receiving stage, we select and attend to various stimuli based on salience. We then interpret auditory and visual stimuli in order to make meaning out of them based on our existing schemata. Short-term and long-term memory store stimuli until they are discarded or processed for later recall. We then evaluate the credibility, completeness, and worth of a message before responding with verbal and nonverbal signals.
- Discriminative listening is the most basic form of listening, and we use it to distinguish between and focus on specific sounds. We use informational listening to try to comprehend and retain information. Through critical listening, we analyze and evaluate messages at various levels. We use empathetic listening to try to understand or experience what a speaker is feeling.
- People-oriented listeners are concerned with others' needs and feelings, which may distract from a task or the content of a message. Action-oriented listeners prefer listening to well-organized and precise information and are more concerned about solving an issue than they are about supporting the speaker. Content-oriented listeners enjoy processing complicated information and are typically viewed as credible because they view an issue from multiple perspectives before making a decision. Although content-oriented listeners may not be very effective in situations with time constraints, time-oriented listeners are fixated on time limits and listen in limited segments regardless of the complexity of the information or the emotions involved, which can make them appear cold and distant to some.

Exercises

1. The recalling stage of the listening process is a place where many people experience difficulties. What techniques do you use or could you use to improve your recall of certain information such as people's names, key concepts from your classes, or instructions or directions given verbally?
2. Getting integrated: Identify how critical listening might be useful for you in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
3. Listening scholars have noted that empathetic listening is the most difficult type of listening. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Which style of listening best describes you and why? Which style do you have the most difficulty with or like the least and why?

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6.3: Barriers to Listening

Understanding Barriers for Better Listening

Now that you have a better understanding of the functions and styles of listening, we will discuss the barriers to listening. A **barrier to listening** is anything that is hindering you from recognizing, understanding, and accurately interpreting the message that you are receiving. We'll discuss four barriers to effective listening: information overload, prejudice or prejudging, rate of speech and thought, and internal and external distractions. When you have a better understanding of the potential barriers to effective listening, you can pinpoint your weaknesses and work on building them up to make you a better listener.

Information Overload

We now know that a majority of our time communicating is spent listening. With all the listening we are doing, there are going to be times when we experience information overload. **Information overload** is when you have so much information coming at you, it's easy to become overwhelmed. In a Public Speaking class, for example, you can experience this when listening to your classmates give speeches, especially if you're hearing 20 speeches, one after the other. You become overwhelmed and you'll probably find yourself tuning out at some point. Or what if a speaker condenses so many statistics into the presentation that you cannot keep track of all the numbers? That's information overload.

To cope with information overload, you might consider taking notes to increase focus and your ability to process the information being delivered. If appropriate in the circumstances, such as in a business meeting or professional training, you might politely ask the speaker to repeat a point you missed, briefly paraphrase what they've said to ensure you've gathered the key points accurately, or even simply ask clarifying questions. You might also ask for resources or recordings that you can reference later at your own pace.

Prejudging

We, as humans, tend to be closed-minded at times. If you have an emotional reaction to a person or disagree with their ideas personally, you might be allowing personal prejudices to distract you. There are various ways we **prejudge** others. We may unconsciously prejudge a speaker because of their age, race, sexual identity, appearance, occupation, or political affiliation. Keeping an open mind when speaking with others is optimal but often challenging, because you may not even know this barrier is preventing you from fully showing up as a listener. Furthermore, you might have a hard time listening because you disagree with the speaker.

One way to identify some unconscious biases you may have towards others is to take the free Implicit Association Test (IAT). This test measures "attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report" (Rudman, Greenwald, & McGhee, 1998). There are a variety of tests one can take, and the results are anonymous and allow you to examine unknown biases you may have toward others. Taking the time to examine your biases can help you become a better listener because you can suspend judgment and listen with an open mind. While you may disagree with the person's perspective, you may learn more about them, yourself, or the topic they are sharing. You'll never know unless you hear them out.

Journal Exercise: Try this!

It can be a struggle to open ourselves up to opinions, perspectives, or people with whom we adamantly disagree. These differences can create real problems in our relationships, at home, and at work. Deliberate listening can be a powerful tool in learning to connect more effectively with the people in your life.

For this entry, sit down with someone that you know who has an opinion or idea you find ridiculous or simply disagree with … and spend at least 10 minutes engaged in listening to them.

After your conversation, take some time to reflect on your experience as a listener and let your insights sink in. Consider questions like:

- In what ways did you find listening to the other person challenging?
- How did you prejudge the speaker?
- What strategies did you use to suspend judgment while listening?
- What did you learn about the other person by listening to them?
- What did you learn about yourself as a listener?

Rate of Speech and Thought

A recent study suggests that most people speak at a rate of 100 to 150 words per minute (wpm) in everyday conversation or when presenting. However, voice readers of audiobooks, radio hosts, and podcasters were found to speak at rates of 150-160 wpm. In the same study, auctioneers' speech rate was 250 wpm, and commentators came in at 250-400 wpm. (Barnard, 2022). So why does this matter? Ideally, the speaker's rate of speech would line up with the listener's speed of thought in processing the words spoken. A consideration is that the speech rate changes depending on who or what we are listening to. The question becomes "Can our brains keep up?"

A 2019 study conducted by Muller, et. al. that analyzed listening efforts in conjunction with varying rates of speech found that "the brain adapts to the auditory input for an optimal stimulus processing…show[ing] a clear influence of speech rate averaged across participants." In other words, our brains will automatically adjust to increased speech rate. So, yes, our brains can keep up. Furthermore, it has been found that most people process between 400 and 800 words per minute (Hargie, 2011). But our brains can process information several times faster than the speed at which words are typically spoken. As a result, a **mental lag** can occur. Since we listen and process information much faster than the average rate of speech, including the high rate at which commentators speak, we tend to fill the void with other thoughts and cognitive biases. In turn, this speaking–listening differential can halt our listening altogether. We find ourselves tuning in and out while our minds are busy making predictions, perhaps prejudging and veering off into other related thoughts, or even simply slipping into a daydream.

To be an effective listener, one has to be mindful of this difference and use strategies to prevent the mind from veering off for too long. One strategy to prevent this mental lag is to mentally summarize the speaker's ideas from time to time to keep yourself engaged. Taking notes, doodling images or symbols of things you are hearing, or visualizing what the speaker is sharing might also help to fill the void while still remaining engaged as a listener. The point is that awareness of this mental lag can help you build your mindfulness around your capacity as a listener and develop strategies that take advantage of the thought–speech differential.

Internal and External Distractions

Let's face it, you have a lot going on in your life. You attend school, you probably work, you might be raising a family, and you have your own issues to work through every day. Sometimes when we are absorbed in our own thoughts and concerns, we can't focus on what someone else is saying. We have all experienced moments of being physically present but mentally absent. This is known as **mind-wandering** or blue-skying, when instead of listening you are thinking about anything but the message at hand. Instead of truly listening, your mind is worried about something happening at work or feeling excited about an upcoming event scheduled later in the day with friends. You could also simply be thinking about your to-do list or reflecting on a conversation you had with a partner the previous night. When you allow those thoughts to take your focus, you will find that you become a less effective listener. Such distracting thoughts and feelings are your **internal distractions.**

In addition to internal distractions, we also experience **external distractions** as a listening barrier. External distractions come from the physical environment and involve any visual, auditory, or other sensorial elements within the space that captures your attention. Perhaps the most prominent external listening barrier today involves technology. The powerhouse technological distractor that most of us carry around is a smartphone. We use our cell phones to send a text message to a friend, make a call to a significant other, record a video on Tik Tok, post a thought of the day or special photo on social media, surf the web, and use the calculator, only to name the basics.

We have created a culture of cell phone dependency and seek out personal connections through our technological devices, which has increased exponentially due to the significant worldwide impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Entire communities around the world shut down and moved to technology to stay connected. However, our dependency has become so great that it is a frequent source of external distraction. For example, when someone is trying to communicate with you, and you hear the notification chime go off on your phone, immediately picking it up to see what it was before the other person has finished speaking, you have just experienced an external listening barrier. Next time, you might consider silencing your phone and placing it out of reach, especially when someone is trying to emotionally connect or engage in an important conversation with you. That being said,

putting the phone down for *every* conversation is ideal for improving communication overall.

Furthermore, external technological distractions may occur when you are on a virtual platform (such as Zoom) for a meeting, college class, or even a virtual video call with a friend. You might experience technical issues with the audio or video components that disrupt the listening process, such as the microphone not working, losing internet connection, or even the video feature malfunctioning. This can be especially frustrating for both parties if, let's say, your mother is telling you something that is important to her and you don't hear everything because the audio cut out. Testing these components beforehand could alleviate the potential for distraction and avoid such frustrations. We know we can't control all of the technical difficulties that could arise; however, taking time to test for issues in advance is one way of being mindful and intentional in your listening practice. Likewise, working, reading, or typing in other applications or browser tabs, checking notifications from Facebook, or checking the email that just came in while you are on a video call would be considered, in part, external distractors. To avoid this, you might consider closing all the tabs you have open and either temporarily disable or plan to ignore notifications that come through while you're on a video call.

The physical environment can also be a source of disruption to listening. Classroom doors slamming, cell phones ringing, or students having conversations outside in the hall are some examples. When working from home, you can experience extensive environmental listening barriers from the mess around you that still needs cleaning, the temptation of grabbing a snack in the refrigerator, the dog barking, the baby crying, a strong odor, the pain in your back, cell phones chiming (there they are again), the glare of the light on your screen ... the list goes on and on. When all of these distractions are happening, it is easy for your ability to listen to be dramatically reduced. Consider planning ahead for these things to maximize your ability to listen fully. Play with the dog right before your virtual meeting to tire them out. Turn your cell phone to silent mode. Have a snack beforehand. You get the idea.

Given the numerous internal and external distractions that are likely to occur frequently in your everyday life, the question becomes "How can I minimize these distractions to become a better listener?" More often than not, the answer is mindfulness. A little planning, preparation, and practice can help you to prevent these types of listening barriers effectively.

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6.4: Ineffective Listening Practices

Habits and Pitfalls to Avoid

Not only do we have barriers to listening that we must pay attention to, but also we have all developed some habits in listening that we can change with hard work. Being aware or conscious of the habits we have is the first step to improving how we listen. At the minimum, we can lessen how much we fall into these habits, and with dedicated work, we may be able to eliminate them. These listening pitfalls include pseudo-listening, selective listening, defensive listening, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, insensitive listening, interrupting, and eavesdropping.

Pseudo-Listening

If you have ever listened to a professor, friend, or family member tell a story while nodding your head politely while your mind was a million miles away, then you have engaged in pseudo-listening. **Pseudo-listening** is pretending to listen (Adler et al., 2018). It includes behaving as if you are listening by providing nonverbal or even verbal feedback (back-channel cues) and showing you are paying attention when you are not. Most often pseudo-listening is a pitfall that can lead to negative consequences, but the reason for engaging in this practice is not typically done out of malice. Hearing a story repeated, complaints you have heard before or suffering from fatigue or preoccupation can all lead to this. Therefore, pseudo-listening is often used as a politeness strategy.

Imagine a scenario where you have shared something important with a friend and found out that they had not listened to you at all. Although they may have felt they were trying to be a good friend by showing you they were listening, it can cause more harm than good. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being “found out” there could be negative relational consequences. On the other hand, if you catch yourself pseudo-listening, a mindful practice involves admitting to the person speaking to you that you were not being fully attentive and kindly asking them to repeat themselves (while re-engaging your full attention on them).

Selective Listening

Do you have a favorite color? If so, when you look at clothing when shopping do you find yourself drawn to the color that you like most? If so, what you are exhibiting is a preference to stick to something that you already favor. Selective listening is an ineffective listening practice that operates in much the same way. **Selective listening** means only paying attention to the points someone makes that are important to you, that impact you, or that you agree with. Children may not pay attention to their parents’ conversation until one of them says “You need to have a B average if you want us to pay your car insurance.” Only then do you attend to what your parents are saying. Even friends, roommates, or romantic partners engage in selective listening. If you were sitting and scrolling through Instagram while someone was talking to you, you may not be paying a lot of attention to what is being said until you hear "It's your turn to do the laundry." You may have no interest in doing the laundry. You don't *want* to do the laundry! But, because the statement has a direct impact on you, you now listen to what is being said. Although this is a relatively benign example that doesn't have significant depth, selective listening can still lead to conflict as someone may feel that you don't find it important to listen to what they have to say.

Defensive Listening

Have you ever been told you were being defensive about something? I think we all know what that means in general, but we don’t often realize it is tied to our listening practices. **Defensive listening** is a practice of listening where you perceive an attack where one does not really exist. Sometimes this occurs when we feel guilty, or even insecure. We tend to personalize a comment that might be made innocently. For example, imagine that you have a roommate, and they make the following comment: “Gosh, the shower in here sure gets moldy easily.” If you are a defensive listener, you would assume that your roommate was somehow accusing you of not taking better care of the shower. If you both had a rule that said you would wipe the shower down each time you used it, but you had neglected to do so several times, then some guilt might be at work as well!

Student Voice

Recently, one of our students, Reynaldo, shared a great example of defensive listening. He wrote:

> I recently began a job at a local fast-food restaurant. One of my main tasks is making tacos and burritos. Lots of tacos and burritos! When I started, my manager and trainer explained how important it was to build these in a specific order. It seemed really easy, but I made a mistake on my first day because I confused the order of the taco and the burrito. I was told that I had made a mistake, and I was pretty upset by it. I wrote notes to myself to bring in and put on the wall where I was working. By the end of my second week, the manager called me into her office. As soon as she said my name, I felt myself start to shake and knew I was going to get in trouble, if not fired. Then she said, “Reynaldo, I just wanted to tell you how impressed I've been with your work these past two weeks. You've really got this down." I felt so stupid because I realized that I had already started listening defensively.

As with many ineffective forms of listening, we may not even realize we are engaged in defensive listening.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you think of an example where you engaged in defensive listening at work, at home, or with friends?
2. What did you feel when you were listening, and what triggered the defensiveness? How did you react?
3. Looking back, what might you have done instead of engaging in this ineffective listening practice?

Aggressive Listening

You might be familiar with the term **aggression**. Oftentimes people view this as a way that someone can use words or actions that are mean-spirited or violent, as you will see in later chapters. Although somewhat different, there is an ineffective listening practice that holds some similar characteristics to aggression. **Aggressive listening,** also referred to as ambushing, is an ineffective listening practice where individuals listen specifically so that they can attack back. It is likened to "lying in wait," so you can pounce. People who engage in aggressive listening are prone to attack someone based on their ideas, personality, or other factors that give them a reason to attack. One can see aggressive listening in politics during political debates. Reasons that this type of listening occurs in interpersonal relationships are often centered around a build-up of tension or frustration. Unfortunately, there are times when things come to a head if people don't communicate with each other.

The following scenario shows how egregious aggressive listening can be. Let's assume Crystal wanted to go away for a weekend, so she found Antonio's calendar and looked at what he had planned for the next few weekends. She was able to see that he had made plans for a getaway with someone else and had written in code.

> Crystal: "I was wondering if you were planning to book a reservation for a weekend getaway next weekend."
>
> Antonio: "Well babe, I really want to go away with you, but I am not sure what my workload will be."
>
> Crystal: "Really? Do you have a lot of work that you can't get done during the week?"
>
> Antonio: "It's still early in the week, so I'm not going to know until at least Thursday."
>
> Crystal: "Hmmm. Well, do you think that we could talk about this Thursday night?"
>
> Antonio: "Yeah, sure, we can talk Thursday about making a weekend trip, whether we can go over the weekend. If not this weekend, maybe another weekend."
>
> Crystal: "Antonio, that's a load of crap. You *already* have plans with someone else this weekend and you totally lied, you jerk. Who is 'FS'?! I'm done with you. You're a liar and a cheat."

As you can see, Crystal perceived that Antonio was cheating on her and that led to aggressive listening on her part. Her perception put her into a mode of attack. Little did Crystal know that Antonio was meeting with FS Catering Company to plan her surprise 21st birthday party. Instead, Crystal’s aggressive listening style potentially had detrimental effects on her relationship with Antonio. Do you think a more positive outcome could be achieved had she gotten more information? Asking clarifying questions before making assumptions would have been more productive, and both Crystal and Antonio might have felt better about the exchange

and the outcome.

Narcissistic Listening



Figure 6.4.1 Narcissistic Personality Disorder by Henry T. McLin on Flickr is licensed CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0

Some individuals struggle with listening to others because they prefer to be the center of attention. **Narcissistic listening** is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them (McCornack, 2019, p. 212). You might consider this type of listener a “stage-hog.” The narcissistic listener will do one of two things to take over the conversation and bring the focus back to them. They might interrupt and re-route the conversation back to themselves, or they might change the topic completely. Being the center of attention is important to them. They may look away from you as though they are bored, they may frown or pout, or they may ignore you or excuse themselves and leave the conversation. When engaging in a **shift response**—turning the conversation back to themselves—it might seem that they are trying to outdo you or "one-up" you.

Perhaps the following type of conversation sounds familiar:

> Constance: "I was really proud of myself! I wanted to paint my dresser because it was so old, so I bought this stuff called 'chalk paint' and I painted my dresser blue this past weekend. It was challenging, but I did it! It came out really well and..."
>
> Brenda (interrupts): "Oh, I've done loads of chalk painting. I actually painted every piece of furniture in my room, and even painted some pieces for my mom. It was so easy."

At times, this type of response is not done maliciously. A conversation may genuinely remind you of something you have done that is similar. A more appropriate response would be to wait until the speaker has finished. Using back-channel cues, you can easily acknowledge the person speaking. When they have finished making their point, acknowledge what you heard and then you might add your contribution to the conversation.

Habitual narcissistic listeners can be identified by continued comments when you are speaking. They may say, “Oh, that reminds me of the time that,” or “I went through the exact same thing,” or “Wait until you hear this one!” An occasional interruption of this type does not mean someone is a narcissistic listener. It is when there are repeated offenses that you see the pattern of this type of listener.

Sometimes you might notice the narcissistic listener changes the topic completely:

> Hunter: "Hey, did you see the game Friday night? We scored two touchdowns in the first ten minutes of the game!"
>
> Jacques: "Dude, I now have over 5,000 followers on Tik Tok! I’ve been changing up my workout routine and now I’m getting at least 50 new followers a day!"

At times like this, it would feel appropriate to address the listener's shift response, so that you can continue the conversation or topic you tried to initiate. However, be mindful that too much work on your part to understand the narcissistic listener puts an extra burden on you. If the listener is a true narcissist, you might consider having a conversation with them about their listening habits and how it affects you. If your attempt is unsuccessful, then you might suggest they seek professional help to learn best practices in communication.

Insensitive Listening

If you recall the definition of **empathic listening**, you will find that insensitive listening is the opposite. Often referred to as "literal listening," **insensitive listening** focuses only on the content level of meaning. Insensitive listeners do not explore the nonverbal cues that accompany the message. Imagine if your friend did not pass an exam, and then tells you. Rather than asking questions, or providing an empathetic response, your response is "I guess you didn't study" or "Yeah, school can be hard." Neither response will allow your friend to feel positive about the exchange. One's tone of voice alone can let you know how someone is feeling or we can also look into someone's eyes to discern sadness or other emotions because insensitive listening can be hurtful.

One of our students shared this story in class: "When I told my mother that I forgot to do my quizzes last week, she just glared at me without saying a word. She didn't have to say anything because this is how she typically responds to me. I'm a Japanese American student, and our culture is a high-context culture. Most of what I understand about my mom's feelings is through her nonverbal communication."

Focus on Culture

Does your culture impact the type of listening practices you engage in? There is a wealth of research in the area of culture that demonstrates that our communication patterns are learned. Let's look at how culture can influence messages.

Culture can often impact whether you pay attention to the relational, or underlying meaning of a message or just the words of a message. Low-context cultures emphasize explicit meaning (Hall & Hall, 2001). For example, US culture places great emphasis on words, or literal meaning. We are taught from an early age to "Say what you mean," or "Use your words." This can contribute to misunderstanding or not seeing the nonverbal cues that give greater meaning to a message. On the other hand, high-context cultures rely on information that is implicit and nonverbal (Hall & Hall, 2001). Individuals from high-context cultures rely on the context, tone, or other nonverbal behaviors to understand a message, which can then affect the interaction. It is important to note that if you were born in the United States, but your family of origin is from a high-context culture, your method of communication will be largely influenced by your family's culture.

One of our authors, Professor Leonard, comes from a high-context culture where indicators of listening meant that when she was young she only nodded as a response to her parents, rather than commenting back. She also did not make direct eye contact when listening because at times that could appear to be disrespectful to her parents. This example is probably the opposite of your professor's expectations of you in a classroom. When you listen in class, your professor might expect you to look them in the eye and participate verbally as a sign of respect. These two scenarios involve very different interpretations of nonverbal communication based on the context of the culture in each situation. These examples demonstrate how culture plays an important role in listening. Great communicators learn to adapt their communication behaviors according to cultural context of the setting and who they are communicating with.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you come from a high-context or low-context culture?
2. How does your family communicate meaning? Is it through direct communication (words), or more through the nonverbal channel (such as eye contact, or silence?).
3. How might you adapt your listening now that you know more about the importance of culture?

Interrupting

Most of us understand what an interruption is, even when we have not defined the term. Simply, **interrupting** is the unintentional or intentional act of delaying or preventing communication. One of the first communication rules that we remember teaching our children was not to interrupt. It was so important to us to instill proper manners in them, that we developed a code for when they wanted to tell us something if we were talking to other people, either on the phone or in person. We told our children to approach

us and put their hand on our arm, or leg, depending on how tall they were at the time. In response, we would take one of our hands and cover their hand. This served as a nonverbal acknowledgment that we were aware that they had something to say. They both learned to wait until there was a break in the conversation, then we would turn to them and ask, “What did you want to tell me?” Sometimes our hands remained in the same place for several long minutes! As you learned in Chapter 5, the regulating function of nonverbal communication means that conversations are based on turn-taking. Whether the turn-taking cues are overt or not, we know when it is our turn to speak.

We try not to interrupt while others are speaking, but sometimes we do unintentionally interrupt. We may have accidentally misinterpreted the turn-taking cue and thought someone was done speaking. In a case like this, it is not a pitfall of listening. There are other times when people are talking excitedly about something and their words or sentences overlap. Back-channel cues can sound like an interruption even if they are just designed to show support.

Occasionally, interruptions are intentional and appropriate. This happened to one of the authors once when a nursing student was giving them a shot, and she was interrupted by her supervisor to tell her that she was inserting the needle at the incorrect angle! Although we am sure that the result would have been no more than an uncomfortable shot, not all situations are the same. These are the times when intentional interrupting is appropriate. Other interruptions are intentional and *inappropriate* when they are used to control or dominate the conversation.

Consider assessing your own patterns of interrupting. Are you afraid you are going to forget what you want to say? If this is a reason for interrupting, the appropriate course of action is to tell the person you are speaking to that you are sorry to interrupt, and that you just want to get your thoughts out before you forget them. After, you should immediately give the platform back to the other person.

Eavesdropping



Figure 6.4.2 Eavesdropping By A. Strakey on Flickr is licensed CC-BY-ND 2.0

You have probably seen at least one television show or comedy where someone is standing with a glass held up to a wall in an attempt to listen to a conversation in the next room. As humorous as these kinds of depictions might be, there can be serious consequences of this ineffective listening practice. **Eavesdropping** is an ineffective listening practice that involves a strategic attempt to listen to a conversation that you are not a part of. The important distinction between eavesdropping and accidentally overhearing a conversation is the strategy, or plan, to listen to a conversation you are not meant to overhear. If you have ever been out at a restaurant, shopping, or even walking on campus next to someone who is on their cell phone having a conversation, you may have experienced the discomfort or embarrassment of listening to someone arguing with another person. This type of listening situation is circumstantial and not planned.

Eavesdropping, however, means that a person positions themselves physically or technologically closer to a conversation in the hope of listening to what others are saying. There may be a variety of reasons that people eavesdrop, and some of those reasons are altruistic. If you heard someone say “bomb” you might position yourself closer to eavesdrop. However, to simply engage in eavesdropping because you find a conversation interesting or titillating would be violating the privacy of others. When caught, not

only would you be embarrassed, but also others could easily be angry with you.

One of our authors shares this example:

> I remember a time when a friend told me that she was worried about some of the things her daughter might be doing, so she would routinely position herself outside her daughter's bedroom to try and listen to her conversations. On more than one occasion the parent listened at the door while her daughter was in a therapy session with her psychologist.

Although a parent may have cause to be concerned about their child, listening at the door could easily lead to a violation of trust and this could harm the relationship greatly. Finally, eavesdropping could lead to you hearing something that is said about you. Although we don't condone people talking behind others' backs, there may be reasons to do so before that information is presented to someone.

If you, or someone in your life, has engaged in an ineffective listening practice, it can be beneficial to learn how journaling can help you process the emotions that arise from these practices.

Journal Exercise: Try This!

Spend the next week journaling as much of the communication as you can between you and the individuals you live with. If you live alone, you can try this with co-workers or friends.

1. Describe the communication interactions that took place and whether you believe they exemplified an ineffective listening practice.
2. Interpret what you believe the communicator wanted to convey as you were listening.
3. Evaluate how the interaction made you feel.
4. Assess what you learned from your evaluation.

The reason that journaling is so important is because it can help us reflect on not only our listening behaviors, but that of others as well. You can use this journal prompt for any of the ineffective listening practices described in this textbook.

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6.5: Becoming a Mindful Listener



Figure 7.8.1: Listening together. Generated by Google Gemini.

Mindful Listening

Before their Communication Studies midterm, four friends—Olivia, Matthew, Jake, and Stephanie—were talking before class. Matthew joked that he should audition for the next season of *Love Island*. Stephanie admitted that after learning so much about interpersonal relationships, she was starting to doubt the guy she had been talking to. Jake shared something more serious: he wasn't sure he wanted to stay in his major anymore.

As Olivia listened, she realized each friend needed something different from her. Matthew wanted playful attention. Stephanie needed relational support. Jake needed space to explore his uncertainty. In that moment, Olivia recognized that effective listening isn't one-size-fits-all—it requires adapting to the needs of the situation. What she was practicing, without fully naming it, was **mindful listening**.

Listening is one of the most important and most undervalued skills in interpersonal communication. People love to be heard, but they are often far less enthusiastic about listening. Traditional "active listening" focuses on what listeners do in the moment: paying attention, retaining information, and responding appropriately. Mindful listening takes a step back and asks listeners to first understand what the listening situation requires.

Mindful listening is the practice of being aware of the purpose, context, and relational needs of a listening interaction and adapting your listening behaviors accordingly. Different situations call for different approaches: listening to a friend vent, listening to a lecture, listening to instructions, and listening to a partner express hurt all require different types of attention, emotional presence, cognitive effort, and response.

Mindful listening begins with three questions:

- What is the purpose of this listening moment?
- What does the speaker need from me?
- What type of listening will best support this interaction?

To help students remember the process, we use the acronym **A.N.C.O.R.**: **Awareness, Nonverbal Support, Clarify the Goal, Orient Attention, and Respond.** These steps anchor mindful listening in intentional, adaptive communication.

ANCOR

A – Awareness

The first step in mindful listening is developing awareness of the listening situation. This includes checking in with yourself: Are you ready to listen? Are you distracted, tired, or preoccupied? Can you set aside time to listen, or do you have a major deadline approaching? Awareness starts with recognizing the need to listen and preparing yourself physically and mentally to do so. It also involves the willingness to suspend judgment of the speaker and topic, and to listen with an open heart. When listeners begin from a place of awareness, they create the conditions for psychological safety and genuine connection.

Example: When Stephanie shared that she was having doubts about the guy she had been talking to, Olivia recognized that this wasn't a moment for multitasking or humor. She closed her laptop, turned toward Stephanie, and gently asked, *"Why? What's going on?"* This simple question signaled that Olivia was present, ready to listen, and aware that Stephanie needed relational support.

N – Nonverbal Support

Nonverbal communication plays a central role in mindful listening. As Ting-Toomey (2015) notes, mindful listening requires using our "ears, eyes, and heart" to understand the speaker's needs. Facial expressions, tone of voice, and posture provide clues about what the speaker is feeling and what they may need from us.

Nonverbal attending behaviors also communicate that we are listening. Eye contact, open posture, and appropriate facial expressions show interest and care. Minimal encouragers—such as head nods, soft "uh-huhs," "go on," or smiling at a joke—provide micro-feedback that keeps the speaker engaged.

Example: As Stephanie continued sharing her concerns, Olivia leaned in slightly, nodded, and maintained soft eye contact. These nonverbal cues signaled empathy and encouraged Stephanie to continue.

Exercise: Try this!

Listening With Your Whole Body

Grab a piece of paper and a pen and make two lists. For your first list, think of a person you consider an excellent listener. Picture that person clearly in your mind. Focus on what they do, not what they are saying. Describe what actions and postures they use to show they are listening. What are they doing with their eyes, hands, and body?

For your second list, think of a person you consider a poor listener. Picture that person clearly in your mind. Focus on what they do, not what they are saying. Describe what actions and postures they use to show they are *not* listening.

Now compare these lists with your behavior. How many of the body language signals from each side do you think you exhibit? How can you add more of the attitudes and actions in the first list to your behaviors? How can you control those behaviors you recognize in yourself from the second list?

C – Clarify the Goal

Listening serves different functions, such as comprehension, appreciation, and relational support. Clarifying the goal means identifying what the speaker needs in the moment. Mindful listeners shift their behaviors to match the situation. A friend expressing hurt may need empathy and paraphrasing. A professor explaining a concept may need you to take notes and ask clarifying questions. Clarifying the goal prevents misunderstandings and ensures that listeners respond to the *actual* need rather than relying on assumptions or habitual listening patterns.

Example: When Jake said, "I'm not sure I want to stay in my major anymore," Olivia recognized that he wasn't asking for quick advice—he was disclosing something personal and uncertain. She clarified the goal by asking, "Do you want to talk through what's making you unsure, or are you just needing to get this off your chest?" This helped Jake identify what kind of support he needed.

O – Orient Attention

Once the listening goal is clear, listeners orient their attention to match the situation. This means removing distractions such as putting away your phone, turning off the TV, and setting aside what you are doing in the moment. Orienting attention is an intentional shift from general awareness to focused engagement. It signals to the speaker that they are a priority and that their message matters.

Example: After Jake indicated he wanted to talk it through, Olivia shifted her attention from the group conversation to him. She put away her phone, turned her body toward him, and focused on his explanation of what felt confusing or overwhelming about his major.

R – Respond

Mindful listening does not end when the speaker stops talking. Richard Carlson, author of *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, explains that many people treat conversations like a horse race—they "race ahead," predicting what the speaker will say, finishing their sentences, or preparing their own response before the speaker is done. This creates disconnection and misunderstanding. Mindful responding requires slowing down, staying present, and choosing a response that fits the speaker's need. Appropriate listening responses include questioning, empathizing, paraphrasing, analyzing, or offering support.

Example: After Jake explained his uncertainty, Olivia paraphrased: "It sounds like you're feeling torn—you like parts of your major, but you're worried it might not fit who you're becoming. Is that right?" This response helped Jake feel understood and opened the door for deeper reflection.

In the next section, we will review different listening responses and how to select the best one based on the needs of the listening situation.

Reflections on Research

Does your listening style shape the outcome of your conflict?

In *The Effects of Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Listening Responses on Relational Outcomes*, researchers examined how different listening styles influence emotions and conflict resolution. Using a mixed-methods design with 975 university students from **California, Texas, and New York**, participants imagined confronting a classmate and then rated how they would feel if the classmate responded with passive, aggressive, or assertive listening statements. The findings showed that **assertive listening**—responses that acknowledge the other person's feelings and take responsibility, such as "My thought is you're feeling angry with me, and you want me to listen to you"—produced the best relational outcomes, including lower anger, greater openness, and higher satisfaction. In contrast, passive responses ("Don't worry, everything will be okay") and aggressive responses ("You need to stop being so angry") made participants feel ignored, dismissed, or attacked. Qualitative comments revealed that assertive listening felt validating and accountable, while passive and aggressive listening felt distancing or hostile. Overall, the study demonstrates how small shifts in wording can dramatically change the emotional climate of a conflict and increase the likelihood of resolution.

Discussion Questions

1. When someone is upset with you, which listening style do you tend to fall into—passive, aggressive, or assertive—and how does that shape the direction of the conflict?
2. Think about a recent disagreement you had. What kind of listening response from the other person would have helped you feel more understood or respected?
3. Assertive listening reduces anger and increases openness. What specific phrases or approaches could you practice to become a more assertive listener in your relationships?

Winer, S., Salazar, L. R., Glowacki, Z. R., Howe, W. T., Quirarte, B., Anderson, A. M., & Macpherson, I. D. (2025). Resolving Conflict in Interpersonal Relationships using Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Listening Statements. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, *18*(3).

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6.6: Communicating the Self

Presentation of Self: Communication and Identity Management

So far, we have explained how communication plays a part in how the self develops. But how do we use communication to influence how others view us? In his classic text, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman describes a new way of thinking about how we attempt to form the self and simultaneously influence others' perspectives of that self we perform. This process is often called **identity management**, and it draws upon a dramaturgical approach. A **dramaturgical approach** is one where we see life as a drama or stage play unfolding. Everyday life is not just an experience we individually perceive and make sense of; rather, we collaborate with one another to act out a series of events as if we were characters in a story. As Shakespeare declared: "All the world's a stage," and it is this notion that helps Goffman frame the concept of identity management.

The idea of "single secret behavior," from an episode of the cable television show *Sex and the City,* demonstrates how we may think about self-presentation in a social setting. The made-up term was used in the show to describe behavior that's private, what we do when nobody is around, or what we would not do in front of other people. The character, Carrie, cited her compulsion to stack saltine crackers with jelly while her friend Charlotte reported her tendency to stare at a magnifying mirror and examine her pores. Clearly, it's not necessary to be single to have private or secret behaviors, indeed, we all have private selves at each stage of our lives. But as Goffman explains, our public selves and private selves must be managed as we navigate interpersonal relationships.

In social situations, we rely upon a "script" that tells us what is expected in that situation. For example, we know what behavior is expected at a funeral, on a first date, or inside a classroom. Goffman (1959) explains we have both a perceived self and a presenting self. The term **perceived self** describes the person you believe yourself to be. When you reflect upon who you are, whether that reflection is indeed objectively true or not, you conceive of your perceived self. This self is not typically shared with others, and it contains some of your most private and intimate perceptions. If you have ever kept a journal, you may be able to observe how you see yourself. It is interesting to reread old journal entries since often you can detect changes in your view of yourself over periods of time.



Figure 6.6.1: "Day 165: 2 Self Portraits" by Sodanie Chea is licensed CC-BY 2.0

On the other hand, the **presenting self** is that public self we perform for others. It is our representation of the self we want to project to others, a self that typically conforms to approved social norms. When you go into a job interview, for example, you cultivate a public image—a presenting self. Rarely do you show up in your slippers, without a shower, and use profanity.

The perceived self and the presenting self may help us to understand Goffman's concepts of **front stage** vs. **back stage.** When we think of a stage play, we see that there are at least two different locations for actors: out in front of the audience and back

behind the stage sets. Impression management occurs out in front of the "audience." When we are in front of others whose impressions of us are important, we may feel a greater pressure to manage our behaviors. This is what we might call being front stage. However, according to Goffman (1959), the back stage is "where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude" (ibid., p. 113). Thus, we are in the backstage area when we are away from others and don't have to consider their judgments.

One of our authors provides an example:

> I can remember being in graduate school years ago and having my first teaching experience. After I taught class one day, I went to the gym. As I was changing into my gym clothes in the women's locker room, I turned to see one of my students, who coincidentally I had been speaking with about an assignment that very day. As our eyes met, it was clear we were both embarrassed. Why? Not only was our relationship at that time forged frontstage, and removing one's clothes is a *backstage activity*, but also our relationship of student–instructor signified a difference in power (since in my role I was responsible to assign grades). While we ignored one another and pretended in class that the locker-room event never happened, I learned a great deal about social roles and the differences between frontstage and backstage. Have you ever had an experience in which these two clashed?

More often than not, within interpersonal interactions, we constantly construct **face**, which refers to the positive impression we would like to make upon others. If we fail to maintain face—for example, if we make an embarrassing remark or act out in some way—it may cause others to have a bad impression of us. Social anxiety derives from the fear of such an event. After all, we are just humans who want to feel good about ourselves. However, to maintain face or repair some damage done to lost face we engage in what Goffman calls facework. **Facework** describes the communicative behavior that we use, both verbal and nonverbal, to enact and maintain our own presenting image or that of another. It is any work that one does in order to construct, or save face (Goffman, 1967). Although most of the time we are not aware we are doing facework, since it is such a familiar activity, we constantly coordinate our identities with others to legitimize our version of self.

Insight into our desire to shape others' views of who we are (even when this desire is unconscious) is helpful when we consider that social interactions are the basis of successful interpersonal relationships. If others do not accept our social performances, we are unable to coordinate with others to achieve our goals—even if those goals involve simply being liked. Perhaps more interesting is that Goffman theorized that the process of impression management is actually a way we form and reform selfhood. By interacting with others, we *realize* the roles we play for others—that is, we become those roles. When you go to your workplace and perform your job, you recognize yourself as the working role you play in that social situation. Thus, from Goffman's perspective, your selfhood is born in and through performances with/for others.

Thoughts on Theory: Identity and Face Negotiation Theory

Have You Ever "Saved Face?"

Being in control of how we are perceived and feeling respected for our identities is crucial to our self-esteem and confidence. So what happens when that self-assurance is threatened? For instance, what do we do when we are embarrassed? Or how would you behave after you are caught in a lie? Typically we try to "save face," in other words, as we learned earlier, we perform facework. We communicate in a way that either explains the behavior or compensates for the behavior. According to **conflict face-negotiation theory** (Ting-Toomey, 2004), a perspective that overlaps in many ways with identity management, we are actually doing things every day to save face and attempting to manage how we, and others, are being perceived. The act of saving face, or doing facework, might sound simple since essentially we are just trying to uphold our pride and ego—but it often happens unconsciously, meaning we aren't even fully aware we are doing it because it is so automatic and habitual.

However, depending on our identity and background, saving face can actually get quite complicated: we may feel pressure to not only save our own face, but also to represent ourselves in a way that promotes a positive image for our entire culture or community. There might be certain behaviors that are expected of you based on your identity within a culture, and as part of facework, you may have to struggle to uphold those standards. Furthermore, if we consider our **intersectionality** (our multiple overlapping identities) as we discussed earlier, we have to juggle a lot of potentially competing identities or stereotypes associated with those identities, all at once!

For example, imagine someone who identifies as a woman and as Asian American. If she is on a women's soccer team where she does not have many Asian American teammates, she might feel more protective of her cultural identity since she is part of a minority within this context. She would most likely perform facework to promote a positive image of Asian Americans. Conversely, if she is on a soccer team that is co-ed (mixed gendered), but made up of mostly Asian American players, she might perform facework to promote a positive self-image of women.

As you can see, the precise identities that we prioritize often depend upon the context within which we find ourselves. Our choices are often fluid, unconscious, and quite subjective (after all, there is no right or wrong way to save face), which only complicates how we perform facework.

Reflection

- Can you think of a time when you behaved in a certain way to "save face?"
- What parts of your identity were most prominent or salient at that time, and which were less significant or more muted at that time? Why?

Presentation of Self: Communication in the Virtual World

We have already learned how impactful social comparison can be when we hold ourselves up to others in our lives. Today, we are finding that social comparison is even more magnified in the virtual world. There is a fine line between social media and social networking sites. Social media broadcasts, or relays content without a necessary interactive component, like YouTube. Social networking sites (SNS) can be interactive so that users have the option to communicate directly with others, like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Snapchat, to name a few. With the increase in popularity across the globe, there is a greater tendency to engage in social comparison as more personal information is disclosed on these sites. The use of social media and social networking connects to our sense of self as we engage in social comparison through these sites. **Social comparison** relies on having information about others readily available. All you have to do is open any of these apps to look at others' posts. Recent research suggests that the use of social media and social networking leads to a greater degree of social comparison and depression (Nguyen, et al., 2020). Why do you thank that is?



Figure 6.6.2: Social Media Addiction by Today Testing is licensed CC-BY-SA 4.0

Most of what we see online is **idealistic,** given that most people tend to post positive things about themselves, such as successes or attractive photos. The "norms," or "standards" for attractiveness, success, intelligence, etc., become the basis for social comparison. It is not surprising that people who spend more time on these sites are more likely to agree that others have "better lives" and are "happier" than themselves. Individuals' self-perceptions and self-evaluations tend to suffer after being exposed to profiles of attractive others on social media and social networking sites.

The way in which we engage online also impacts our self-esteem. Some people are **passive users** and simply read what others post, whereas others are **active users** in that they post and interact with others. Individuals who are active users find their worth primarily from feedback given to them by others, and this includes the number of "likes" and/or comments they receive. Upward social comparison, (thinking that others are superior to you), is associated with decreased life satisfaction and other negative

feelings like envy and jealousy among SNS users. By disabling the “Like” feature, one might be able to avoid some of these negative feelings. However, like many addictions, it is difficult for us to consider disabling this feature, since each time we see that our post is liked, our brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is responsible, in part, for our moods. Why would we want to give up the high that we get while actively using social networking sites?

According to Nguyen, et al., as cited in Casale and Banshi (2020), “Social media addiction (or problematic social media use) classified into DSM V is a proposed form of psychological or behavioral dependence on social media platforms” (p. 257). Meanwhile, mental disorders (or mental illnesses) are conditions that affect your thinking, feeling, mood, and behavior (Medlineplus, 2020). It is hard for physicians to diagnose the disease if the addict does not report their problem. Young people and students are considered to be most vulnerable to problematic internet use (Kuss et al., 2013; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016; Loannidis et al., 2018). A study in India showed that the rate of social media addiction was 36.9% among 1,389 social media users who were pre-university college students (Ramesh et al., 2018). Furthermore, the problem of social media use in children and young people is often associated with symptoms of mental disorder, for example, anxiety and depression (Hoge et al., 2017). In the United States, approximately 25% of college students surveyed showed signs of depression when using Facebook (Moreno et al., 2011). A 2013 survey from the American Psychological Association found that psychological problems were increasing among college students, such as anxiety (41.6%), depression (36.4%), and relationship problems (35.8%) (American Psychological Association, 2013).

We can also see how social media platforms and networking can lead to positive outcomes. Individuals who would normally not interact with others due to social anxiety find their voice through social media. They will be more interactive and communicate with others positively because they feel safer. In addition, social media can be used to promote a cause or event that is for the betterment of society.

In short, findings on social media use suggest that first, symptoms of depression and anxiety are associated with excessive social media use. Second, people who have a passive lifestyle are at a higher risk of depression. Third, excessive social media usage time (over three hours a day), is a significant risk to users' anxiety and depression. Finally, social comparison habits are likely to cause depression and psychological disorders because users often feel lost when others share positive experiences. Do you or people you know use social media? Most likely, the answer is “yes.” Given the research discussed in the sidebar that follows, it is worth your time to consider how social media may play a role in your self-concept and/or self-esteem. I am not advocating you simply cease using electronic platforms; rather, I urge you to be mindful of the ways you use them, and how they impact your interpersonal relationships.

Explore: Social Media Use and Politics

A recent article by writer Brooke Auxier posits that “From global protests against racial injustice to the 2020 election, some Americans who use social media are taking to these platforms to mobilize others and show their support for causes or issues. But experiences and attitudes related to political activities on social media vary by race and ethnicity, age, and party, according to a Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted June 16-22, 2020 (Auxier, 2020). Auxier further notes that individuals use social media to post pictures in support of a cause, look up information about events like rallies or protests nearby, or encourage others to take action. The data reveal significant differences between the use of social media based on race, age, and political affiliation. For example, the Pew Research Center found that “Black users stand out: 48% of Black social media users say they have posted a picture on social media to show their support for a cause in the past month, compared with 37% of Hispanic users and 33% of white users. Black adults who use social media (45%) are also more likely than their Hispanic (33%) or white (30%) counterparts to say that in the past month they’ve taken to social media to encourage others to take action on issues that are important to them” (Auxier, 2020).

Reflection

- Would you agree with these results based on your own experience with social media?

Try this: Read the rest of the Pew Research Center report on differences in age and political affiliation. Would you agree with the data that are presented? How does this make you feel about your race, age, and political views? Is this one aspect of yourself that you are particularly pleased with, or one that you might hope to change?

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6.7: Theories and Measurement of Self-Disclosure

Learning Objectives

- Compare and contrast the reasons we self-disclose according to the two major theories: social penetration theory and social comparison
- How do we measure self-disclosure?

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

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

Theories of Self-Disclosure

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



Figure 6.7.1 Social penetration theory compares the process of self-disclosure to peeling back the layers of an onion. Helena Jacoba – Red Onion close up(opens in new window) – CC BY 2.0.

The theory also argues that people in a relationship balance needs that are sometimes in tension, which is a dialectic. Balancing a dialectic is like walking a tightrope. You have to lean to one side and eventually lean to another side to keep yourself balanced and prevent falling. The constant back and forth allows you to stay balanced, even though you may not always be even, or standing straight up. One of the key dialectics that must be negotiated is the tension between openness and closedness (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). We want to make ourselves open to others, through self-disclosure, but we also want to maintain a sense of privacy.

We may also engage in self-disclosure for the purposes of social comparison. Social comparison theory states that we evaluate ourselves based on how we compare with others (Hargie, 2011). We may disclose information about our intellectual aptitude or athletic abilities to see how we relate to others. This type of comparison helps us decide whether we are superior or inferior to others in a particular area. Disclosures about abilities or talents can also lead to self-validation if the person to whom we disclose reacts positively. By disclosing information about our beliefs and values, we can determine if they are the same as or different from others. Last, we may disclose fantasies or thoughts to another to determine whether they are acceptable or unacceptable. We can engage in social comparison as the discloser or the receiver of disclosures, which may allow us to determine whether or not we are interested in pursuing a relationship with another person.

"Getting Plugged In": Self-Disclosure and Social Media

Facebook and Twitter are undoubtedly dominating the world of online social networking, and the willingness of many users to self-disclose personal information ranging from moods to religious affiliation, relationship status, and personal contact information has led to an increase in privacy concerns. Facebook and Twitter offer convenient opportunities to stay in touch with friends, family, and coworkers, but are people using them responsibly? Some argue that there are fundamental differences between today's digital natives, whose private and public selves are intertwined through these technologies, and older generations (Kornblum, 2007). Even though some colleges are offering seminars on managing privacy online, we still hear stories of self-disclosure gone wrong, such as the football player from the University of Texas who was kicked off the team for posting racist comments about the president or the student who was kicked out of his private, Christian college after a picture of him dressed in drag surfaced on Facebook. However, social media experts say these cases are rare and that most students are aware of who can see what they're posting and the potential consequences (Nealy, 2009). The issue of privacy management on Facebook is affecting parent-child relationships, too, and as the website "Oh Crap. My Parents Joined Facebook." shows, the results can sometimes be embarrassing for the college student and the parent as they balance the dialectic between openness and closedness once the child has moved away.

1. How do you manage your privacy and self-disclosures online?
2. Do you think it's ethical for school officials or potential employers to make admission or hiring decisions based on what they can learn about you online? Why or why not?
3. Are you or would you be friends with a parent on Facebook? Why or why not? If you already are friends with a parent, did you change your posting habits or privacy settings once they joined? Why or why not?

Measuring Disclosure

We measure disclosure in two dimensions: depth and breadth.

The **depth** of disclosure refers to *the level of intimacy or the personal nature of the disclosure*. Disclosure can range from very superficial (our name) to very intimate and personal (secrets we hold close). Generally, for us to share intimate details of our lives, we need a close, trusting relationship with the other person.

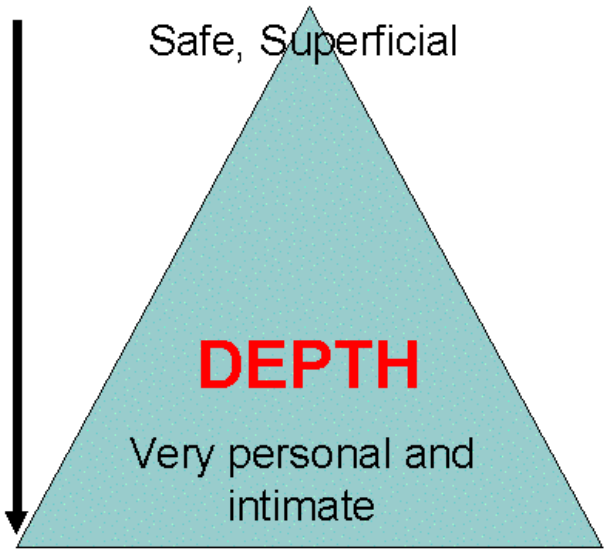


Figure 6.7.2 Depth of disclosure triangle

The **breadth** of disclosure refers to *the number of topics addressed*. We have friends for different reasons: some are for spending time with, some are for dealing with serious personal problems, and some are for just about anything. There are different topics we consider appropriate depending on the relationship. Some relationships are marked by a very broad breadth of disclosure, where just about any topic is okay. Other relationships are marked by their narrow breadth, in which only a few topics are considered appropriate.

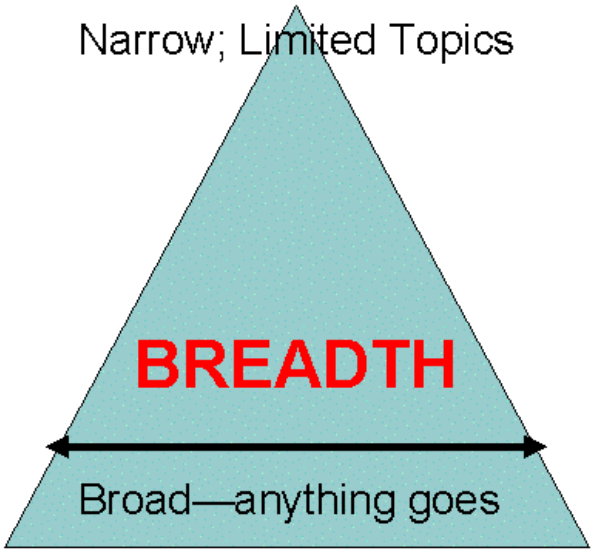


Figure 6.7.3 Breadth of disclosure triangle

Effects of Disclosure on the Relationship

The process of self-disclosure is circular. An individual self-discloses, the recipient of the disclosure reacts, and the original discloser processes the reaction. How the receiver interprets and responds to the disclosure are key elements of the process. Part of the response results from the receiver's attribution of the cause of the disclosure, which may include dispositional, situational, and interpersonal attributions (Jiang, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2011). Let's say your coworker discloses that she thinks the new boss got his promotion because of favoritism instead of merit. You may make a dispositional attribution that connects the cause of her disclosure to her personality by thinking, for example, that she is outgoing, inappropriate for the workplace, or fishing for information. If the personality trait to which you attribute the disclosure is positive, then your reaction to the disclosure is more likely to be positive. Situational attributions identify the cause of a disclosure with the context or surroundings in which

it takes place. For example, you may attribute your coworker's disclosure to the fact that you agreed to go to lunch with her. Interpersonal attributions identify the relationship between sender and receiver as the cause of the disclosure. So if you attribute your coworker's comments to the fact that you are best friends at work, you think your unique relationship caused the disclosure. If the receiver's primary attribution is interpersonal, relational intimacy and closeness will likely be reinforced more than if the attribution is dispositional or situational, because the receiver feels like they were specially chosen to receive the information.

The receiver's role doesn't end with attribution and response. There may be added burdens if the information shared with you is a secret. As was noted earlier, there are clear risks involved in self-disclosure of intimate or potentially stigmatizing information if the receiver of the disclosure fails to keep that information secure. As the receiver of a secret, you may feel the need to unburden yourself from the co-ownership of the information by sharing it with someone else (Derlega, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). This is not always a bad thing. You may strategically tell someone who is removed from the social network of the person who told you the secret to keep the information secure. Although unburdening yourself can be a relief, sometimes people tell secrets they were entrusted to keep for less productive reasons. A research study of office workers found that 77 percent of workers that received a disclosure and were told not to tell anyone else told at least two other people by the end of the day (Hargie, 2011)! They reported doing so to receive attention for having inside information or to demonstrate their power or connection. Needless to say, spreading someone's private disclosure without permission for personal gain does not demonstrate communication competence.

When the cycle of disclosure ends up going well for the discloser, there is likely to be a greater sense of relational intimacy and self-worth, and there are also positive psychological effects such as reduced stress and increased feelings of social support. Self-disclosure can also have effects on physical health. Spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not disclose information to their friends were more likely to have more health problems such as weight change and headaches and suffer from more intrusive thoughts about the death than those who did talk with friends (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006).

Exercises

1. Answer the questions from the beginning of the section: Have you ever said too much on a first date? At a job interview? To a professor? Have you ever posted something on Facebook only to return later to remove it? If you answered yes to any of the questions, what have you learned in this chapter that may have led you to do something differently?
2. Have you experienced negative results due to self-disclosure (as sender or receiver)? If so, what could have been altered in the decisions of what, where, when, or how to disclose that may have improved the situation?
3. Under what circumstances is it OK to share information that someone has disclosed to you? Under what circumstances is to not OK to share the information?

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6.8: Self-Disclosure in Romantic Relationhips and the Johari Window

Initiating and Forming Romantic Relationships



Figure 6.8.1 GenderSpectrum-Day1-0344 by Zackary Ducker licensed CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

Think about the last time that you were messaging someone on a dating site like Tinder, OkCupid, Bumble, or Grindr, or perhaps the last time you were talking with a new person you met in a class, or even at an event, or maybe work? When we engage with other people and share information about ourselves, we are self-disclosing. **Self-disclosure** is the process of voluntarily revealing information about yourself to another person, not already known by them.

Getting Plugged In

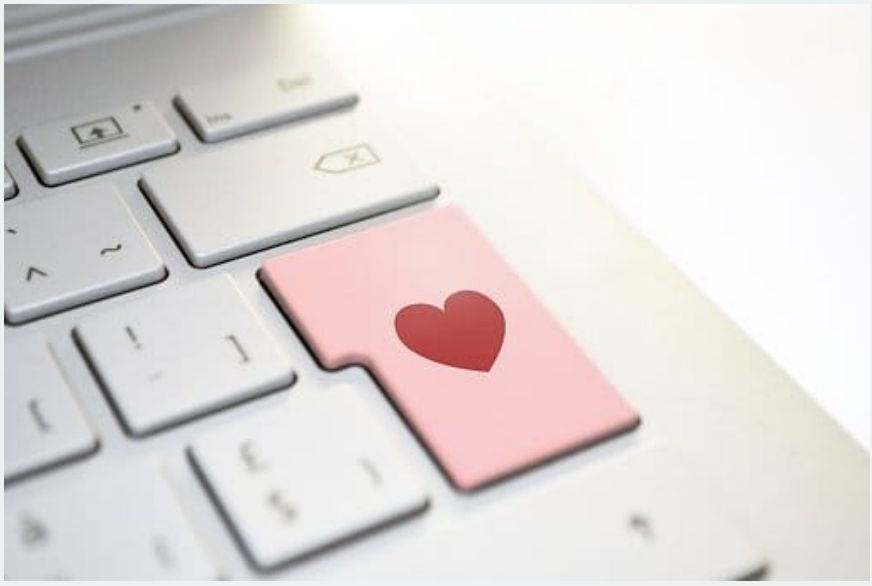


Figure 6.8.2 Heart Love Keyboard Enter Button by Athree23 on Pixabay

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

Social platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter, are undoubtedly prevalent in the world of online social networking. Many users self-disclose personal information on these sites, ranging from moods to religious affiliation, relationship status, style, food, travel, and personal contact information. Social platforms offer convenient opportunities to stay in touch with friends, family, classmates, and coworkers. We also have apps designed for dating, and meeting potential romantic or sexual partners. Dating services and apps like Grindr, Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, Scruff, Christian Mingle, Black People Meet, Plenty of Fish, Match, EHarmony, OkCupid, and more were created to bring people together.

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

Reflection Questions

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

Johari Window

The Johari window can help us examine self-disclosure in relationships. Displayed in Figure \(\PageIndex{3\), the Johari window examines what information we have about ourselves, as well as the information others know about us (an accessible text description is linked in the figure caption). Based on the combination of our self-knowledge and others' knowledge about us, there are four types of selves: Open Self, Closed Self, Blind Self, and Unknown Self. Let's examine each of these.

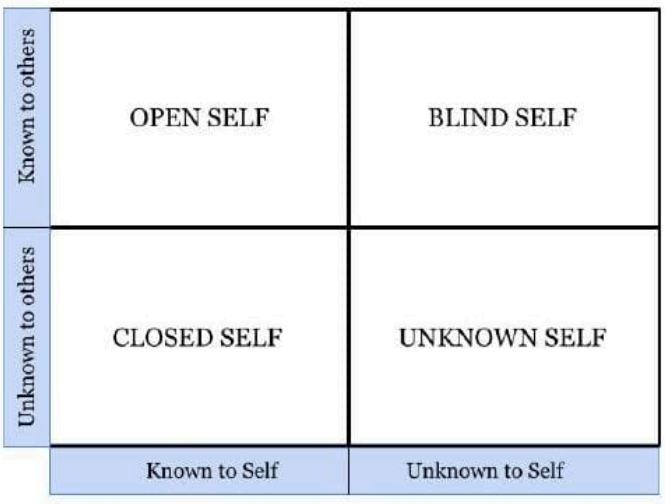


Figure 6.8.3 Johari Window by Hilary Altman adapted from Johari Window by Spaynton on Wikipedia Commons is licensed under CC BY 4.0

A longer description of the Johari Window

Open Self

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

One of our authors shares this example:

> When I was in college, I shared mostly surface information with most of my classmates, keeping the size of my Open Self small. As a work-study student, I cleaned dishes at one of the campus dining halls to help pay my tuition. I became very close with another work-study student in dining, as we felt more comfortable sharing about the challenges of balancing work and school, as well as dealing with financial aid and student loans. When I self-disclosed more personal information to my work-study friend, my Open Self became larger.

Closed Self

The **Closed Self** (also sometimes called the **Private Self**) represents the parts of ourselves we know well, but that we choose to keep secret or not tell others. With someone we know well and trust, we tend to have a larger Open Self and a smaller Closed Self. Let's say Jean has known her girlfriend Kennedy for three years. They get along well, have high trust in their relationship, and also live together. In this situation, Jean is likely to self-disclose more freely with Kennedy, and due to this, her Closed Self would be smaller. However, Jean shares only surface information with her colleagues at work. In her work relationships, Jean's Closed Self or Private Self is much larger.

We keep information about ourselves from others in order to protect ourselves. For example, when Jean gets a phone call from Tom, someone trying to sell her a magazine subscription, she would be hesitant to provide information about herself other than her name. When Tom asks Jean to talk about how many magazines she subscribes to, she may or may not provide this information. If she chooses not to self-disclose, Jean keeps this part of herself within the Closed Self. The size of the Open Self is directly proportional to the size of the Closed Self. In other words, people with a large Open Self have a small Closed Self or Private Self. Individuals with a large Private Self or Closed Self have a small Open Self.

Blind Self

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

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

Unknown Self

The **Unknown Self** represents the parts of our selves that no one knows. It is difficult to think about what the Unknown Self may include, since neither we nor others are aware of this information. Sometimes this information is buried deep in our subconscious,

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

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

The second theory we will discuss as we explore self-disclosure is the **uncertainty reduction theory** (**URT**). URT helps us to understand why we initiate communication with people, as well as why we continue to build and maintain relationships with them. Uncertainty reduction theory states that we pursue knowledge about others in order to reduce or resolve anxiety associated with the unknown. According to URT, humans use three basic strategies: **passive**, **active**, and **interactive**, to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability and the feeling of safety when interacting with others. Let's start with an example: Keisha saw a photo of Lidia on a dating app, and she is interested in her. Let's look at how the three strategies of URT might help Keisha to feel safe moving forward with getting to know this potential romantic partner.

Passive, Active, and Interactive Strategies

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

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

Finally, the **interactive strategy** focuses on a direct exchange of information with the other person. After using the passive and active strategies to find out more information about Lidia, Keisha messaged Lidia directly and engaged in a conversation with mutual self-disclosure. The interactive strategy allows for the most in-depth and direct exchange of information. Thus, Keisha used all three strategies to gain information about Lidia. These three strategies help us not only to reduce uncertainty about others but also to more accurately predict future behavior.

Now that we have explored many of the theories associated with the formation of love relationships, we will discuss strategies for maintaining romantic relationships.

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7: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

7.1: Foundations of Culture

7.2: Understanding Cultural Identity

7.3: Social Construction of Cultural Identity

7.4: Cultural Biases

7.5: Taxonomies of Cultural Patterns

7.6: Intercultural Communication Competence

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7.1: Foundations of Culture

Learning Objectives

1. Define culture.

2. Explain the difference between co-cultures, subcultures, and countercultures

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 traced 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 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.

A more simplistic term to understand by Lustig and Koester (2018) would be *culture* is a "learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms and social practices, which affects the behaviors of a relatively large group of people."[i]

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. ***Values*** are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. ***Beliefs*** are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value that the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, individuals spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetic products and surgeries to look young and beautiful. The United States also has an individualistic culture, meaning people place a high value on individuality and independence. In contrast, many other cultures are collectivist, meaning the welfare of the group and group relationships are a primary value.

Living up to a culture's values can be difficult. It's easy to value good health, but it's hard to quit smoking. Marital monogamy is valued, but many spouses engage in infidelity. Cultural diversity and equal opportunities for all people are valued in the United States, yet the country's highest political offices have been dominated by white men.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an ***ideal culture***, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from ***real culture***, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that not only is the ideal hard to live up to, but the value alone is not enough to spare teenagers the potential consequences of having sex.

One way societies strive to put values into action is through rewards, sanctions, and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a "thank you." A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People ***sanction*** certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and nonsupport. Sanctions are a form of ***social control***, a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions: good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers. From a criminal justice perspective, properly used social control is also inexpensive crime control. Utilizing social control approaches pushes

most people to conform to societal rules, regardless of whether authority figures (such as law enforcement) are present.

When people go against a society's values, they are punished. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label—lazy, no-good bum—or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.



Figure 7.1.1: In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would Americans react to these two soldiers? (Photo courtesy of Geordie Mott/Wikimedia Commons)

Values are not static; they vary across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective societal beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It's rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the United States where that behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president George W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. A simple gesture, such as hand-holding, carries great symbolic differences across cultures.[ii]

Norms

Many examples of culture often describe how people are expected to behave in certain situations—for example, when buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call norms. ***Norms*** define how to behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

Formal norms are established, written rules. They are behaviors worked out and agreed upon in order to suit and serve the most people. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and "no running" signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced. But even formal norms are enforced to varying degrees and are reflected in cultural values.

For example, money is highly valued in the United States, so monetary crimes are punished. It's against the law to rob a bank, and banks go to great lengths to prevent such crimes. People safeguard valuable possessions and install antitheft devices to protect homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it's against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime. These examples show a range of enforcement in formal norms.

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of ***informal norms***—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly—"Kiss your Aunt Edna" or "Use your napkin"—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm. But although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. In the United States, there are informal norms regarding behavior at fast food restaurants. Customers line up to order their food and leave when they are done. They don't sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don't commit even benign breaches of informal norms. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules.

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. ***Mores*** (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are legally protected with laws or other formal norms. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm).

But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups. The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Writing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are severe and usually result in expulsion.

Unlike mores, ***folkways*** are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. They indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, that's not acceptable. In regions in the southern United States, bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough. Other accepted folkways in the United States may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday. The rules regarding these folkways may change from culture to culture.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). Those who experience culture shock may find that it subsides as they learn the new culture's folkways and are able to move through their daily routines more smoothly. Folkways might be small manners, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. Like mores and laws, these norms help people negotiate their daily lives within a given culture.[iii]

The last aspect of culture we will mention is social practices. *Social practices* are the predictable behavior patterns members of a cultural group tend to follow. The simple activity of children going to school each morning Monday-Friday is an example of a social norm in the United States. When combined these beliefs, values, norms and social practices create a way of living for those members.[iv]

Co-Cultures and Countercultures

Now that you have a better understanding of culture and what it entails, let's briefly discuss co-cultures. We use the term co-culture to describe when a person has more than one cultural identity. For example, someone might consider themselves an Irish-American or a deaf-American. In these cases, we want to honor and respect the multiple ways people identify.



Figure 7.1.2: Trekkies (or fans of Star Trek) are a co-culture; they share specific understandings and meanings that those outside their subculture may not understand. Image by V Threepio is used under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

A **co-*culture*** is a culture shared and actively participated in by a minority of people within a broader culture. Some co-cultures achieve such a status that they acquire a name of their own. Examples of co-cultures could include: bikers, military culture, Bronies, and Star Trek fans (Trekkers or Trekkies).



Figure 7.1.3: The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (or FLDS), advocates the practice polygamy, making members part of a countercultural group (polygamy is illegal in the United States). FLDS Eldorado by Randy Mankin is in the public domain.

A ***counterculture*** is a co-culture with the addition that some of its beliefs, values, or norms challenge or even contradict those of the main culture of which it is part.[12] Examples of countercultures in the U.S. could include: the hippie movement of the 1960s, the green movement, polygamists, feminist groups, or punk rockers, for example.

Co-cultures can be distinctive because of the age, ethnicity, class, location, and/or gender of the members. The qualities that determine a co-culture as distinctive may be linguistic, aesthetic, religious, political, sexual, geographical, or a combination of other unique identities. Members of a co-culture often signal their membership through a distinctive and symbolic use of style, which includes fashions, mannerisms, and language.

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[i] Stokes-Rice, 2019

[ii] https://courses.lumenlearning.com/alamo-sociology/chapter/values-and-beliefs/

[iii] https://courses.lumenlearning.com/alamo-sociology/chapter/values-and-beliefs/

[iv] Stokes-Rice, 2019

[v] https://www.oercommons.org/courses/introduction-to-sociology/view

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7.2: Understanding Cultural Identity

Learning Objectives

1. Define personal, social, and cultural identities.
2. Summarize non-dominant and dominant identity development.
3. Explain why difference matters in the study of culture and identity.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Ask yourself the question "Who am I?" We develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us from 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, B. D., 2000). 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 (see Table "Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities").

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, J. & Kotthoff, H., 2009). ***Personal identities*** include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. For example, I consider myself a puzzle 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.

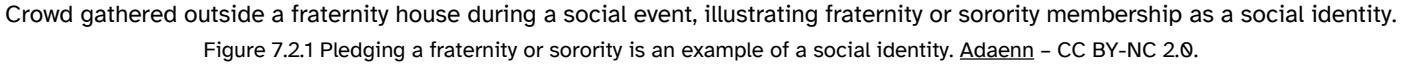

Crowd gathered outside a fraternity house during a social event, illustrating fraternity or sorority membership as a social identity.

Figure 7.2.1 Pledging a fraternity or sorority is an example of a social identity. Adaenn – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Table 7.2.1 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

Personal	Social	Cultural
Athletic	Professional Skier	Gay/Lesbian

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 innumerous 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. A 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 MMORPG, or a massively multiplayer online role-playing game community, 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 (Yep, G. A., 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, M. J., 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed for African 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.

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 & Nakayama, 2010). 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 him or her 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, 2007). 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 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 on 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 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, 2002). He notes repressing his Chinese identity as an adolescent living in Peru and then later embracing his Chinese identity and learning about his family history while in college in the United States. 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 non-dominant groups (Allen, 2011). Dominant identities historically had and currently have more resources and influence, while non-dominant identities historically had and currently have less 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 non-dominant 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 non-dominant groups are at a disadvantage. The main non-dominant 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.

Identity Development

There are multiple models for examining identity development. Given our focus on how difference matters, we will examine similarities and differences in non-dominant and dominant identity formation. While the stages in this model help us understand how many people experience their identities, identity development is complex, and there may be variations. We must also remember that people have multiple identities that intersect with each other. So, as you read, think about how circumstances may be different for an individual with multiple nondominant and/or dominant identities.

Non-dominant Identity Development

There are four stages of nondominant identity development (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The first stage is unexamined identity, which is characterized by a lack of awareness of or lack of interest in one's identity. For example, a young woman who will later identify as a lesbian may not yet realize that a nondominant sexual orientation is part of her identity. Also, a young African American man may question his teachers or parents about the value of what he's learning during Black History Month. When a person's lack of interest in their own identity is replaced by an investment in a dominant group's identity, they may move to the next stage, which is conformity.

In the conformity stage, an individual internalizes or adopts the values and norms of the dominant group, often in an effort not to be perceived as different. Individuals may attempt to assimilate into the dominant culture by changing their appearance, their mannerisms, the way they talk, or even their name. Moises, a Chicano man interviewed in a research project about identities, narrated how he changed his "Mexican sounding" name to Moses, which was easier for his middle-school classmates and teachers to say (Jones Jr., 2009). He also identified as white instead of Mexican American or Chicano because he saw how his teachers treated the other kids with "brown skin." Additionally, some gay or lesbian people in this stage of identity development may try to "act straight." In either case, some people move to the next stage, resistance and separation, when they realize that despite their efforts they are still perceived as different by and not included in the dominant group.

In the resistance and separation stage, an individual with a nondominant identity may shift away from the conformity of the previous stage to engage in actions that challenge the dominant identity group. Individuals in this stage may also actively try to separate themselves from the dominant group, interacting only with those who share their nondominant identity. For example, there has been a Deaf culture movement in the United States for decades. This movement includes people who are hearing impaired and believe that their use of a specific language, American Sign Language (ASL), and other cultural practices constitutes a unique culture, which they symbolize by capitalizing the *D* in *Deaf* (Allen, 2011).

Woman wearing a red top communicating with her hands using American Sign Language (ASL).

Figure 7.2.2 Many hearing-impaired people in the United States use American Sign Language (ASL), which is recognized as an official language. Quinn Dombrowski – ASL interpreter – CC BY-SA 2.0.

While this is not a separatist movement, a person who is hearing impaired may find refuge in such a group after experiencing discrimination from hearing people. Staying in this stage may indicate a lack of critical thinking if a person endorses the values of the nondominant group without question.

The integration stage marks a period where individuals with a nondominant identity have achieved a balance between embracing their own identities and valuing other dominant and nondominant identities. Although there may still be residual anger from the discrimination and prejudice they have faced, they may direct this energy into positive outlets such as working to end discrimination for their own or other groups. Moises, the Chicano man I mentioned earlier, now works to support the Chicano community in his city and also has actively supported gay rights and women's rights.

Dominant Identity Development

Dominant identity development consists of five stages (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The unexamined stage of dominant identity formation is similar to nondominant in that individuals in this stage do not think about their or others' identities. Although they

may be aware of differences—for example, between races and genders—they either don't realize there is a hierarchy that treats some people differently than others or they don't think the hierarchy applies to them. For example, a white person may take notice that a person of color was elected to a prominent office. However, he or she may not see the underlying reason that it is noticeable—namely, that the overwhelming majority of our country's leaders are white. Unlike people with a nondominant identity who usually have to acknowledge the positioning of their identity due to discrimination and prejudice they encounter, people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined stage for a long time.

In the acceptance stage, a person with a dominant identity passively or actively accepts that some people are treated differently than others but doesn't do anything internally or externally to address it. In the passive acceptance stage, we must be cautious not to blame individuals with dominant identities for internalizing racist, sexist, or heterosexist "norms." The socializing institutions we discussed earlier (family, peers, media, religion, and education) often make oppression seem normal and natural. For example, I have had students who struggle to see that they are in this stage say things like "I know that racism exists, but my parents taught me to be a good person and see everyone as equal." While this is admirable, seeing everyone as equal doesn't make it so. And people who insist that we are all equal may claim that minorities are exaggerating their circumstances or "whining" and just need to "work harder" or "get over it." The person making these statements acknowledges difference but doesn't see their privilege or the institutional perpetuation of various "-isms." Although I've encountered many more people in the passive state of acceptance than the active state, some may progress to an active state where they acknowledge inequality and are proud to be in the "superior" group. In either case, many people never progress from this stage. If they do, it's usually because of repeated encounters with individuals or situations that challenge their acceptance of the status quo, such as befriending someone from a nondominant group or taking a course related to culture.

The resistance stage of dominant identity formation is a major change from the previous in that an individual acknowledges the unearned advantages they are given and feels guilt or shame about it. Having taught about various types of privilege for years, I've encountered many students who want to return their privilege or disown it. These individuals may begin to disassociate with their own dominant group because they feel like a curtain has been opened and their awareness of the inequality makes it difficult for them to interact with others in their dominant group. But it's important to acknowledge that becoming aware of your white privilege, for instance, doesn't mean that every person of color is going to want to accept you as an ally, so retreating to them may not be the most productive move. While moving to this step is a marked improvement in regards to becoming a more aware and socially just person, getting stuck in the resistance stage isn't productive, because people are often retreating rather than trying to address injustice. For some, deciding to share what they've learned with others who share their dominant identity moves them to the next stage.

People in the redefinition stage revise negative views of their identity held in the previous stage and begin to acknowledge their privilege and try to use the power they are granted to work for social justice. They realize that they can claim their dominant identity as heterosexual, able-bodied, male, white, and so on, and perform their identity in ways that counter norms. A male participant in a research project on identity said the following about redefining his male identity:

I don't want to assert my maleness the same way that maleness is asserted all around us all the time. I don't want to contribute to sexism. So I have to be conscious of that. There's that guilt. But then, I try to utilize my maleness in positive ways, like when I'm talking to other men about male privilege (Jones, Jr., 2009).

The final stage of dominant identity formation is integration. This stage is reached when redefinition is complete and people can integrate their dominant identity into all aspects of their life, finding opportunities to educate others about privilege while also being a responsive ally to people in nondominant identities. As an example, some heterosexual people who find out a friend or family member is gay or lesbian may have to confront their dominant heterosexual identity for the first time, which may lead them through these various stages. As a sign of integration, some may join an organization like PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), where they can be around others who share their dominant identity as heterosexuals but also empathize with their loved ones.

People marching together in the Atlanta Pride Festival parade, including participants carrying a PFLAG banner.

Figure 7.2.3 Heterosexual people with gay family members or friends may join the group PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) as a part of the redefinition and/or integration stage of their dominant identity development. Jason Riedy – Atlanta Pride Festival parade – CC BY 2.0.

Knowing more about various types of identities and some common experiences of how dominant and nondominant identities are formed prepares us to delve into more specifics about why difference matters.

Difference Matters

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, it is often the differences that are highlighted and that 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, 2011). 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, an ideology of domination that makes it seem natural and normal to many that some people or groups will always have power over others (Allen, 2011). 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 better understanding 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 United States, 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 2010 Census shows that the Hispanic and Latino/a populations in the United States are now the second largest group in the country, having grown 43 percent since the last census in 2000 (Saenz, 2011). By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population (Allen, 2011). 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 has 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.

"Getting Real"- Diversity Training

Businesses in the United States spend $200 to $300 million a year on diversity training, but is it effective? (Vedantam, 2008). If diversity training is conducted to advance a company's business goals and out of an understanding of the advantages that a diversity of background and thought offer a company, then the training is more likely to be successful. Many companies conduct mandatory diversity training based on a belief that they will be in a better position in court if a lawsuit is brought against them. However, research shows that training that is mandatory and undertaken only to educate people about the legal implications of diversity is ineffective and may even hurt diversity efforts. A commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace environment must include a multipronged approach. Experts recommend that a company put a staff person in charge of diversity efforts, and some businesses have gone as far as appointing a "chief diversity officer" (Cullen, 2007). The US Office of Personnel Management offers many good guidelines for conducting diversity training: create learning objectives related to the mission of the organization, use tested and appropriate training methods and materials, provide information about course content and expectations to employees ahead of training, provide the training in a supportive and noncoercive environment, use only experienced and qualified instructors, and monitor/evaluate training and revise as needed (US Office of Personnel Management, 2011). With these suggestions in mind, the increasingly common "real-world" event of diversity training is more likely to succeed.

1. Have you ever participated in any diversity training? If so, what did you learn or take away from the training? Which of the guidelines listed did your training do well or poorly on?

2. Do you think diversity training should be mandatory or voluntary? Why?

3. From what you've learned so far in this book, what communication skills are important for a diversity trainer to have?

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, 2011). 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 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.” Recall from our earlier discussion of identity formation that people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined or acceptance stages for a long time. Being stuck in these stages makes it much more difficult to value difference.

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.

Key Takeaways

- Culture is an ongoing negotiation of learned patterns of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors.
- Each of us has personal, social, and cultural identities.
  - Personal identities are components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connect to our individual interests and life experiences.
  - Social identities are components of self that are derived from our involvement in social groups to which we are interpersonally invested.
  - Cultural identities are components of self based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for our thoughts and behaviors.
- Nondominant identity formation may include a person moving from unawareness of the importance of their identities, to adopting the values of dominant society, to separating from dominant society, to integrating components of identities.
- Dominant identity formation may include a person moving from unawareness of their identities, to accepting the identity hierarchy, to separation from and guilt regarding the dominant group, to redefining and integrating components of identities.
- Difference matters because people are treated differently based on their identities and demographics and patterns of interaction are changing. Knowing why and how this came to be and how to navigate our increasingly diverse society can make us more competent communicators.

Exercises

1. List some of your personal, social, and cultural identities. Are there any that relate? If so, how? For your cultural identities, which ones are dominant and which ones are nondominant? What would a person who looked at this list be able to tell about you?
2. Describe a situation in which someone ascribed an identity to you that didn’t match with your avowed identities. Why do you think the person ascribed the identity to you? Were there any stereotypes involved?
3. Getting integrated: Review the section that explains why difference matters. Discuss the ways in which difference may influence how you communicate in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, and personal.

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7.3: Social Construction of Cultural Identity

Learning Objectives

- Explain some of the trends in United States policy and law regarding cultural identity and how these laws and policies affect people's individual freedoms.
- Discuss how small groups can create norms that demonstrate respect for all members, inclusive of cultual identities.
- Watch a short video clip of a diverse small group meeting and analyze the verbal and nonverbal communication for how culture is addressed. Specifically discuss how the group encourages inclusiveness, ignores cultural differences, or dismisses/criticizes people's 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 relationship to social, cultural, and political contexts (Allen, 2011). 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. There are other important identities that 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 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, 2011). Therefore, we'll define race as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.

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 the 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. Western "scientists" used these differences as "proof" that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). 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."



Figure 7.3.1 Friends by Evilgurl is used under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

There is actually no biological basis for racial classification among humans, as we share of our DNA. Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it's important to know how race and communication relate (Allen, 2011). 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 history 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 United States 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 U.S. Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn't always been the case. In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen, 2011). 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 U.S. American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an for Negro. Later she referred to herself as colored because that's what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term Black had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word Black, and the slogan "Black is beautiful" was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the newer label of African American but notes that she still prefers Black. The terms colored and Negro are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when Black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms African American and Black are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase people of color is acceptable 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.

Racial Categories of the U.S. Census Over Time

- 1790 No category for race
- 1800s Race defined by the percentage of "African blood." Mulatto was the classification used to describe someone with one Black and one White parent. The term Quadroon was used to describe someone with "one-quarter African blood," Octoroon for someone with "one-eight African blood"
- 1830-1940 The term "Color" used instead of "Race"
- 1900 Racial categories included: White, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers 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" dropped and replaced by "Race"
- 1960-70 Both race and color were used on census forms
- 1980-2010 Race becomes the only term again
- 2020 Individuals who identified as White, Black/African American, and/or American Indian or Alaskan Native were asked to specifically identify their racial origins

Note: Racial Categories of the U.S. Census Over Time

As you read through the changes in racial categories the U.S. Census uses from the first census in 1790 to the most recent one in 2020, notice how the terminology changes over time. Some of this is due to major historical events or policies, such as the Civil Rights Act (1866 and updated in 1964), Voting Rights Act (1965), and Hate Crime Statistics Act (1990), all of which required the U.S. government to collect data with the goal of preventing or decreasing discrimination.

The label Latin American generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, or to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. Latina and Latino are labels that are preferable to Hispanic for many who live in the 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, 2007). In verbal communication you might say "Latina" when referring to a particular female or "Latino" when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say "Latinas and Latinos" or "Latinx" instead of just "Latinos," which would be more gender inclusive. While Hispanic is used by the U.S. Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which 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, there are people who claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as White. Labels such as Puerto Rican or Mexican American, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone's preference.

The history of immigration in the United States also ties to the way that race has been constructed. The metaphor of the melting pot has been used to describe the immigration history of the United States but doesn't capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen, 2011). 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 United States. 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, 2011). 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 "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.



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

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 inclusion of Spanish in many areas of public life. This has also created a backlash, which some scholars argue is tied more to the race of the immigrants than the language they speak and a fear that White America could be engulfed by other languages and cultures (Speicher, 2002). This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the United States.

The U.S. Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman, 2010). 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 United States has always had many languages represented, that national unity hasn't rested on a single language, and that there are actually benefits to having a population that is multilingual (Linguistic Society of America, 1986). 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 are able to maintain their linguistic identities with their in-group peers but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in dominant society (Yancy, 2011). White people may also feel anxious about communicating with people of color out of fear of being perceived as racist. In other situations, people in dominant groups may spotlight nondominant members by asking them to comment on or educate others about their race (Allen, 2011). 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 & James, 2011). 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 is 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, 2005). 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, 2005).

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 an adult (White) males (Allen, 2011). Doctors and other decision makers like politicians also used women's menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational, or hysterical, and therefore 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 system is based on the ideology of patriarchy, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group

(Wood, 2005). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the "generic" human being to which others are compared. But that ignores that 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 United States dates back to the 1800s, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women's rights movements have been led by White, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women's rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women's rights movement had class and education privilege, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much noted extemporaneous speech at a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called "Ain't I a Woman?" (Wood, 2005) Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by Black women.

Example: Ain't I A Woman

Watch actress Alfre Woodard deliver an interpretation of Sojourner Truth's speech, originally delivered in 1851 in Akron, Ohio, as part of the early women's rights movement.

Alfre Woodard Interprets Sojourner Truth's Speech "Ain't I a Woman?"

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 hand 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 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 hand. 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.

women's march.jpgWomen's March by Carol Leigh Scarlot on Flickr

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 pronoun they or them. If someone has long hair, make-up, 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.

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to recreate the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen, 2011). For example, teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and 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 of the educational workforce, only of superintendents and of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 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 for promotion to upper management. Many of my students have been surprised at the continuing pay gap that exists between men and women. 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 (National Committee on Pay Equity, n.d.a). 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 (National Committee on Pay Equity, n.d.b).

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 a 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, 2011). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and 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 United States 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 together 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 in social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. 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.

Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication

- 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 coined to mean "sexual perversion" for consensual 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
- 1900-30 Doctors "treat" homosexuality with castration, electro-shock therapy, and incarceration in mental hospitals
- 1924 Chicago Society for Human Rights (first gay rights organization in the United States) founded
- 1933-44 Nazi Germany forces thousands of gay men into concentration camps. They are forced to wear pink triangles.
- 1948 Sexologist Alfred Kinsey's research finds a significant percentage of people have engaged in same-sex activity. Also highlights the existence of bisexuality
- 1969 "Stonewall Inn Riot" - LGBT patrons of this bar fought back against police who regularly harassed queer customers
- 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
- 2011 Repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell,", allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in U.S. Military
- 2015 U.S. Supreme Court "Obergefell v. Hodges" guarantees right to same-sex marriage nationwide
- 2019 President Trump institutes policy requiring service members to serve in their biological sex only (cannot enlist as transgender)
- 2021 President Biden reverses bans on transgender individuals enlisting and serving in U.S. Military
- 2025 President Trump signed Executive Order banning people who identify as transgender from military service

Notice as you look at the "Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication" bullet points how many rules and policies have been reversed and reinstated over time.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity, because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical rather than social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen, 2011, p. 12). An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen, 2011). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there 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.

One in four (26%) adults in the United States live with a disability (Okoro, et al., 2018). Despite how commonplace disability is among US citizens, discrimination against people with disabilities occurs regularly. Able-bodied people may see a person who uses a wheelchair and imagine how difficult or terrible it would be to not be able to walk. For a person with a physical disability, using a wheelchair may equate to freedom of movement.

There is a strong international disability movement that recognizes “disability” is actually created by environmental barriers, as opposed to any person's physical issues. For example, someone who is deaf communicates as well or better with sign language than with the spoken word. The limits on this person’s communication are due to a lack of people who use sign language or a skilled translator. In healthcare, to determine pain level, many hospitals and doctors offices use a number of measures, including a number scale and the Facial Action Coding System (Kripke, 2018). However there is still work to be done to improve communication with neurodiverse patients, who may have different interpretations of facial expressions (Dildine & Atlas, 2019).

Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution (2020)

The documentary *Crip Camp* features teenagers who participate in a summer camp (Camp Jened) for disabled adolescents, and it looks into their futures as adult advocates for accessibility and disability rights. Perhaps you watched this documentary, or the movie *CODA*. (The acronym CODA stands for "child of deaf adults.") Each of these Oscar-nominated films features people living with disabilities who lead multifaceted lives, speak and act with power and leadership, and look at disability as a culture or community. In both of these films, we see disability as one aspect of identity, and how intersectionality [coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991)], - the different parts of our identities, including race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, etc. - plays a role in power, privilege, and the way we are treated and function in our everyday lives.



Figure 7.3.3 Camp Jened by Steve Honigsbaum licensed as CC BY-ND-NC 2.0

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, 2011). 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.



Figure 7.3.4 110518-M-EC403-102 by Wounded Warrior Regiment is used under 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.

Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you'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 of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live

longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number could continue to increase, as we have thousands of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

"Inclusion is about willingness to take a unique difference and develop it as a gift to others. It is not about disability." — Judith Snow

As disability has been constructed in U.S. history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to "political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm." They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the "scientific" category of "feeblemindedness," which led them to be institutionalized (Carlson, 2001). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to 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 U.S. history, as the eugenics movement sought to limit reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

During the early part of the 1900s, the eugenics movement was the epitome of the move to rehabilitate or reject people with disabilities (Allen, 2005). This was a brand of social engineering that was indicative of a strong public support in the rationality of science to cure society's problems (Allen, n.d.). 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, n.d.). During the eugenics movement in the United States, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized (Allen, 2011). Although the eugenics movement as it was envisioned and enacted then is unthinkable today, some who have studied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s have issued warnings that a newly packaged version of eugenics could be upon us. As human genome mapping and DNA manipulation become more accessible, advanced genetic testing could enable parents to eliminate undesirable aspects or enhance desirable characteristics of their children before they are born, creating "designer children" (Spice, 2005).

Much has changed for people with disabilities in the 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, 2003). As society better adapts to people with disabilities, there will be more instances of interability communication taking place. In order to support interability communication, 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, the The United States Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) came up with the "Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities." This list was first published in 1995, yet they continue to apply today.

Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign-language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.

9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

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7.4: Cultural Biases

Learning Objectives

1. Define racial prejudice.
2. Explain the effect privilege and ethnocentrism affects intercultural competence.

We have already discussed race in chapter three. In this chapter we will discuss three other distinct concepts of race, as well as other cultural biases existing in today's world.

"When you begin to understand the biology of human variation, you have to ask yourself if race is a good way to describe that."–Janis Hutchinson, Biological Anthropologist



Figure 7.4.1 Three Indian woman performing a native dance. By pavan gupta

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

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

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

Privilege

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

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

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

McIntosh admits, "My perception is that colleges and universities are the main institutions that are raising awareness of the relationship between privilege and oppression, but that this awareness is needed throughout all public and private sectors of the United States; the ability to see privilege should be in the minds of all citizens" (195). As you think about privilege and the resulting advantages that some groups have over others, you should also keep in mind two facts. One, privilege is a relative

concept that varies according to context. In some situations we may be more privileged than others, and in order to access some of that privilege one may decide to highlight or conceal parts of their identity. For example, unless a person tells you, you have no way of knowing their sexual orientation. Thus, a gay man might decide to "pass" as straight at a family reunion to avoid conflict from a heterosexist family. The fact that he can choose pass as an Asian man and cannot make the choice to pass as Latino is another example of privilege. Two, we may have aspects of our identities that are simultaneously advantaged and disadvantaged. The gay, white, working-class, male above is advantaged by the fact that he has light skin and is male, and is disadvantaged by the fact that he is gay and working-class.

Thinking About Privilege

People often complain about minor daily inconveniences that actually stem from hidden privileges, a concept popularized by a viral **BuzzFeed** essay by Nathan W. Pyle.

10 Taken-for-Granted Privileges

- **Slow Internet:** Having high-speed digital access that only frustrates you when a page loads slowly.
- **Food Choices:** Complaining that there is "nothing to eat" while staring at a full refrigerator or pantry.
- **Traffic Delays:** Sitting in traffic because you own or have access to a reliable personal vehicle.
- **A Full Closet:** Struggling to find an outfit because you have too many clothes to choose from.
- **Household Chores:** Complaining about using a dishwasher, washing machine, or vacuum to clean your living space.
- **Busy Schedules:** Feeling stressed because you have a job, social plans, or active commitments to manage.
- **Delivery Wait Times:** Impatiently waiting for hot food or online packages to arrive at your doorstep.
- **Utility Bills:** Paying high costs for electricity, gas, and running water because you live in a heated or cooled home.
- **Exercise Fatigue:** Complaining about going to the gym or working out because you have a healthy body that moves.
- **Travel Planning:** Feeling overwhelmed by the logistics of packing and going on a vacation or trip.

Ethnocentrism

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

Ethnocentrism shows up in small and large ways: the WWII Nazi's elevation of the Aryan race and the corresponding killing of Jews, Gypsies, gays and lesbians, and other non Aryan groups is one of the most horrific ethnocentric acts in history. However, ethnocentrism shows up in small and seemingly unconscious ways as well. In American culture, if you decided to serve dog meat as appetizers at your cocktail party you would probable disgust your guests and the police might even arrest you because the consumption of dog meat is not culturally acceptable. However, in China "it is neither rare nor unusual" to consume dog meat (Wingfield-Hayes). In the Czech Republic, the traditional Christmas dinner is carp and potato salad. Imagine how your family might react if you told them you were serving carp and potato salad for Christmas. In the Czech Republic, it is a beautiful tradition, but in America, it might not receive a warm welcome. Our cultural background influences every aspect of our lives from the food we consume to the classroom. Ethnocentrism is likely to show up in Literature classes as well. Cultural bias dictates which "great works" students are going to read and study in the classroom. More often than not, these works represent the given culture (i.e., reading French authors in France and Korean authors in Korea). This ethnocentric bias has received some challenge in United States' schools as teachers make efforts to create a multicultural classroom by incorporating books, short stories, and traditions from non-dominant groups.

In the field of geography there has been an ongoing debate about the use of a Mercater map versus a Peter's Projection map. The arguments reveal cultural biases toward the Northern, industrialized nations.

Whiteness

If you are White, how would you describe your culture? When we ask this question to our students we find that White students are often uncomfortable with the question, feel guilty about self-identifying as White, or claim that White people do not have a culture. Gordon Alley-Young says, "The invisibility of whiteness and white privilege for many people is what makes it difficult to name and thus to disrupt" (312). These sentiments have lead an increasing amount of scholars in a variety of disciplines such as Sociology, Women's Studies, Anthropology, English, as well as Communication to study the concept of Whiteness. Orbe and Harris explain why exploring this concept is important by explaining that "[i]t helps us all view communication as a racialized process [which] sharpens our awareness of how racial categorization is used to reinforce old hierarchies in which some races are more superior than others [and that] whiteness studies also assign each person a role in race relations" (89).

> *View communication as a racialized process—meaning that our communication is structured by larger societal and racial dynamics. Second, understanding Whiteness sharpens our awareness of how racial categorization is used to reinforce old hierarchies in which some races are more superior than others. This helps us recognize how Whiteness can be used to signify dominance, privilege, and advantage in the United States. And, third, through studying and recognizing the effects of Whiteness, each person plays a role in race relations. White people can no longer sit on the sidelines and claim "it's a black problem" when discussing interracial conflict. (82-83)*

Overall, it removes the White race from the often-unidentified "normative" group and provides a context for studying, talking about, and hopefully improving race relations.

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

Political Correctness

Another claim or label that may be used to discount such difficult discussions is Political Correctness, or "PC" as it has been dubbed in the popular press. Opponents of multiculturalism and diversity studies try and dismiss such topics as "that's just PC." Luckily, some of the heated debate about PC have quieted in recent years but the history lingers. In short, political correctness refers to "the elimination of speech that often works to exclude, oppress, demean, or harass certain groups" (Orbe and Harris 58, Remar). The debate largely focused around competing interpretations of the First Amendment right to free speech and the Fourteenth Amendment's right to equal access to education. No matter what your position on this issue, we want to simply recognize two facts. One, that much of the PC debate and fury was largely misrepresented and hyped in the mainstream media by the use of extreme examples and a slippery-slope argument. Rush Limbaugh, for example, became famous for claiming that an awareness and sensitivity of language choice would lead to the "thought Police" or "PC police." Two, that words and labels have great power to create perceptions, realities and identities. Toward that aim, we will discuss the power of language in greater detail in the following section.

Summary

Culture: belief systems, values, and behaviors that support a particular ideology or social arrangement.

Culture guides language use, appropriate forms of dress, and views of the world.

The concept is broad and encompasses many areas of our lives such as the role of the family, individual, educational systems, employment, and gender.

Racial prejudice refers to the practice of holding false or negative beliefs of one racial group for the purpose of making another racial group (usually one's own) appear superior or normative.

Racial discrimination is the outward manifestation of racial prejudice: it is when people act upon their negative beliefs about

other races when
communicating or setting policy.

Racism, combines racial prejudice with social power. It is institutional, rather than individual, meaning it occurs in large institutional contexts such as the representations of particular groups within media or the fact that racial minorities do not have equal access to educational or legal opportunities. It often involves the unequal accessibility to resources and power.

Understanding Race

Race falls into two camps: a biological versus a sociopolitical construction:

Table 7.4.1

Biological	*Sociopolitical*
"pure" races existed and could be distinguished by such physical features as eye color and shape, skin color, and hair.	it is not a person's DNA that places them into a particular racial grouping, but all of the other factors that create social relations—politics, geography, or migration.
traced back to genetic differences	what it means to be of a particular race
no scientific connection with racial identity and cultural traits or behaviors	meanings of race have changed across time and space.

- **Ethnicity** refers to a person's or people's heritage and history, and involves shared cultural traditions and beliefs.
- **Nationality** refers to a person's nation-state of residence or where he/she holds citizenship.
- **Gender** is part of culture in that every society has particular gender roles and expectations for males and females.
- **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's preference for sexual or romantic relationships; one may prefer a partner of the same sex, the opposite sex, or both.
- **Power** is the ability to influence others and control our lives.
- The **dominant group** in the US is white, male, Christian, middle-class, able-bodied, educated, and heterosexual. Those who fall into this category are deemed privilege based on their power
- **Nondominant groups** are people who do not conform or fit into the dominant group and have less sociopolitical and economic power.
- **Ethnocentrism**—placing one's own culture and the corresponding beliefs, values, and behaviors in the center; in a position where it is seen as normal and right, and evaluating all other cultural systems against it.

Table 7.4.2

Minority Identity Development	Majority Identity Development	Bi- or Multiracial Identity Development
Stage 1: Unexamined Identity.	Stage 1: Unexamined Identity	Stage 1: Personal Identity
Stage 2: Conformity	Stage 2: Acceptance.	Stage 2: Group Categorization

Minority Identity Development	Majority Identity Development	Bi- or Multiracial Identity Development
Stage 3: Resistance and Separation.	Stage 3: Resistance	Stage 3: Enmeshment/Denial
Stage 4: Integration	Stage 4: Redefinition	Stage 4: Appreciation
	Stage 5: Integration	Stage 5: Integration.

- **High Context**: the meaning of the communication is in the people, or more specifically, the relationship between the people as opposed to just the words.
- **Low Context**: When we have to rely on the translation of the words to decipher a person's meaning
- **Collectivist**: When a person or culture places the needs and interests of the group above individual desires or motivations.
- **Individualistic**: The self or one's own personal goals motivate these cultures. Each person is viewed as responsible for his or her own success or failure in life.

KEY TERMS

- Afrocentricity
- Critical race theory
- Collectivism/Individualism
- Communication Styles
- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Ethnocentrism
- Gender
- High and low context
- Identity
- Popular Culture
- Privilege
- Race
- Representation
- Symbolic Annihilation
- Whiteness

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7.5: Taxonomies of Cultural Patterns

Learning Objectives

- Explain the similarities and differences of Hall, Hofstede and the GLOBE Taxonomies.

To develop confidence in intercultural communication, you must understand differences in cultural patterns. Cultural patterns are the similar behaviors within similar situations we witness due to shared beliefs, values, norms and social practices that are steady over time. In this chapter, you will explore three different taxonomies, which help us understand similarities and differences in these cultural patterns. Specifically, we will examine Edward Hall's High-Low context cultural taxonomy, Geert Hofstede's six dimensions, and Shalom Schwartz's seven dimensions of culture. (Stokes Rice, 2019).[i]

Hall's High-Low Context Cultural Taxonomy

Anthropologist Edward Hall founded the field of intercultural communication in 1959 with his book *The Silent Language*. The book was originally intended for the general public, but it sparked academic research in intercultural communication and fueled interest in subjects like nonverbal communication, according to Keio Communication Review.[ii]

High and Low Context[iii]

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

While some cultures are low or high context, in general terms, there can also be individual or contextual differences within cultures. In the example above between the two sisters, they are using high context communication, however, America is considered a low context culture. Countries such as Germany and Sweden are also low context while Japan and China are high context.Hall defines intercultural communication as a form of communication that shares information across different cultures and social groups. One framework for approaching intercultural communication is with high-context and low-context cultures, which refer to the value cultures place on indirect and direct communication.High-Context Cultures

A high-context culture relies on implicit communication and nonverbal cues. In high-context communication, a message cannot be understood without a great deal of background information. Asian, African, Arab, central European and Latin American cultures are generally considered to be high-context cultures.

High-context cultures often display the following tendencies, according to C.B. Halverson's book *Cultural Context Inventory*.

- **Association**: Relationships build slowly and depend on trust. Productivity depends on relationships and the group process. An individual's identity is rooted in groups (family, culture, work). Social structure and authority are centralized.
- **Interaction**: Nonverbal elements such as voice tone, gestures, facial expression and eye movement are significant. Verbal messages are indirect, and communication is seen as an art form or way of engaging someone. Disagreement is personalized, and a person is sensitive to conflict expressed in someone else's nonverbal communication.
- **Territoriality**: Space is communal. People stand close to each other and share the same space.
- **Temporality**: Everything has its own time, and time is not easily scheduled. Change is slow, and time is a process that belongs to others and nature.
- **Learning**: Multiple sources of information are used. Thinking proceeds from general to specific. Learning occurs by observing others as they model or demonstrate and then practicing. Groups are preferred, and accuracy is valued.

Low-Context Cultures

A low-context culture relies on explicit communication. In low-context communication, more of the information in a message is spelled out and defined. Cultures with western European roots, such as the United States and Australia, are generally considered to be low-context cultures.

Low-context cultures often display the following tendencies, according to Halverson:

- **Association**: Relationships begin and end quickly. Productivity depends on procedures and paying attention to the goal. The identity of individuals is rooted in themselves and their accomplishments. Social structure is decentralized.
- **Interaction**: Nonverbal elements are not significant. Verbal messages are explicit, and communication is seen as a way of exchanging information, ideas and opinions. Disagreement is depersonalized; the focus is on rational (not personal) solutions. An individual can be explicit about another person's bothersome behavior.
- **Territoriality**: Space is compartmentalized. Privacy is important, so people stand farther apart.
- **Temporality**: Events and tasks are scheduled and to be done at particular times. Change is fast, and time is a commodity to be spent or saved. One's time is one's own.
- **Learning**: One source of information is used. Thinking proceeds from specific to general. Learning occurs by following the explicit directions and explanations of others. Individual orientation is preferred, and speed is valued.

Communication Dynamics in High- and Low-Context Cultures

Cultural differences shape every aspect of global communication, says *Forbes* contributor Carol Kinsey Goman. This helps explain why people in Japan (a high-context culture) prefer face-to-face communication over electronic technology favored by other industrialized countries like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Germany (low-context cultures).

High-context cultures also prefer personal bonds and informal agreements over meticulously worded legal documents. They "are looking for meaning and understanding in what is *not* said — in body language, in silences and pauses, and in relationships and empathy," Goman says. Meanwhile, low-context cultures "place emphasis on sending and receiving accurate messages directly, and by being precise with spoken or written words," she explains. U.S. business leaders often fall into a communication trap by disregarding the importance of building and maintaining personal relationships when interacting with people from high-context cultures.

People should also watch for differences within high- and low-context cultures. This classification is an oversimplification, according to A.C. Krizan and others in the book *Business Communication*. "For example, although American culture is classified as low context, communication among family members tends to be high context," they write. "Family relationships and members' high level of shared experiences require fewer words because of mutual understandings."

On the other hand, communication between two businesspersons from a low-context culture tends to be more specific and direct. Attention focuses more on what is said than relationships. In China or Japan, words receive less attention than relationships, mutual understandings and nonverbal body language.

Hofstede's Taxonomy

The theory of Hofstede's cultural dimensions constitutes a framework revolving around cross-cultural communication, which was devised by Geert Hofstede. The dimensions collectively portray the impact of the culture ingrained in society on the values of the members of that society. They also describe the relationship between these values and behavior, with the help of a structure based on factor analysis. In other words, this theory studies significant aspects of culture and provides them a rating on a comparison scale.

So far as international business is concerned, the dimensions of culture form an important facet. Knowledge of the manner in which different features of a business are viewed in different cultures, can help a manager in understanding and sailing successfully across the international business market.

In this article, we discuss the topic of Hofstede cultural dimensions by exploring 1) an introduction; 2) the six cultural dimensions of Hofstede framework, and using those dimensions to better understand cultures and people based on 3) a case study of cultural differences; 4) the urgency of managing cultural difference as part of human resources management; and 5) conclusion.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

The original model of Hofstede was the outcome of factor analysis done on a global survey of the value system of employees at IBM between the years 1967 and 1973. This theory was one of the initial ones which could quantify cultural differences.

The original theory that Hofstede proposed talked of four dimensions, namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism and masculinity vs. femininity. After conducting independent studies in Hong Kong, Hofstede included a fifth dimension, known as long-term vs. short-term orientation, to describe value aspects that were not a part of his original theory. Again in 2010, Hofstede devised another dimension, the sixth one, indulgence vs. self-restraint, in an edition of '*Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*', co-authored by Michael Minkov.

Hofstede's work serves as the base for other researches in cross-cultural psychology, inviting a number of researchers to study different aspects of international business and communication. These dimensions founded by Hofstede illustrate the deeply embedded values of diverse cultures. These values impact not only how people with different cultural backgrounds behave, but also the manner in which they will potentially behave when placed in a work-associated context.

> Click this link for an interactive map to compare the Hofstede dimensions globally.This is a brief overview of the six cultural dimensions:

1. **Power Distance**: This dimension explains the extent to which members who are less powerful in a society accept and also expect that the distribution of power takes place unequally.
2. **Uncertainty Avoidance**: It is a dimension that describes the extent to which people in society are not at ease with ambiguity and uncertainty.
3. **Individualism vs. Collectivism**: The focus of this dimension is on the question regarding whether people have a preference for being left alone to look after themselves or want to remain in a closely knitted network.
4. **Masculinity vs. Femininity**: Masculinity implies a society's preference for assertiveness, heroism, achievement and material reward for attaining success. On the contrary, femininity represents a preference for modesty, cooperation, quality of life and caring for the weak.
5. **Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation**: Long-term orientation describes the inclination of a society toward searching for virtue. Short-term orientation pertains to those societies that are strongly inclined toward the establishment of the absolute truth.
6. **Indulgence vs. Restraint**: This revolves around the degree to which societies can exercise control over their impulses and desires.

Hofstede's Dimensions and Understanding Countries, Culture and People

According to Geert Hofstede, culture is the mind's collective programming that differentiates between one category of people and members of one group from another. The term 'category' might imply nations, religions, ethnicities, regions across or within nations, genders, organizations, or occupations.

#1: Power Distance

Power distance stands for inequality that is defined not from above, but from below. It is, in fact, the extent to which organizations and societies accept power differentials.

Societies with large power distance are characterized by the following features:

- Autocracy in leadership;
- Authority that is centralized;
- Paternalistic ways of management;
- A number of hierarchy levels;
- The acceptance of the privileges that come with power;
- A lot of supervisory staff;
- An expectation of power differences and inequality.
- Societies that have small power distance possess the following features:
- Participative or consultative style of management;

- Decision-making responsibility and authority decentralized;
- Flat structure of organizations;
- Supervisory staff small in proportion;
- Questioning the authority and lack of acceptance;
- An inclination toward egalitarianism;
- Consciousness of rights.

#2: Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members belonging to a society are capable of coping with future uncertainty without going through stress.

Weak uncertainty avoidance comes with the following features:

- Undertaking risk;
- Flexibility;
- Tolerance toward differing opinions and behaviors.

Strong uncertainty avoidance is represented by the following aspects:

- Tendency to avoid risk;
- Organizations that have a number of standardized procedures, written rules, and clearly delineated structures;
- Strong requirement for consensus;
- Respect for authority;
- Requirement for predictability highlighting the significance of planning;
- Minimal or no tolerance for deviants;
- Promotions depending upon age or seniority.

#3: Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism set against its opposite collectivism defines the extent to which individuals are inclined toward remaining in groups.

Individualistic cultures are characterized by:

- Fostering contractual relationships that revolve around the fundamentals of exchange. These cultures engage in the calculation of profit and loss prior to engagement in a behavior.
- Concentration on self or at the most very near and dear ones, and concern with behavioral relationships as well as own goals, interests, and needs.
- Emphasis on personal enjoyment, fun, and pleasure, over duties and social norms. They are a part of a number of in-groups which hardly have any influence on their lives.
- Self-sufficiency and value independence, and placement of self-interest over collective interest. Confrontation is accepted as an attribute.
- Stress on horizontal relationships (such as the relationship between spouse and spouse) rather than vertical relationships (such as the relationship between parent and child).
- The notion that they hold unique beliefs.

Collectivistic cultures are characterized by:

- Behavior as per social norms that are established for maintenance of social harmony among in-group members;
- Considering the wider collective with regards to implications of their actions;
- Sharing of resources and readiness to give up personal interest keeping in mind the collective interest;
- Favoring some in-groups (such as friends and family);
- Being a part of a few in-groups that have an influence on their lives. Rather than being individualistic, they have an increased inclination towards conformity;
- Increased concern regarding in-group members. They show hostility or indifference toward out-group members;
- Emphasis on harmony and hierarchy within group;
- Regulation of behavior with the help of group norms.

#4: Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculinity and femininity revolve around the emotional role distribution between genders, which is again a prime issue in a number of societies.

Masculine cultures possess the following characteristics:

- Clearly distinct gender roles;
- Benevolence has little or no significance;

Men are expected to be tough and assertive with a concentration on material achievements;

- Much value is associated with mastery of people, nature, job, and the like;
- Sense of humor, intelligence, affection, personality are considered preferred characteristic traits of a boyfriend by the women;
- Understanding, wealth, and health are considered desirable characteristic traits of a husband by the women.

Feminine cultures possess the following characteristics:

- Overlapping of social gender roles;
- Men, as well as women, are expected to be tender, modest, with focus on the quality of life;
- Emphasis on the non-materialistic angles of success;
- The preferred traits in boyfriends and husbands are the same.

#5: Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

This is based on the Confucian dynamism. According to the teachings of Confucius, the following aspects of life are evident:

- Unequal relationships existing between people ensure the stability of society.
- Every social organization has its prototype in the family.
- Virtuous behavior involves treatment meted out to others in a similar manner as one prefers to be treated oneself.
- So far as tasks in life are concerned, virtue comprises acquiring skills, working hard, education, being wise in spending as well as showing perseverance and patience.

Long-term orientation (high Confucian values) reflects the following:

- A futuristic, dynamic mentality;
- Emphasis on a relationship order depending on status, and observance of this order;
- Emphasis on persistence and perseverance;
- Stress on possessing a sense of shame;
- Stress on thrift;
- Positive association with economic growth;
- Inclination toward interrelatedness represented in sensitivity toward social contacts.

Short-term orientation (low Confucian values) is characterized by the following:

- Orientation toward past and present;
- Focus on respect for tradition;
- A comparatively static, more conventional mentality;
- Emphasis on saving face;
- Emphasis on personal steadiness;
- Focus on stability;
- Emphasis on reciprocation of gifts, favors, and greetings;
- Negative association with economic growth.

#6: Indulgence vs. Restraint

The dimension of indulgence vs. restraint focuses on happiness. A society that practices indulgence makes room for the comparatively free gratification of natural and basic human drives pertaining to indulging in fun and enjoying life. The quality of restraint describes a society that holds back need gratification and tries to control it through stringent social norms.

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

GLOBE Taxonomy

GLOBE stands from Global Leadership and Organization Behavior Effectiveness. It is a means of compiling information on what are the dominant patterns of a culture. The measures that are defined by Hofstede include: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarian ism, assertiveness, performance orientation, future orientation, and humane orientation. If a culture's numbers are above zero on the GLOBE scale, then they have high dimensions. If they are low on the GLOBE scale, they will be prone to have low dimensions.[vi]

- Power Distance: The degree to which people believe that power should be stratified, unequally shared, and concentrated at higher levels of an organization or government
- Uncertainty Avoidance: The extent to which people strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on social norms, rules, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability
- In-Group Collectivism: The degree to which people express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their families
- Institutional Collectivism: The degree to which a culture's institutional practices encourage collective actions and the collective distribution of resources
- Gender Egalitarianism: The extent to which people minimize gender role differences and gender discrimination while promoting gender equality
- Assertiveness: The degree to which people are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships
- Performance Orientation: The extent to which people encourage others to improve their task-oriented performance and excel.
- Future Orientation: The degree to which people engage in future orientated behaviors such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification
- Humane Orientation: The degree to which people encourage others to be fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and king

The "Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness" (GLOBE) Research Program was conceived in 1991 by Robert J. House of the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania. In 2004, its first comprehensive volume on "Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies" was published, based on results from about 17,300 middle managers from 951 organizations in the food processing, financial services, and telecommunications services industries. A second major volume, "Culture and Leadership across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies" became available in early 2007. It complements the findings from the first volume with in-country leadership literature analyses, interview data, focus group discussions, and formal analyses of printed media to provide in-depth descriptions of leadership theory and leader behavior in those 25 cultures. Cultural Dimensions and Culture Clusters: GLOBE's major premise (and finding) is that leader effectiveness is contextual, that is, it is embedded in the societal and organizational norms, values, and beliefs of the people being led. In other words, to be seen as effective, the time-tested adage continues to apply: "When in Rome do as the Romans do." As a first step to gauge leader effectiveness across cultures, GLOBE empirically established nine cultural dimensions that make it possible to capture the similarities and/or differences in norms, values, beliefs –and practices—among societies. They build on findings by Hofstede (1980), Schwartz (1994), Smith (1995), Inglehart (1997), and others. They are: Power Distance: The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally. Uncertainty Avoidance: The extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events. Humane Orientation: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others. Collectivism I: (Institutional) The degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action. Collectivism II: (In-Group) The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families. Assertiveness: The degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others. Gender Egalitarianism: The degree to which a collective minimizes gender inequality. Future Orientation: The extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future. Performance Orientation: The degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence.[vii]

[i] Stokes Rice, 2019

[ii] online.seu.edu/articles/high-and-low-context-cultures/

[iii] courses.candelalearning.com/...-by-culture-2/

[iv] https://www.cleverism.com/understanding-cultures-people-hofstede-dimensions/

[v] courses.candelalearning.com/...-by-culture-2/

[vi] http://tevinsic.blogspot.com/2012/03/cultural-patterns-and-communication_02.html

[vii] https://www.inspireimagineinnovate.com/pdf/globesummary-by-michael-h-hoppe.pdf

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7.6: Intercultural Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

- Define intercultural competence and discuss at least two strategies or practices
- Explain how to move small groups towards embracing and practicing 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.



Figure 7.6.1 Intercultural Festival by CEU on Flickr

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.

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 & Nakayama, 2010). 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 in order 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.

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 United States 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 adapt masculine communication patterns, people who are gay or lesbian may self-censor and avoid discussing their same-gender partners with coworkers, and people with nonvisible disabilities may not disclose them in order 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.

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 & Nakayama, 2010). 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 I lived in Sweden, my Swedish roommates often discussed how they were wary of befriending students from the United States. They perceived U.S. Americans to be shallow because they were friendly and exciting while they were in Sweden but didn't remain friends once they left. Although I was initially upset by their assessment, I came to see the truth in it. Swedes are generally more reserved than U.S. 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 me more aware of how my communication was perceived, enhancing my self-knowledge. I also learned more about communication behaviors of the Swedes, which contributed to my other-knowledge.


Figure 7.6.2 Sharing Food by CEU on Flickr

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 United States, many people still only interact with people who are similar to them. Even in a racially diverse educational setting, for example, people often group off 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 other 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, 2009). 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 in 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.

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 & Nakayama, 2010). 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 in a less competent manner. 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, 2009). 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.

Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence

How can ICC be built and achieved? This is a key question we will address in this section. Two main ways to build ICC are through experiential learning and reflective practices (Bednarz, 2010). We must first realize that competence isn't any one thing. Part of being competent means that you can assess new situations and adapt your existing knowledge to the 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. I have always told my students that ICC is less about a list of rules and more about a box of tools.

Three ways to cultivate ICC are to foster attitudes that motivate us, discover knowledge that informs us, and develop skills that enable us (Bennett, 2009). To foster attitudes that motivate us, we must develop a sense of wonder about culture. This sense of wonder can lead to feeling overwhelmed, humbled, or awed (Opdal, 2001). This sense of wonder may correlate to a high tolerance for uncertainty, which can help us turn potentially frustrating experiences we have into teachable moments. I've had many such moments in my intercultural encounters at home and abroad. One such moment came the first time I tried to cook a frozen pizza in the oven in the shared kitchen of my apartment in Sweden. The information on the packaging was written in Swedish, but like many college students, I had a wealth of experience cooking frozen pizzas to draw from. As I went to set the oven dial to preheat, I noticed it was strange that the oven didn't go up to my usual 425-450 degrees. Not to be deterred, I cranked the dial up as far as it would go, waited a few minutes, put my pizza in, and walked down the hall to my room to wait for about fifteen minutes until the pizza was done. The smell of smoke drew me from my room before the fifteen minutes was up, and I walked into a corridor filled with smoke and the smell of burnt pizza. I pulled the pizza out and was puzzled for a few minutes while I tried to figure out why the pizza burned so quickly, when one of my corridor-mates gently pointed out that the oven temperatures in Sweden are listed in Celsius, not Fahrenheit! Despite almost burning the kitchen down, I learned a valuable lesson about assuming my map for temperatures and frozen pizzas was the same as everyone else's.

Group of hands decorated with henna designs.jpg Henna Hands by CEU on Flickr

Discovering knowledge that informs us is another step that can build on our motivation. One tool involves learning more about our cognitive style, or how we learn. Our cognitive style consists of our preferred patterns for "gathering information, constructing meaning, and organizing and applying knowledge" (Bennett, 2009). As we explore cognitive styles, we discover that there are differences in how people attend to and perceive the world, explain events, organize the world, and use rules of logic (Nisbett, 2003). Some cultures have a cognitive style that focuses more on tasks, analytic and objective thinking, details and precision, inner direction, and independence, while others focus on relationships and people over tasks and things, concrete and metaphorical thinking, and a group consciousness and harmony.

Developing ICC is a complex learning process. At the basic level of learning, we accumulate knowledge and assimilate it into our existing frameworks. But accumulated knowledge doesn't necessarily help us in situations where we have to apply that knowledge. Transformative learning takes place at the highest levels and occurs when we encounter situations that challenge our accumulated knowledge and our ability to accommodate that knowledge to manage a real-world situation. The cognitive dissonance that results in these situations is often uncomfortable and can lead to a hesitance to repeat such an engagement. One tip for cultivating ICC that can help manage these challenges is to find a community of like-minded people who are also motivated to develop ICC. In my graduate program, I lived in the international dormitory in order to experience the cultural diversity that I had enjoyed so much studying abroad a few years earlier. I was surrounded by international students and U.S. American students who were more or less interested in cultural diversity. This ended up being a tremendous learning experience, and I worked on research about identity and communication between international and American students.

Developing skills that enable us is another part of ICC. Some of the skills important to ICC are the ability to empathize, accumulate cultural information, listen, resolve conflict, and manage anxiety (Bennett, 2009). Again, you are already developing a foundation for these skills by reading this book, but you can expand those skills to intercultural settings with the motivation and knowledge already described. Contact alone does not increase intercultural skills; there must be more deliberate measures taken to fully capitalize on those encounters. While research now shows that intercultural contact does decrease prejudices, this is not enough to become interculturally competent. The ability to empathize and manage anxiety enhances prejudice reduction, and these two skills have been shown to enhance the overall impact of intercultural contact even more than acquiring cultural knowledge. There is intercultural training available for people who are interested. If you can't access training, you may choose to research intercultural training on your own, as there are many books, articles, and manuals written on the subject.

Reflective practices can also help us process through rewards and challenges associated with developing ICC.

As we open ourselves to new experiences, we are likely to have both positive and negative reactions. It can be very useful to take note of negative or defensive reactions you have. This can help you identify certain triggers that may create barriers to effective intercultural interaction. Noting positive experiences can also help you identify triggers for learning that you could seek out or recreate to enhance the positive (Bednarz, 2010). A more complex method of reflection is called intersectional reflexivity. Intersectional reflexivity is a reflective practice by which we acknowledge intersecting identities, both privileged and disadvantaged, and implicate ourselves in social hierarchies and inequalities (Jones, 2010). This method brings in the concepts of dominant and nondominant groups and the privileges/disadvantages dialectic we discussed earlier.

While formal intercultural experiences like studying abroad or volunteering for the Special Olympics or a shelter for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth can result in learning, informal experiences are also important. We may be less likely to include informal experiences in our reflection if we don't see them as legitimate. Reflection should also include "critical incidents" or what I call "a-ha! moments." Think of reflection as a tool for metacompetence that can be useful in bringing the formal and informal together (Bednarz, 2010).

"Getting Competent"

Thinking under the Influence

Communication and culture scholar Brenda Allen coined the phrase "thinking under the influence" (TUI) to highlight a reflective process that can help us hone our intercultural communication competence (Allen, 2011). As we discussed earlier, being mindful is an important part of building competence. Once we can become aware of our thought processes and behaviors, we can more effectively monitor and intervene in them. She asks us to monitor our thoughts and feelings about other people, both similar to and different from us. As we monitor, we should try to identify instances when we are guilty of TUI, such as uncritically accepting the dominant belief systems, relying on stereotypes, or prejudging someone based on their identities. She recounts seeing a

picture on the front of the newspaper with three men who appeared Latino. She found herself wondering what they had done, and then found out from the caption that they were the relatives of people who died in a car crash. She identified that as a TUI moment and asked herself if she would have had the same thought if they had been Black, White, Asian, or female. When we feel "surprised" by someone different, this often points to a preexisting negative assumption that we can unpack and learn from. Allen also found herself surprised when a panelist at a conference who used a wheelchair and was hearing impaired made witty comments. Upon reflection, she realized that she had an assumption that people with disabilities would have a gloomy outlook on life. While these examples focus on out-groups, she also notes that it's important for people, especially in nondominant groups, to monitor their thoughts about their own group, as they may have internalized negative attitudes about their group from the dominant culture. As a Black woman, she notes that she has been critical of Black people who "do not speak mainstream English" based on stereotypes she internalized about race, language, and intelligence. It is not automatically a bad thing to TUI. Even Brenda Allen, an accomplished and admirable scholar of culture and communication, catches herself doing it. When we notice that we TUI, it's important to reflect on that moment and try to adjust our thinking processes. This is an ongoing process, but it is an easy-to-remember way to cultivate your ICC. Keep a record of instances where you catch yourself "thinking under the influence" and answer the following questions:

1. What triggers you to TUI?
2. Where did these influences on your thought come from?
3. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to change your thought processes?

[i] Stokes

[ii] http://culturalcommunicaiton.blogspot.com/2012/03/communication-and-intercultural.html

[iii] Stokes-Rice, 2019

[iv] http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.461.5459&rep=rep1&type=pdf

[v] Stokes-Rice, 2019

[vi] www.quora.com/How-is-cultural-integration-defined

[vii] COC Sociology 101 OER

[viii] Stokes-Rice, 2019

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8: ANCILLARY MATERIALS

8.1: Powerpoint Presentations
8.2: Speech Outlines

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8.1: Powerpoint Presentations

Attachments

File	Description	Last Modified
Chapter 1 - Introduction to Public Speaking.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 12 - Informative Speaking.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 14 - Persuasive Speaking.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 2 - Ethics.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 3 - Speaking with Confidence.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 4 - Listening Effectively.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 6 - Organizing and Outlining.pptx		September 20, 2021
Chapter 8 - Delivering Your Speech.pptx		September 20, 2021

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8.2: Speech Outlines

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