

Understanding Human Communication

NINTH EDITION



RONALD B. ADLER

GEORGE RODMAN

Understanding Human Communication, Ninth Edition

Ronald B. Adler
George Rodman

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UNDERSTANDING HUMAN COMMUNICATION



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Preface xiii

PART ONE: ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

- Chapter 1 Human Communication: What and Why 2**
- Chapter 2 Perception, the Self, and Communication 32**
- Chapter 3 Language 74**
- Chapter 4 Listening 114**
- Chapter 5 Nonverbal Communication 152**

PART TWO: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

- Chapter 6 Understanding Interpersonal Relationships 186**
- Chapter 7 Improving Interpersonal Relationships 226**

PART THREE: COMMUNICATION IN GROUPS

- Chapter 8 The Nature of Groups 260**
- Chapter 9 Solving Problems in Groups 288**

PART FOUR: PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

- Chapter 10 Choosing and Developing a Topic 326**
- Chapter 11 Organization and Support 352**
- Chapter 12 Presenting Your Message 386**
- Chapter 13 Informative Speaking 404**
- Chapter 14 Persuasive Speaking 426**

APPENDIX

- Appendix Interviewing 457**

Notes 481
Glossary 501
Credits 511
Index 515

PART ONE: ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER 1

HUMAN COMMUNICATION: WHAT AND WHY 2

COMMUNICATION DEFINED 4

- Communication Is Human 4
- Communication Is a Process 4
- Communication Is Symbolic 6

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION 6

- Intrapersonal Communication 6
- Dyadic/Interpersonal Communication 7
- Small Group Communication 8
- Public Communication 8
- Mass Communication 8

FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION 9

- Physical Needs 9
- Identity Needs 10
- Social Needs 11
- Practical Needs 11

MODELING COMMUNICATION 12

- A Linear Model 12
- A Transactional Model 15

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR? 18

- Communication Competence Defined 18
- Characteristics of Competent Communicators 21

CLARIFYING MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNICATION 24

- Communication Does Not Always Require Complete Understanding 24
- Communication Is Not Always a Good Thing 26
- No Single Person or Event Causes Another's Reaction 26
- Communication Will Not Solve All Problems 26
- Meanings Rest in People, Not Words 26
- Communication Is Not Simple 26
- More Communication Is Not Always Better 27

SUMMARY 28

KEY TERMS 28

ACTIVITIES 29

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 30

CHAPTER 2

PERCEPTION, THE SELF, AND COMMUNICATION 32

PERCEIVING OTHERS 34

- Narratives and Perception 34
- Common Perceptual Tendencies 36
- Situational Factors Influencing Perception 39
- Perception and Culture 41
- Empathy and Perception 43

PERCEIVING THE SELF 48

- Self-Concept Defined 48
- Communication and Development of the Self 49
- Culture and the Self-Concept 52
- The Self-Concept, Personality, and Communication 54
- The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy 55

IDENTITY MANAGEMENT: COMMUNICATION AS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT 58

- Public and Private Selves 58
- Characteristics of Identity Management 59
- Why Manage Impressions? 63
- How Do We Manage Impressions? 63
- Impression Management and Honesty 65

SUMMARY 69

KEY TERMS 69

ACTIVITIES 70

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 71

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE 74

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE 76

- Language Is Symbolic 76
- Meanings Are in People, Not Words 77
- Language Is Rule-Governed 78

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE 81

- Language Shapes Attitudes 81
- Language Reflects Attitudes 85

TROUBLESOME LANGUAGE 88

- The Language of Misunderstandings 88
- Disruptive Language 94
- Evasive Language 96

GENDER AND LANGUAGE 98

- Content 99
- Reasons for Communicating 99
- Conversational Style 100
- Nongender Variables 101

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE 103

- Verbal Communication Styles 103
- Language and Worldview 106
- Language Use in North American Culture 109

SUMMARY 110

KEY TERMS 111

ACTIVITIES 111

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 112

CHAPTER 4

LISTENING 114

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LISTENING 116

- Listening and Hearing Are Not the Same Thing 116
- Listening Is Not a Natural Process 118
- Listening Requires Effort 119
- All Listeners Do Not Receive the Same Message 119

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING 119

- Faulty Listening Behaviors 119
- Reasons For Poor Listening 121

PERSONAL LISTENING STYLES 126

- Content-Oriented 126
- People-Oriented 126
- Action-Oriented 126
- Time-Oriented 127

INFORMATIONAL LISTENING 127

- Don't Argue or Judge Prematurely 128
- Separate the Message from the Speaker 129
- Be Opportunistic 129
- Look for Key Ideas 130
- Ask Questions 130
- Paraphrase 131
- Take Notes 133

CRITICAL LISTENING 134

- Listen for Information Before Evaluating 135
- Evaluate the Speaker's Credibility 135
- Examine the Speaker's Evidence and Reasoning 135
- Examine Emotional Appeals 136

EMPATHIC LISTENING 137

Advising 138
Judging 138
Analyzing 139
Questioning 140
Supporting 142
Prompting 143

Paraphrasing 143
When and How to Help? 146

SUMMARY 147
KEY TERMS 148
ACTIVITIES 148
FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 149

CHAPTER 5

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION 152

CHARACTERISTICS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION 154

Nonverbal Communication Exists 155
Nonverbal Behavior Has Communicative Value 155
Nonverbal Communication Is Primarily Relational 156
Nonverbal Communication Is Ambiguous 157
Nonverbal Communication Is Different from Verbal Communication 159
Nonverbal Skills Are Important 159

INFLUENCES ON NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION 160

Culture 160
Gender 161

FUNCTIONS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION 163

Repeating 163
Substituting 163
Complementing 163
Accenting 164
Regulating 164

Contradicting 164
Deceiving 165

TYPES OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION 167

Posture and Gesture 168
Face and Eyes 168
Voice 170
Touch 171
Physical Attractiveness 173
Clothing 174
Distance 176
Time 178
Territoriality 178
Environment 179

SUMMARY 180
KEY TERMS 181
ACTIVITIES 181
FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 183

PART TWO: INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER 6

UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 186

CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 188

What Makes Communication Interpersonal? 188
Interpersonal Communication and the Internet 189
Content and Relational Messages 190
Metacommunication 192

INTIMACY IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 193

Dimensions of Intimacy 193

Male and Female Intimacy Styles 194
Cultural Influences on Intimacy 195

RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE 197

A Developmental Perspective 197
A Dialectical Perspective 201
Characteristics of Relational Development and Maintenance 205

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 206

- Models of Self-Disclosure 207
- Characteristics of Effective Self-Disclosure 210
- Guidelines for Appropriate Self-Disclosure 213
- Alternatives to Self-Disclosure 214

- SUMMARY** 220
- KEY TERMS** 220
- ACTIVITIES** 221
- FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** 222

CHAPTER 7

IMPROVING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 226

COMMUNICATION CLIMATES IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS 228

- Confirming and Disconfirming Messages 228
- How Communication Climates Develop 231
- Creating Positive Communication Climates 232

MANAGING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT 235

- The Nature of Conflict 235
- Styles of Expressing Conflict 236
- Characteristics of an Assertive Message 239

- Gender and Conflict Style 243
- Cultural Influences on Conflict 245
- Methods of Conflict Resolution 247
- Steps in Win-Win Problem Solving 250

- SUMMARY** 254
- KEY TERMS** 254
- ACTIVITIES** 255
- FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** 255

PART THREE: COMMUNICATION IN GROUPS

CHAPTER 8

THE NATURE OF GROUPS 260

WHAT IS A GROUP? 262

- Interaction 262
- Interdependence 263
- Time 264
- Size 264
- Goals 265

GOALS OF GROUPS AND THEIR MEMBERS 265

- Individual Goals 265
- Group Goals 266

TYPES OF GROUPS 267

- Learning Groups 267
- Problem-Solving Groups 267
- Social Groups 269
- Growth Groups 269

CHARACTERISTICS OF GROUPS 269

- Rules and Norms 270

- Roles 272
- Patterns of Interaction 277
- Decision-Making Methods 279

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON GROUP COMMUNICATION 281

- Individualism versus Collectivism 282
- Power Distance 283
- Uncertainty Avoidance 284
- Task versus Social Orientation 284
- Short- versus Long-Term Orientation 285

- SUMMARY** 285
- KEY TERMS** 285
- ACTIVITIES** 286
- FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION** 286

CHAPTER 9

SOLVING PROBLEMS IN GROUPS 288

PROBLEM SOLVING IN GROUPS: WHEN AND WHY 290

Advantages of Group Problem Solving 290
When to Use Groups for Problem Solving 292

GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING FORMATS 294

Types of Problem-Solving Groups 294
Computer-Mediated Groups 296

APPROACHES AND STAGES IN PROBLEM SOLVING 297

A Structured Problem-Solving Approach 297
Developmental Stages in Problem-Solving Groups 303

MAINTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS 305

Basic Skills 305

Building Cohesiveness 305

LEADERSHIP AND POWER IN GROUPS 308

Power in Groups 308
What Makes Leaders Effective? 311

OVERCOMING DANGERS IN GROUP DISCUSSION 316

Information Underload and Overload 316
Unequal Participation 316
Pressure to Conform 318

SUMMARY 319

KEY TERMS 320

ACTIVITIES 320

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 321

PART FOUR: PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER 10

CHOOSING AND DEVELOPING A TOPIC 326

CHOOSING A TOPIC 329

Look for a Topic Early 329
Choose a Topic That Interests You 329

DEFINING PURPOSE 329

General Purpose 330
Specific Purpose 330
The Thesis Statement 332

ANALYZING THE SPEAKING SITUATION 333

The Listener: Audience Analysis 333
The Occasion 338

GATHERING INFORMATION 340

Internet Research 340
Library Research 343
Interviewing 344
Personal Observation 344
Survey Research 345

SAMPLE SPEECH 346

SUMMARY 348

KEY TERMS 349

ACTIVITIES 349

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 350

CHAPTER 11

ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT 352

STRUCTURING THE SPEECH 354

Working Outline 354
Formal Outline 354
Speaking Notes 355

PRINCIPLES OF OUTLINING 355

Standard Symbols 356
Standard Format 356
The Rule of Division 356

The Rule of Parallel Wording 358

ORGANIZING YOUR POINTS IN A LOGICAL ORDER 358

USING TRANSITIONS 362

BEGINNING AND ENDING THE SPEECH 362

The Introduction 362

The Conclusion 366

SUPPORTING MATERIAL 367

Functions of Supporting Material 367

Types of Supporting Material 369

Styles of Support: Narration and Citation 372

USING VISUAL AIDS 373

Types of Visual Aids 373

Media for the Presentation of Visual Aids 375

Rules for Using Visual Aids 378

SAMPLE SPEECH 379

SUMMARY 383

KEY TERMS 383

ACTIVITIES 383

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 384

CHAPTER 12

PRESENTING YOUR MESSAGE 386

DEALING WITH STAGE FRIGHT 388

Facilitative and Debilitative Stage Fright 388

Sources of Debilitative Stage Fright 388

Overcoming Debilitative Stage Fright 390

TYPES OF DELIVERY 391

Extemporaneous 391

Impromptu 392

Manuscript 393

Memorized 394

PRACTICING THE SPEECH 394

GUIDELINES FOR DELIVERY 395

Visual Aspects of Delivery 395

Auditory Aspects of Delivery 397

OFFERING CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM 400

SUMMARY 401

KEY TERMS 401

ACTIVITIES 401

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 402

CHAPTER 13

INFORMATIVE SPEAKING 404

TYPES OF INFORMATIVE SPEAKING 407

By Content 407

By Purpose 407

INFORMATIVE VERSUS PERSUASIVE TOPICS 408

An Informative Topic Tends to Be

Noncontroversial 408

The Informative Speaker Does Not Intend to Change

Audience Attitudes 408

TECHNIQUES OF INFORMATIVE SPEAKING 409

Define a Specific Informative Purpose 409

Create Information Hunger 410

Make It Easy to Listen 411

Emphasize Important Points 411

Use a Clear Organization and Structure 412

Use Supporting Material Effectively 414

Use Clear, Simple Language 414

Generate Audience Involvement 415

SAMPLE SPEECH 417

SUMMARY 424

KEY TERMS 424

ACTIVITIES 424

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 425

CHAPTER 14

PERSUASIVE SPEAKING 426

CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSUASION 428

- Persuasion Is Not Coercive 428
- Persuasion Is Usually Incremental 428
- Persuasion Is Interactive 430
- Persuasion Can Be Ethical 430

CATEGORIZING TYPES OF PERSUASION 432

- By Types of Proposition 432
- By Desired Outcome 433
- By Directness of Approach 434

CREATING THE PERSUASIVE MESSAGE 436

- Set a Clear, Persuasive Purpose 436
- Structure the Message Carefully 437
- Use Solid Evidence 439
- Avoid Fallacies 441

ADAPTING TO THE AUDIENCE 442

- Establish Common Ground 443
- Organize According to the Expected Response 443
- Neutralize Potential Hostility 444

BUILDING CREDIBILITY AS A SPEAKER 445

- Competence 445
- Character 446
- Charisma 446

SAMPLE SPEECH 447

SUMMARY 451

KEY TERMS 452

ACTIVITIES 452

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION 453

APPENDIX

INTERVIEWING 457

THE NATURE OF INTERVIEWING 458

- Interviewing* Defined 458
- How Interviewing Differs from Conversation 460

PLANNING THE INTERVIEW 460

- The Interviewer's Role 460
- The Interviewee's Role 466

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW 467

- Stages of an Interview 467
- The Interviewer's Responsibilities 468
- The Interviewee's Responsibilities 469

THE SELECTION INTERVIEW 470

- Employment Strategies 470
- Tips for the Interviewee 471

THE INFORMATION GATHERING INTERVIEW 475

- Prepare for the Interview 476
- Choose the Right Interviewee 476
- Informational Interviewing Tips 476

OTHER INTERVIEW TYPES 477

- The Persuasive Interview 477
- The Counseling Interview 479
- The Survey Interview 479

SUMMARY 480

KEY TERMS 480

- Notes 481
- Glossary 501
- Credits 511
- Index 515

PREFACE



We asked George Rodman's daughter Jenny (a college senior) and Ron Adler's son Daniel (a freshman) what distinguishes good textbooks from bad ones. A good text, they told us, ought to spell out how theory and research relate to everyday life. It should be loaded with interesting examples that help make the subject matter clear. A good textbook should speak to students with a reader-friendly voice, talking *to* them rather than over their heads or down at them. Our college students told us that a good text should be visually inviting—ideally offering at least one interesting extra-textual element on every two-page spread. Finally, they told us that a good text should give them tools to master the material and earn a grade they can be proud of.

We also asked our colleagues what they think distinguishes a good textbook. Above all, they told us, a good text must present an accurate and comprehensive picture of the academic work it addresses. It should be manageable within the length of an academic term. An ideal text, our colleagues told us, would make life easier for them by giving students plenty of learning support.

BASIC APPROACH

We have worked hard to make sure this ninth edition of *Understanding Human Communication* meets the needs of both students and their professors as described above. If we've succeeded, students will find this book is clear, interesting and useful, and that it provides tools that will help them succeed in their first serious exploration of human communication. And if we've done our job, professors will find the book does justice to the discipline and helps make their teaching more efficient and effective.

This edition builds on the approach that has served over a half million students and their professors well in the past. Rather than take sides in the theory vs. skills debate that often rages in our discipline, *Understanding Human Communication* treats scholarship and skill development as mutually reinforcing. Its reader-friendly approach strives to present material clearly without being overly simplistic. A wealth of examples helps make concepts clear and interesting. A handsome design makes the material inviting, as do a collection of stimulating photos, interesting readings, amusing and instructive cartoons, and well-chosen quotations. Marginal definitions of cultural idioms help non-native English speakers make sense of colloquial expressions.

Every chapter of this book emphasizes the influence of both culture and technology on human communication. Along with discussion in the text itself, sidebars highlight key topics in this area. **Understanding Diversity** sidebars (many new to this edition) address subjects including the cultural challenges of overseas customer service call centers; how ethnic names shape perception; a disorder that interferes with interpreting nonverbal cues; how different cultures regard the kinds of intimacy 21st century western society views as ideal; and how effective public speakers deal with cultural diversity in their audiences.

Understanding Communication Technology boxes focus on topics including how instant messaging can improve relationships; how online game play-

ers create new identities; the specialized vocabulary of e-mail; software that allows groups to work online; how heavy television viewing by children can create poor listening skills later in life; and how online groups can promote unhealthy practices like eating disorders.

CHANGES IN THE NINTH EDITION

Our primary focus in this edition has been on enhancing *student success*. This edition of *Understanding Human Communication* contains several improvements that should help students master the material more effectively.

Case studies now open each part, presenting real-life communication challenges on the job, in school, and in personal relationships. Each case study comes with thought provoking questions that encourage students to apply the information in each chapter to understand and solve the problem.

Each chapter now opens with a list of **chapter highlights** that preview the upcoming material in a way that is more readable and understandable than a traditional outline. These highlights aren't just a preview: They also serve as a useful review tool that will help students understand the chapter's contents as they study for exams.

Key terms are now listed at the end of each chapter, where they will make more sense after students have read the material. Page numbers where the term first appeared accompany each entry, making it easy for students to refer to that section of the text.



Marginal icons like those in the margin direct students to resources that will help them understand concepts in the text and apply them to their own lives. The pencil icon refers to activities at the end of each chapter. The CD icon indicates an activity in the Student Resources section of the CD-ROM that accompanies the text. Every chapter of this edition contains changes that expand and enrich the contents. Among other topics, this edition discusses the ethical challenges of identity management online, how the careless use of language can cause others pain, ways to detect deception via nonverbal cues, and gender differences in nonverbal communication. It offers an expanded discussion of the differences between personal and impersonal communication, describes how interpersonal communication operates on the Internet, explores the ethics of "benign" dishonesty in maintaining relationships, and describes ways people use communication to create greater distance with others in personal relationships.

This edition contains all-new sample speeches on topics that college students will find intriguing such as binge drinking, the psychological effects of the war against terrorism, and modern forms of slavery. The analyses of these speeches include full outlines and commentary by the students themselves, as well as the authors of this book. In addition, the book offers the latest information on using the Internet for speech research. It looks at the latest software for speech organization, as well as the latest research on why PowerPoint isn't always a speaker's best friend. The book contains increased coverage of strategies for overcoming stage fright and provides new information about the effects of information overload on informative speaking. The discussion of persuasion explores the ethical dimensions of using emotional evidence, as well as methods of neutralizing hostility in an audience.

ANCILLARY PACKAGE

This edition of *Understanding Human Communication* contains a results-oriented package of **ancillary materials** that will make teaching more efficient and learning more effective. For students, each new copy of the text comes with a free **Student Resources Disc**, which includes a complete study guide to the text; dozens of fill-in-the-spaces activities that students can complete on a computer, then print out and turn in for feedback; self-tests; sample speech videos; and much more. The *Understanding Human Communication Web site* (www.oup.com/us/uhc) offers a wealth of resources including links to articles and websites on a variety of communication topics and viewing guides for feature films that illustrate how communication concepts appear in a variety of settings. For those wanting additional support, a brief **Student Success Manual** is available and is packed with tips that will show how to master the course material and improve study skills. The **Instructor's Manual** provides the largest, most comprehensive package of support of any text in its market. It includes a copy of the rewritten and expanded **test bank** (also provided to instructors on disc), as well as a printed version of all the quizzes and study materials that appear in the Student Resources Disc.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Anyone involved with creating a textbook knows that the authors wouldn't exist without the contributions of many people.

We are grateful to the talent and hard work of our colleagues who developed the package of ancillary materials that will help instructors teach more effectively and students succeed in mastering the material in this text. TJ Jenkins of James Madison University developed the massive *Instructor's Manual* and bank of exam questions. The eagle-eyed Ingrid Peternel, College of DuPage, continued to define Cultural Idioms that will help non-native speakers understand the text better (while they also help native speakers understand how cultural idioms work). Jeanne Elmhurst of Albuquerque TVI Community College created both the *Student Success Manual* and *Student Resources Manual* on the CD-ROM.

We thank professors from far-flung colleges and universities for their constructive suggestions that led to the improvements in this edition of *Understanding Human Communication*: Beth Bryant, Northern Virginia Community College, Loudoun; Patricia Connell, Gadsden State Community College; Rebecca Ellison, Jefferson College; Judy Litterst, St. Cloud State College; Jim Mignerey, St. Petersburg College; Emily Osbun-Bermes, Indiana-Purdue University at Fort Wayne; Doug Parry, University of Alaska at Anchorage; Dan Robinette, Eastern Kentucky University; Theresa Rogers, Baltimore City Community College, Liberty; Patricia Spence, Richland Community College; Maria Jaskot-Inclan, Wilbur Wright College, and Princess Williams, Suffolk County Community College. Thanks are also due to the faculty members who reviewed the test bank questions for clarity, accuracy, and relevance: Pete Bicak, SUNY Rockland; Jo-Anne Bryant, Troy State University Montgomery; Catriona O'Curry, Bellevue Community College; Michele Russell, Northern Virginia Community College; and Sarah Stout, Kellogg Community College.

The professionals at Oxford University Press have been a delight to work with on this project. We salute Peter Labella, Sean Mahoney, Elyse Dubin, Karen Shapiro, Scott Burns, Jeanne Ambrosio, Cathleen Elliott, Jill Crosson, Emily Pillars, and Shiwani Srivastava.

We also thank the freelance professionals on the UHC team: Janet Bollow-Allyn for designing this handsome book you are holding, Sherri Adler for locating the photos it contains, and Sandra Lord for securing rights to use them. We are deeply grateful to our talented and tireless development editor Carol Wada, who orchestrated this project.

Finally, we thank our families for their good-natured tolerance and support of our efforts during the year we worked on *Understanding Human Communication*. In the end, we did it for you.

Ronald B. Adler
George Rodman

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN COMMUNICATION

PART ONE

CASE STUDY

You have been approached by a publishing company that is planning a book titled *About the Americans*. This guide is designed for travelers from other countries who will be visiting the United States, and who need to understand how Americans communicate.

The book will be a compilation of observations by a large number of

people who have lived in the United States, both native-born Americans and visitors. The authors believe that insights of keen observers will reveal a great deal about how communication operates in this country.

The publishers have chosen you because you are a student who has systematically studied com-

About the Americans

munication. They will pay handsomely if your observations show how the principles covered in your communication course operate in everyday life.

Use the activities and questions below to structure your observations. Give **specific examples** of communication in the United States to illustrate each of your points.

As you read the chapters in this unit, consider the following:

CHAPTER 1

1. Describe an incident that illustrates how communication is a symbolic process.
2. Using your own experience, describe 2–3 examples of each type of communication (intrapersonal, dyadic/interpersonal, small group, public, and mass) in everyday life.
3. Discuss one or more typical communication transactions that aim at satisfying each type of need: physical, identity, social, and practical.
4. Use an incident from everyday life to illustrate the transactional process of communication, as described on pages 15–18.
5. Use the characteristics of competent communication (pages 18–24) to evaluate one transaction you have observed or experienced.
6. Show how avoiding common misconceptions about communication (pages 24–27) can make relationships more satisfying.

CHAPTER 2

1. Describe a case where an American and someone from another country might have incompatible narratives.
2. Discuss how common perceptual tendencies (pages 36–39), situational factors (pages 39–41), and cultural differences (pages 41–43) have led to friction. How might greater empathy have helped the people involved communicate more smoothly?
3. Explain some of the factors (personal and cultural) that have helped shape your self-concept.
4. Using yourself or someone you know as an example, describe how the process of identity management operates during an average day. Discuss the ethics of presenting multiple identities.

CHAPTER 3

1. Describe an incident illustrating how meanings reside in people, not words.
2. Recall incidents when (a) language shaped your attitudes, and (b) when your own choice of words reflected your attitudes.
3. Explain how the types of troublesome language described on pages 88–94 have caused problems in a situation you experienced or observed.
4. Based on your experience in U.S. culture, describe how gender and nongender variables described on pages 98–103 affect communication.
5. Give examples illustrating which communication styles described on pages 103–106 operate in mainstream U.S. culture.

ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION



CHAPTER 4

1. Describe situations from your own experience illustrating the listening misconceptions listed on pages 116–119.
2. Recall examples of at least three of the faulty listening behaviors described on pages 119–121.
3. Describe how a situation at work or school looks and sounds different depending on which of the personal listening styles (pages 126–127) was used.
4. Apply the guidelines in the second half of this chapter to three situations that require good listening: one informational, one critical, and one empathic.

CHAPTER 5

1. Use the information in this Chapter to write a set of guidelines for newcomers to the United States on how nonverbal communication operates in this country. Pay special attention to unspoken rules governing various types of nonverbal communication: touch, voice, time, etc.



AFTER STUDYING THE MATERIAL IN THIS CHAPTER . . .

You should understand:

1. The working definition and characteristics of *communication*.
2. The types of communication covered in this book.
3. The needs satisfied by communication.
4. The characteristics of linear and transactional communication models.
5. The characteristics of competent communication.
6. Common misconceptions about communication.

You should be able to:

1. Define *communication* and give specific examples of the various types of communication introduced in this chapter.
2. Describe the key needs you attempt to satisfy in your life by communicating.
3. Use the criteria in this chapter to identify the degree to which communication (yours or others') in a specific situation is competent and suggest ways of increasing the competence level.
4. Identify how misconceptions about communication can create problems and suggest how a more accurate analysis of the situations you describe can lead to better outcomes.

Human Communication: What and Why

CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

Communication, as we will study it in this book, possesses three important characteristics:

- It occurs between humans
- It is a process
- It is symbolic

There are several different types of communication introduced in this chapter:

- Intrapersonal
- Dyadic/interpersonal
- Small group
- Public
- Mass

Communication helps satisfy a number of needs in our lives:

- Physical needs
- Identity needs
- Social needs
- Practical needs

Models of communication help us understand what is involved in this process.

- The linear model is familiar, but overly simplistic
- The transactional model better describes how people communicate

Communication competence is a measure of a person's effectiveness. This chapter explores competence by

- Defining the nature of competence and how it is acquired
- Outlining the characteristics of competent communicators

Clarifying certain misconceptions about communication helps us understand how the process works effectively. We will consider the following clarifications of common misconceptions:

- Communication doesn't always require complete understanding
- Communication isn't always a good thing
- No single person or event causes another's reaction
- Communication won't solve all problems
- Meanings rest in people, not words
- Communication isn't as simple as it often seems
- More communication isn't always better

COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Because this is a book about *communication*, it makes sense to begin by defining that term. This is not as simple as it might seem because people use the term in a variety of ways that are only vaguely related:

- Family members, coworkers, and friends make such statements about their relationships as “We just can’t communicate” or “We communicate perfectly.”
- Businesspeople talk about “office communications systems” consisting of computers, telephones, printers, and so on.
- Scientists study and describe communication among ants, dolphins, and other animals.
- Certain organizations label themselves “communications conglomerates,” publishing newspapers, books, and magazines and owning radio and television stations.

There is clearly some relationship among uses of the term such as these, but we need to narrow our focus before going on. A look at the table of contents of this book shows that it obviously doesn’t deal with animals, computers, or newspapers. Neither is it about Holy Communion, the bestowing of a material thing, or many of the other subjects mentioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s 1,200-word definition of *communication*.

What, then, *are* we talking about when we use the term *communication*? A survey of the ways in which scholars use the word will show that there is no single, universally accepted usage. Some definitions are long and complex, whereas others are brief and simple. This isn’t the place to explore the differences between these conceptions or to defend one against the others. What we need is a working definition that will help us in our study. For our purposes we will say that **communication** refers to the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behavior of other persons.

A point-by-point examination of this definition reveals some important characteristics of communication as we will be studying it.

Communication Is Human

In this book we’ll be discussing communication between human beings. Animals clearly do communicate: Bees instruct their hive-mates about the location of food by a meaning-laden dance. Chimpanzees have been taught to express themselves with the same sign language used by deaf humans, and a few have developed impressive vocabularies. And on a more commonplace level, pet owners can testify to the variety of messages their animals can express. Although this subject of animal communication is fascinating and important, it goes beyond the scope of this book.¹

Communication Is a Process

We often talk about communication as if it occurred in discrete, individual acts such as one person’s utterance or a conversation. In fact, communication is a continuous, ongoing process. Consider, for example, a friend’s compliment about your appearance. Your interpreta-



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