

Exploring Communication in the Real World

EXPLORING COMMUNICATION IN THE REAL WORLD

An Introduction to Speech Communication

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College of DuPage Digital Press

Glen Ellyn, IL



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Chapter 1: Introduction to Communication Studies

How did humans develop the ability to communicate? Are humans the only creatures on earth that communicate? What purpose does communication serve in our lives? Answers to these historical, anthropological, and social-scientific questions provide part of the diversity of knowledge that makes up the field of communication studies. As a student of communication, you will learn that there is much more to the field than public speaking, even though the origins of communication studies are traced back thousands of years to ancient Greek philosophers and teachers like Plato and Aristotle who were the first to systematically study and write about speech. Communication students and scholars also study basic communication processes like nonverbal communication, perception, and listening, as well as communication in various contexts, including interpersonal, group, intercultural, and media communication.

Communication has been called the most practical of the academic disciplines. Even the most theoretical and philosophical communication scholars are also practitioners of communication, and even though you have likely never taken another communication studies class, you have a lifetime of experience communicating. This experiential knowledge provides a useful foundation and a starting point from which you can build the knowledge and practice the skills necessary to become a more competent and ethical communicator. I always inform my students that I consider them communication scholars while they are taking my class, and I am pleased to welcome you to the start of your communication studies journey. Whether you stay on this path for a semester or for much longer, studying communication has the potential to enrich your life in many ways.

[1]

Communication: History and Forms

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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*. In his book *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey, educator, philosopher, and *not* the founder of the Dewey decimal system stated, “Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common” (1916, p. 5). For our purposes in this book, we will defer to John Dewey and employ his definition of communication. According to Dewey (1916) “communication is a sharing of experience till [sic] it becomes a common possession” (p. 11). Contemporarily, we can define communication as process of sharing meaning through the sending and receiving of 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, the definition and understanding of the construct of communication has evolved. Let’s start by looking at a history of the field.

From Aristotle to obama: A Brief History of Communication

While there are rich areas of study in animal communication and interspecies communication, however 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). For example, we have the capacity to use abstract symbols, like the word *education*, to discuss a construct 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 the same gorilla’s ability to use symbols doesn’t extend to the same level of abstraction as does the human being. Despite our capabilities to think differently than other mammals, however, human communication has changed significantly over the past millennium.

Some scholars speculate that humans' first words were onomatopoeic. 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.



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 contexts, participants, messages, channels, feedback, and noise. The five main forms of communication, all of which will be explored in much more detail in this book, are intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public address, and mass communication. This book is designed to introduce you to all these forms of 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, or sometimes referred to as “self-talk,” is communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking (Sellnow et al, 2018, p. 23). Like other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication is triggered by some internal or external stimulus. We may, for example, communicate with oneself about what to eat after seeing another person take a bite of a sandwich or when we smell the unique odor created by dunking raw potatoes into boiling oil. Unlike other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication takes place *only* inside our heads. As will be explained later, the other forms of communication must be *perceived* by someone else to meet the criterion for communication. So what is the point of intrapersonal message if no one else ever sees it, hears it, touches it, tastes it, or smells it?



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, 1972). For example, a person may use self-talk to calm himself down in a stressful situation, or a shy person may remind herself to smile during a social event. Intrapersonal communication also helps build and maintain our self-concept. We 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 [Chapter 2 “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, 1972).

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 employ intrapersonal communication to simply pass time. More than likely, there is a swath of intrapersonal communication going on in waiting rooms, in classrooms, in work environments as well as in the confines of your own home as you are reading this sentence. In all of the aforementioned scenarios, the fundamental understanding is that intrapersonal communication is usually unplanned and doesn't include a clearly defined goal (Dance & Larson, 1972). 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. This is probably due to the fact that intrapersonal communication seems to be better suited to individuals interested in the study of human psychology rather than those of us interested in the study 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 branches of communication, both a sender *AND* a receiver are present, thus making this facet of communication inherently unique from the other forms of academic inquiry.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is communication between two people whose lives mutually influence one another. Interpersonal communication, or sometimes referred as “dyadic 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, 1972). 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.

Small Group Communication

Group communication is communication amongst three or more people, who feel a sense of belonging, either influence or are willing to be influenced and all of whom are working towards a common shared goal. You have likely worked in groups at work, in school, and in extra curricular activities. Furthermore, if you are like most people, group communication is not something you enjoy and/or are very good at 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.



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 usually intentional and may include formal group rules rather than assumed norms that tend to drive most communication. 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 group experience that more communicators usually leads to more conflict. 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 relational-oriented conflict amongst the group membership. Since group members also communicate with and relate to each other interpersonally, may have preexisting relationships, or may develop them during the course of group interaction, the tenets of interpersonal communication are multiplied due to the sheer volume of communicated messages. [Chapter 13 “Small Group Communication”](#) and [Chapter 14 “Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups”](#) of this book, which deal 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 overall functionality 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 do not enjoy.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=23>

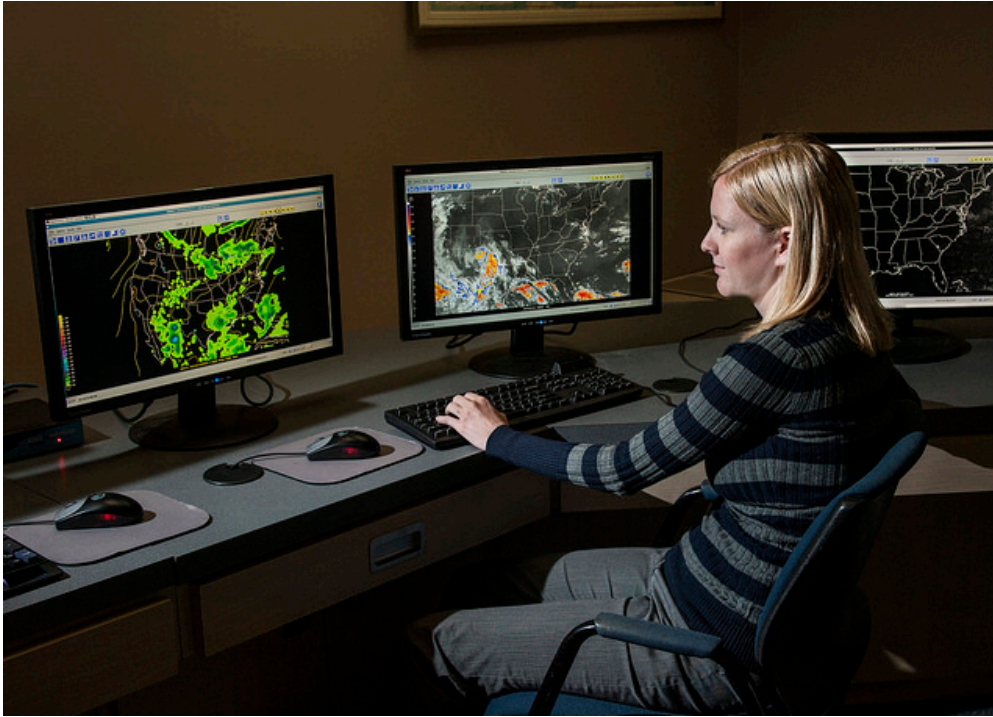
But, just like group communication, public speaking is an important part of our academic, professional, and civic lives. When compared to interpersonal and group communication, public communication is the most intentional, most formal, and most goal-oriented form of communication we have discussed.

Public communication, at least in Western societies, is predominately sender-focused. 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 do not necessarily develop individual relationships with audience members, they still have the benefit of being engaged face-to-face, thus the speaker is able to receive verbal and nonverbal feedback. Later in this chapter, you will learn some strategies for managing speaking anxiety, since presentations are a requirement in the basic speech at College of DuPage. In [Chapter 9 “Preparing a Speech”](#), [Chapter 10 “Delivering a Speech”](#), [Chapter 11 “Informative and Persuasive Speaking”](#), and [Chapter 12 “Public Speaking in Various Contexts”](#), 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.



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 the intersection of media and communication more in [Chapter 15 "Media, Technology, and Communication"](#) and [Chapter 16 "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 <http://whatcanidowiththismajor.com/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

1. What Can I Do with This Major? “Communication Studies,” accessed May 18, 2012, <http://whatcanidowiththismajor.com/major/communication-studies>

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).

Media Attributions

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The Communication Process

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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 principles. 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 linear, interaction, and transaction models.

Although these models of communication somewhat differ, there is some commonality amongst and within the models. The first two models we will discuss: the transmission (sometimes referred to as the linear model) model and the interaction model, include the following parts: sender-message-receiver. In communication models, the senders and receivers of messages are considered participants in the communicative 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.



Although models of communication provide a useful blueprint to see how the communication process works, they are not complex enough to capture what communication is like as it is experienced.

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 receiver.

L. T. Townsend's book entitled The Art of Speech: Vol. 1 – Studies in Poetry and Prose (1884) demonstrates the linear model of communication in his text. Townsend (1884) writes,

Among our earliest observations we find people talking to one another. The phenomenon is looked upon, at first, as merely a commonplace event; but later, the attention of the observer is arrested. A person having a thought, and wishing to awaken a corresponding thought in the mind of someone else, is seen to do so by emitting, at stated intervals, a portion of his breath, modified by certain movements of the vocal organs. These movements are known to start corresponding undulations in the atmosphere, which, reaching the hearing organs of the listener, are supposed to excite in them vibrations corresponding identically with the original vibrations in the vocal organs of the speaker; then, through the agency of instinct, invention, and the laws of association, the two persons have the same thought. (p. 9)

Early communication scholars were also influenced by the advent, spread, and success of the industrial revolution, yet furthermore, communication, as an academic discipline, was heavily influenced over the 20th century due to the end of institutional slavery, two World Wars, and of new communication technologies of the time such as telegraphy, radio, and eventually television. 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 does not 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.

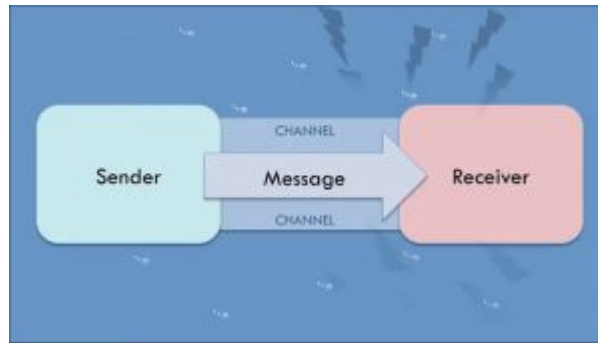


Figure 1.1 The Linear Model of Communication

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, or noise, that interferes with effective communication. Noise is anything that inhibits your ability to effectively communicate. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, noise may interfere with a message being accurately received and decoded. The linear 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. Furthermore, the wonderful smell of food cooking in the kitchen may also interfere with your ability to effectively encode or decode messages that are exchanged during the interaction. 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, MAC computers sometimes struggle to decode files that originated from a PC computer. Likewise, most Arabic speakers cannot accurately decode Dutch and vice versa. Semantic noise can also interfere in communication between people speaking the same language because many words have multiple or unfamiliar meanings. For example, people in the southern United States refer to soda drinks as Coke, while individuals who live in the midwest region may refer to the same product as “pop” or “soda.” Simply, your geographic location has significant influence on your language choices and, sometimes, in your inability to decode information even when the individuals are “speaking the same language.”

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 in greater detail 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) and in highly intimate friendship groups. 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. Certainly, if you have a phone you have either sent or received one of these “autocorrected” text messages and experienced the confusion when a word or phrase is spelled incorrectly. Or to make matters move from bad to worse, imagine sending that “one message” to the wrong person? More than likely, you have been on both sides of these awkward text mishaps before.

“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.

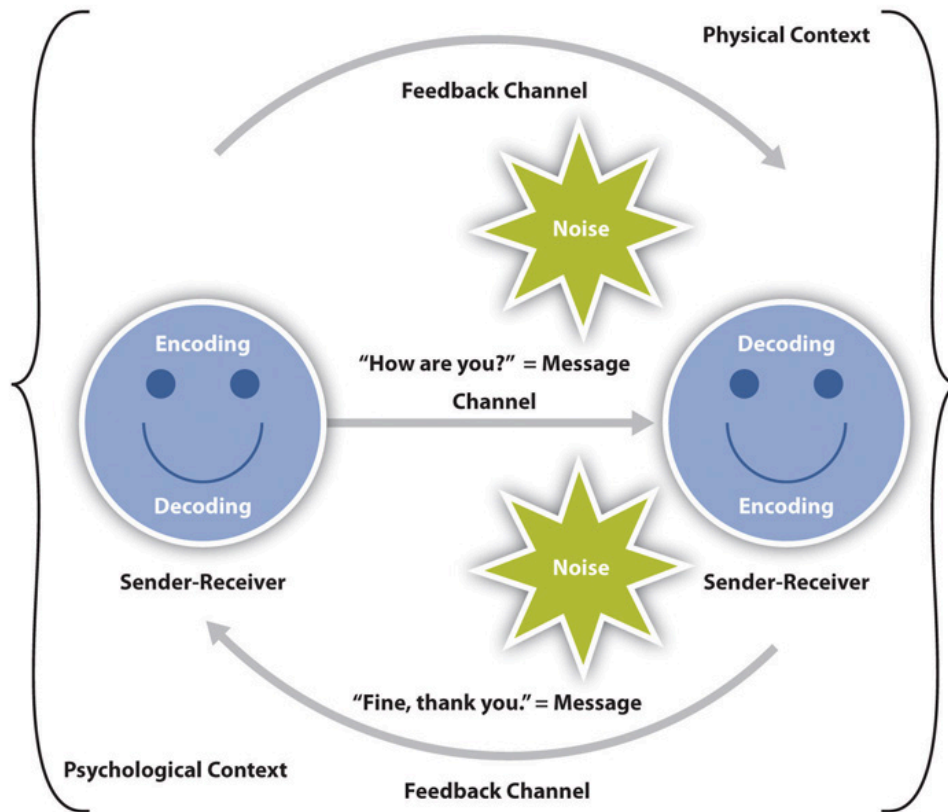
1. In a typical day, what types of CMC do you use?
2. What are some ways that CMC reduces stress in your life? What are some ways that CMC increases stress in your life? Overall, do you think CMC adds to or reduces your stress more?
3. Do you think we, as a society, have less value for FtF communication 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 complex 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 because there are multiple messages being sent at one time 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. Perhaps you have a job interviews on a sofa in a comfortable office, sitting around a large conference table, or perhaps in an auditorium where I was positioned on the stage facing about twenty potential colleagues seated in the audience. These two physical spaces will influence your ability to encode and decode messages differently depending on the expectations of the environment. The temperature of the environment will also influence your communication. Imagine walking around campus to interview various people in temperatures below freezing. Now imagine conducting those aforementioned interviews while walking around Puerto Rico, outside, wearing a suit in near 90 degree temperatures. Certainly, you can understand how temperature affects your ability to communicate. The physical context will influence your communication choices.

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. Some speakers will recently find some troubling news a few hours before a big public presentation. More than likely, the speaker found the presentation was more challenging because of the psychological noise triggered by the stressful news before the engagement began. 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 ignore incompatible personality traits or avoid negatively evaluating 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

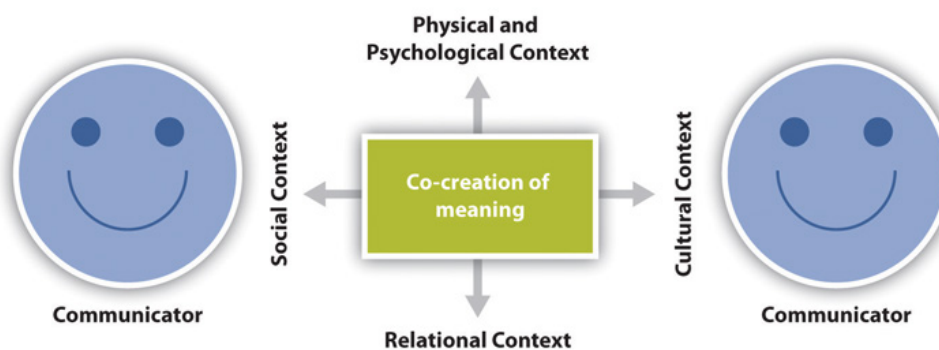
meaning. As much as we like to compare, humans are not computers, and we sometimes relationally struggle with the alternation between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. Scholars also frequently use the phrase, “One cannot NOT communicate” to describe contemporary understanding of the communication discipline. Simply, we are unable to 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 like the U.S. Post Office. A package is sent from one place to another and it’s done...until the receiver of the letter decides to reply to the address. 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 physical, psychological, social, historical, and cultural contexts. In this model, communication is more than simply 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 do not 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 individuals as simply senders and receivers, the people in a communication encounter are referred to as *participants*. 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. Undoubtedly, during the date you are sending your verbal message to start receiving and decoding the nonverbal messages of your date rather than waiting until you get home to “try and figure out” what just happened for the past three hours. 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 physical, social, historical, psychological, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

Remember, the physical context refers to the actual physical environment in which the communication takes place. The physical environment is influential to the communication process in multiple ways. If you are reading this sentence right now look around the physical room. Where are you? Now, look at your clothes. If you were sitting in class right now, would you be wearing this same outfit? What if you had to leave for a wedding in one hour? Or a funeral? Would you be wearing those same clothes? Probably not. We are influenced by the expectations of the physical context and as a result, we will change our clothes to meet the expected demands of the upcoming physical context. However, we do not simply change our clothes depending on the physical demands of the environment. Rather, we make myriad changes to our character and personality. Imagine having a conversation with your friend in the hallway at school. How loud do you need to talk for the communication to be effective? Now, imagine having that same conversation with the same friend, but not place yourselves in the confines of the library. Are you going to speak with the same volume as you did in the hallways or on the drive to school. Again, probably not. The physical context will influence your ability to effectively and appropriately communicate with a variety of people.

Social context refers to the nature of the relationship, including the roles of the participants, as well as rules, and unstated norms that guide communication. As we are socialized into our various communities, we learn the necessary communicative requirements that guide our specific role in the situation, the rules that are necessary for effective communication and implicitly pick up on norms which also allow us to be appropriate in the communicative episode. Some common rules that influence social contexts include telling the truth, hear someone out fully before speaking, do not cut in line, greet people when they greet you, say “Thank You” after someone “Blesses” your sneeze, 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 ethical 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.

Historical context includes the previous interpersonal history. 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 historical 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 historical 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 historical context.

Psychological context refers to the feelings and emotions that we are experiencing while engaging in active communication. Certainly, you have received bad news before going into work or going into class. Recall how distracted you were for a certain period of time until you were able to reestablish your psychological context. Sometimes, we might be unable to control our psychological manifestation and as a consequence we are not able to be effective communicators. A psychology class may be best suited to better explain the power of our psyche.

however, for the purposes of communication, it is imperative to understand that our psychological status is heavily influential in our ability to effectively communicate.

Finally, cultural context includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, ability, and capability. We will learn more about these identities in [Chapter 2 “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.



Cultural context is influenced by numerous aspects of our identities and is not limited to race or ethnicity.

[Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain.

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 [Chapter 8 “Culture and Communication”](#), is not 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 may 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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Media Attributions

- Networking technology sharing
- Linear Model
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Communication Principles

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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.



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Communication Is Integrated into All Parts of Our Lives

This book is meant to help people see the value of communication through a pragmatic lens. The idea of a pragmatic approach to communication has roots in the philosophy of John Dewey (1916). In his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) argues, “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 101). The term pragmatism is to simply say that something is practical, relevant, with real-world application. This is not meant 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; however, in order to explore how communication applies to pragmatic situations it becomes imperative to divide up and demonstrate the versatility of communication as an academic discipline. Communication impacts our academic, professional, personal, and civic lives. The following sections will demonstrate how communication impacts all aspects of our pragmatic daily living.

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, you are challenged to try and make explicit connections between this course and *within every aspect of your life*. When you leave this class, you should be able to connect the content of what you are experiencing 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, future worker, and ultimately a participatory democratic citizen.



Good communication skills can help you succeed in academic settings and set you up for success postgraduation.

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 speaking and listening, writing, establishing speech goals, effective organization, locating and integrating outside research, informing or persuading an audience, interpersonal skills, interviewing skills, and small group problem solving processes and procedures (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

On a personal level, many students know from experience and from the prevalence of communication counseling on television talk shows, including self-help books, that communication forms, maintains, and ends our interpersonal relationships; yet, they do not know the extent to which that occurs. The interpersonal communication chapter in this textbook may help to answer some of those uncertainties, but if not you should still be intrigued by the relevance and practicality of the concepts and theories discussed. Students often remark that they already know, from experience, much of what is discussed in the interpersonal unit of the course. And although *some* of this may be true, we absolutely learn from experience, but recall communication is an academic discipline, with specific vocabulary, essential foundational knowledge of communication concepts and theories, and therefore, our experience that has “taught us” how to communicate, may in actuality, be working *against us* and we are not even aware. This textbooks, including many other speech communication basic texts are designed to help you make sense of your previous experiences, from an academic lens. 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, salient personal implications of communication will become increasingly clear.

Civic

The connection between communication and our civic lives is a little more abstract and difficult for students to understand, yet arguably, is the most important applicable aspect of this course. Many younger people are unable to make a connection to the “civic” part of their lives because the academic, professional, and personal parts of their lives have so much more daily relevance. However, what most students fail to understand is that the civic engagement aspect of communication is more than just an aspect of communication, rather communication *makes* civic engagement *work*. Hess (2009) states that there exists three components that dramatically influence students’ long-term civic engagement: frequent classroom discussion of election issues teacher encouragement for expressing opinions, and student participation in get-out-the-vote drives (McDevitt & Kioussis, 2006, p. 3, as cited in Hess, 2009). The civic part of our lives is developed through engagement with the decision making that goes on in our society at the local, state, regional, national, or even the international level. Such involvement ranges from serving on a neighborhood advisory board to sending an engaging with a political candidate at a town hall meeting (see below). 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.



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AT CONGRESSIONAL TOWN HALL MEETINGS, CITIZENS TURN UP THE VOLUME — AND ACTIVISM. 02/24/2017, COURTESY YOUTUBE.COM

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." 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. For more information regarding ways that you can become more civically engaged, please visit the website: <http://www.aacu.org/resources/civicengagement>.

Communication Meets Needs

Hopefully, you are beginning to 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. Your ability to identify a sign that signifies an organization for shelter (e.g. hotels and motels) demonstrates how symbols can communicate messages that meet your physical needs 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.”



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. Compliance-gaining communication is different from persuasion, which we will discuss in more detail in [Chapter 11 “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, notice how many of these tactics are 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 voluntary share 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, giving a high five, or being keenly aware when your friend is going through a personal struggle. Although our relationships vary in terms of closeness and intimacy, all individuals have relational needs and all relationships require maintenance. Finally, communication helps us end relationships, sometimes due to the lack of effective message exchange shared between the participants. 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. Keep in mind, communicating for relational needs is not always positive. Some people have “relational needs” that lead to negative, unethical, or even illegal behaviors. Although we may feel the “need” to be passive aggressive or controlling, these communicative patterns are not positive and can hurt our relationships. In [Chapter 6 “Interpersonal Communication Processes”](#) and [Chapter 7 “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? What type or brand of clothing do you prefer to wear? What about your music or television tastes? Your answer is not just based on who you *think* you are, since much of how we think of ourselves is based on our communication with other people and their respective reactions to our messages. 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 performs 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 [Chapter 2 “Communication and Perception”](#).

Communication Is a Process

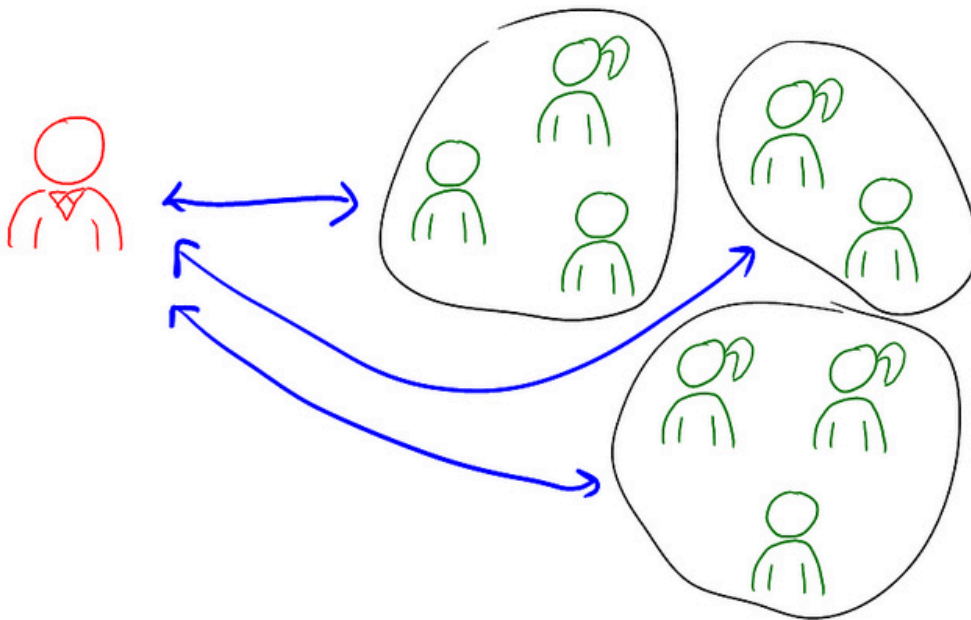
Communication is a process that involves an interchange of verbal and nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events (Hargie, 2011). When we refer to communication as a process, it is implied that communication has a distinct beginning and end or follows a predetermined sequence of events. As such, it can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter. Since communication is dynamic, it does not always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or communication phenomena difficult to discern and academically analyze. Any time we pull a 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. Take, for example, feedback or eye contact. Trying to investigate the effectiveness of eye contact during the exchange itself is almost impossible to accomplish. However,

communication scholarship provides academics an opportunity to discover messages in symbols or rhetorical artifacts that tell a bigger story than the actual delivered message. 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 or a hidden message may be present that is not apparent at face value. 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).



See the hidden arrow in the FedEx logo?

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.



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 is not intended for others to perceive, would it be considered communication? 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 that I was unintentionally sending. As a communication scholar, you are asked whether you 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. This type of communication is known as spontaneous message construction. We often scream when we are frightened, say “ouch!” when we stub our toe, and stare blankly when we are bored. This is not 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, or scripted 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 does not 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 their “intention” for communication should not be the cause an undesired effect. Unfortunately, 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, he cannot simply state, “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. All of us, at some point or another, will have 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, historical, 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 than 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. Taiwan 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, nonverbal communication, and ambiguous message exchange. However, here in the United States, such ambiguity is frequently discouraged. Imagine your Mom “hinting” to you to take out the garbage? More than likely the direct message, “Julie, take out the garbage!” is more effective in an individualistic culture compared to “Wow...it would be great if someone took out the garbage.” Ambiguity is not advantageous in individualistic cultures, whereas the same “hinting” approach might be very effective in Taiwan, China, or many other Eastern cultures. People are socialized from birth and learn to communicate in culturally specific ways that vary by context. In this section we will discuss how communication is learned, the rules and norms that influence how we communicate, and the ethical implications of communication.

Communication Is Learned

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 3 “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?



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”](#).



Ethics deals with our beliefs about what is right and wrong, but the choice is often not as clear-cut.

Justin Baeder – [That Way](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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. Students are often told that we all make choices daily that are more ethical or less ethical, and we may confidently make a decision only later to 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.

“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: <http://natcom.org/Tertiary.aspx?id=2119&terms=ethical%20credo>.

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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Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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. More than likely the term *communication competence* is unfamiliar to you, but as we learn more about it in this section, you will see how communication competence can be beneficial in many aspects of your life. Since this book focuses on communication from a pragmatic perspective, 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

When we combine the terms communication and competence 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 includes *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 includes *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 refers to our capability 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 might 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. Simply by reading this book student will gain valuable knowledge about communication and with a little practice, these same students, will have an idea about how to apply their learned communication competency knowledge. It is understandable to begin to feel some anxiety about your current ability to communicate competently. After all, you've spent many years explicitly and implicitly learning to communicate, and sometime with poor results. 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, rather you must also have the motivation to reflect on and better your communication and the skills needed to do so.

In regards to competence, everyone has areas where we feel skilled and areas where we feel deficient. In most cases, we can consciously decide to work on our deficiencies, which may take considerable effort. There are multiple stages of competence that are challenging and only you can assess your ability to competently communicate in your daily life: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence are all example of how communication competency applies to you (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 are simply communicating successfully without much effort to be competent. However, be aware that an individual who exhibits communication competency in one context or with one person does not necessarily mean that person will be equally competent in a different context or when talking to a different person. People are faced with new communication encounters regularly, and although they may be able to draw on learned communication skills, it may take a few attempts, practicing communication competence before you can advance to later stages.

In many introductory communication classes students assume that the teacher has high levels of communication competency. At the same time students assume that because they have little to no experience speaking in public that they are deficient in their ability to communicate competently. Neither of the aforementioned assumptions could be further from the truth. In response to both of these comments, we have to understand, that communication competency, much like many of the communication contexts, is situational, and unpredictable. 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 we do make communication mistakes, it is important to make a mental note and reflect on it. More than likely, your class will require you to give a speech or two in front of others. Your instructor will be providing you with valuable feedback that will help to improve your communication competency in a new and excited context!



Becoming more mindful of your communication and the communication of others can contribute to your communication competence.

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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 be indicative of communication competence. This is just the beginning of our conversation about communication competence. Regarding the previous examples, we will learn more about paraphrasing in [Chapter 5 “Listening”](#), conflict management in [Chapter 6 “Interpersonal Communication Processes”](#), and deception in [Chapter 4 “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.



Communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety are common but can be managed productively.

Ana C. – [day 339 butterflies](#) – 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 [Chapter 12 “Public Speaking in Various Contexts”](#). 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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Chapter 2: Communication and Perception

Think back to the first day of classes. Did you plan ahead for what you were going to wear? Did you get the typical school supplies together? Did you try to find your classrooms ahead of time or look for the syllabus online? Did you look up your professors on an online professor evaluation site? Based on your answers to these questions, you are creating an impression. But would that perception be accurate? Would it match up with how you see yourself as a student? And perception, of course, is a two-way street. You also formed impressions about your professors based on their appearance, dress, organization, intelligence, and approachability. Professors often instruct students to really take the first day of class seriously. The impressions that both teacher and student make on the first day help set the tone for the rest of the semester.

As we go through our daily lives we perceive all sorts of people and objects, and we often make sense of these perceptions by using previous experiences to help filter and organize the information we take in. Sometimes we encounter new or contradictory information that changes the way we think about a person, group, or object. The perceptions that we make of others and that others make of us affect how we communicate and act. In this chapter, we will learn about the perception process, how we perceive others, how we perceive and present ourselves, and how we can improve our perceptions.

[5]

Perception Process

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

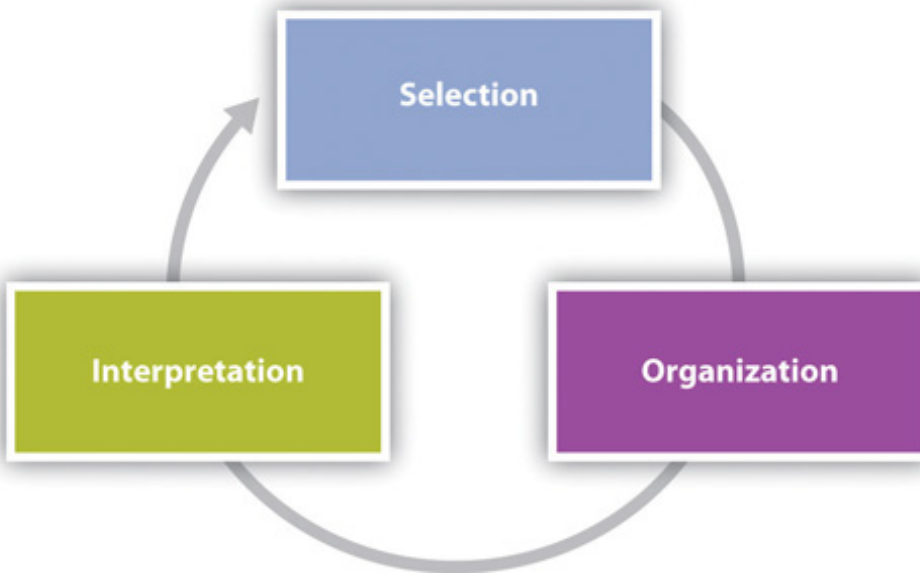
1. Define perception.
2. Discuss how salience influences the selection of perceptual information.
3. Explain the ways in which we organize perceptual information.
4. Discuss the role of schemata in the interpretation of perceptual information.

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process, which is shown in [Figure 2.1 “The Perception Process”](#), includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filters, are organized into our existing structures and patterns, and are then interpreted based on previous experiences. Although perception is a largely cognitive and psychological process, how we perceive the people and objects around us affects our communication. We respond differently to an object or person that we perceive favorably than we do to something we find unfavorable. But how do we filter through the mass amounts of incoming information, organize it, and make meaning from what makes it through our perceptual filters and into our social realities?

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. So, as information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues on through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). **Selecting** is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information. Think about how, out of many other possible stimuli to pay attention to, you may hear a familiar voice in the hallway, see a pair of shoes you want to buy from across the mall, or smell something cooking for dinner when you get home from work. We quickly cut through and push to the background all kinds of sights, smells, sounds, and other stimuli, but how do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

Figure 2.1 The Perception Process



We tend to pay attention to information that is salient. Saliency is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, a person's identity as a Native American may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver, Colorado. Or a bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of saliency depends on three features (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Lastly, expectations affect what we find salient.

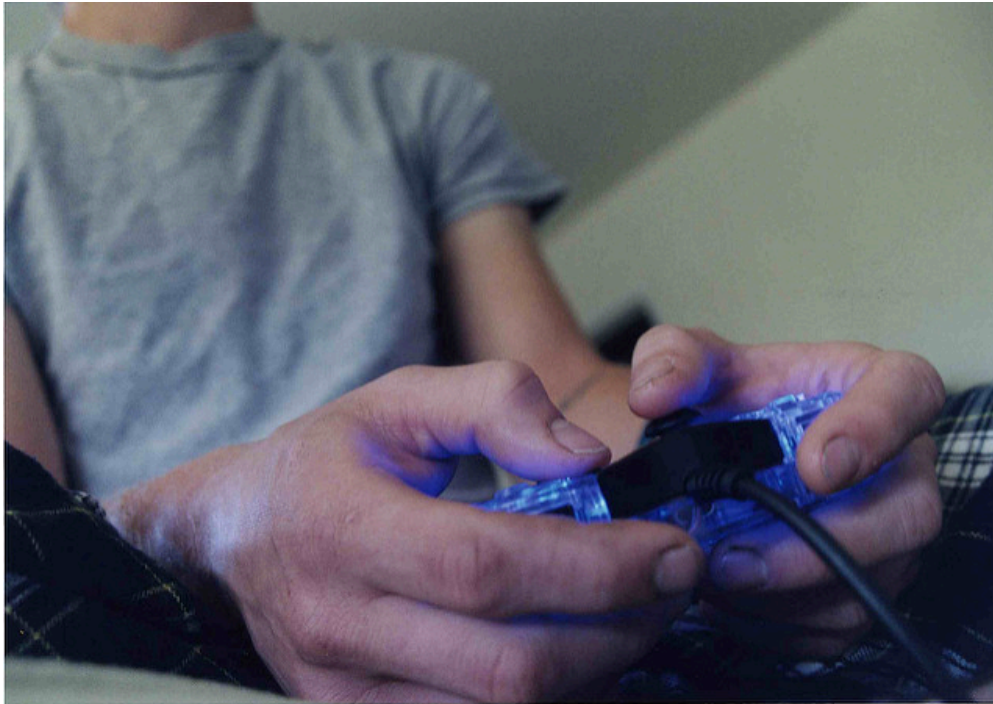
Visual and Aural Stimulation

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become salient in our perceptual field and get our attention. Creatures ranging from fish to hummingbirds are attracted to things like silver spinners on fishing poles or red and yellow bird feeders. Having our senses stimulated isn't always a positive thing though. Think about the couple that won't stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose subwoofer shakes your ceiling at night. In short, stimuli can be attention-getting in a productive or distracting way. As communicators, we can use this knowledge to our benefit by minimizing distractions when we have something important to say. It's probably better to have a serious conversation with a significant other in a quiet place rather than a crowded food court. As we will learn later in [Chapter 12 "Public Speaking in Various Contexts"](#), altering the rate, volume, and pitch of your voice, known as vocal variety, can help keep your audience engaged, as can gestures and movement. Conversely, nonverbal adaptors, or nervous movements we do to relieve anxiety like pacing or twirling our hair, can be distracting. Aside from minimizing distractions and delivering our messages enthusiastically, the content of our communication also affects saliency.

Needs and Interests

We tend to pay attention to information that we perceive to meet our needs or interests in some way. This type of selective attention can help us meet instrumental needs and get things done. When you need to speak with a financial aid officer about your scholarships and loans, you sit in the waiting room and listen for your name to be called. Paying close attention to whose name is called means you can be ready to start your meeting and hopefully get your business handled. When we don't think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost. Imagine you are in the grocery store and you hear someone say your name. You turn around, only to hear that person say, "Finally! I said your name three times. I thought you forgot who I was!" A few seconds before, when you were focused on figuring out which kind of orange juice to get, you were attending to the various pulp options to the point that you tuned other stimuli out, even something as familiar as the sound of someone calling your name. Again, as communicators, especially in persuasive contexts, we can

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



If you're engrossed in an interesting video game, you may not notice other perceptual cues.

R Pollard – [tex playing video games](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

In many cases we know what interests us and we automatically gravitate toward stimuli that match up with that. For example, as you filter through radio stations, you likely already have an idea of what kind of music interests you and will stop on a station playing something in that genre while skipping right past stations playing something you aren't interested in. Because of this tendency, we often have to end up being forced into or accidentally experiencing something new in order to create or discover new interests. For example, you may not realize you are interested in Asian history until you are required to take such a course and have an engaging professor who sparks that interest in you. Or you may accidentally stumble on a new area of interest when you take a class you wouldn't otherwise because it fits into your schedule. As communicators, you can take advantage of this perceptual tendency by adapting your topic and content to the interests of your audience.

Expectations

The relationship between salience and expectations is a little more complex. Basically, we can find expected things salient and find things that are unexpected salient. While this may sound confusing, a couple examples should illustrate this point. If you are expecting a package to be delivered, you might pick up on the slightest noise of a truck engine or someone's footsteps approaching your front door. Since we expect something to happen, we may be extra tuned in to clues that it is coming. In terms of the unexpected, if you have a shy and soft-spoken friend who you overhear raising the volume and pitch of his voice while talking to another friend, you may pick up on

that and assume that something out of the ordinary is going on. For something unexpected to become salient, it has to reach a certain threshold of difference. If you walked into your regular class and there were one or two more students there than normal, you may not even notice. If you walked into your class and there was someone dressed up as a wizard, you would probably notice. So, if we expect to experience something out of the routine, like a package delivery, we will find stimuli related to that expectation salient. If we experience something that we weren't expecting and that is significantly different from our routine experiences, then we will likely find it salient. We can also apply this concept to our communication. I always encourage my students to include supporting material in their speeches that defies our expectations. You can help keep your audience engaged by employing good research skills to find such information.

There is a middle area where slight deviations from routine experiences may go unnoticed because we aren't expecting them. To go back to the earlier example, if you aren't expecting a package, and you regularly hear vehicle engines and sidewalk foot traffic outside your house, those pretty routine sounds wouldn't be as likely to catch your attention, even if it were slightly more or less traffic than expected. This is because our expectations are often based on previous experience and patterns we have observed and internalized, which allows our brains to go on "autopilot" sometimes and fill in things that are missing or overlook extra things. Look at the following sentence and read it aloud: Percpetoin is bsaed on pateetrns, maening we offten raech a cocnlsuion witouht cosnidreing ecah indviidaul elmenet. This example illustrates a test of our expectation and an annoyance to every college student. We have all had the experience of getting a paper back with typos and spelling errors circled. This can be frustrating, especially if we actually took the time to proofread. When we first learned to read and write, we learned letter by letter. A teacher or parent would show us a card with *A-P-P-L-E* written on it, and we would sound it out. Over time, we learned the patterns of letters and sounds and could see combinations of letters and pronounce the word quickly. Since we know what to expect when we see a certain pattern of letters, and know what comes next in a sentence since we wrote the paper, we don't take the time to look at each letter as we proofread. This can lead us to overlook common typos and spelling errors, even if we proofread something multiple times. As a side note, I'll share two tips to help you avoid proofreading errors: First, have a friend proofread your paper. Since they didn't write it, they have fewer expectations regarding the content. Second, read your papers backward. Since patterns of speech aren't the same in reverse you have to stop and focus on each word. Now that we know how we select stimuli, let's turn our attention to how we organize the information we receive.

Organizing Information

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



Since we organize perceptual information based on proximity, a person may perceive that two people are together, just because they are standing close together in line.

[Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain.

We also group things together based on similarity. We tend to think similar-looking or similar-acting things belong together. I have two friends that I occasionally go out with, and we are all three males, around the same age, of the same race, with short hair and glasses. Aside from that, we don't really look alike, but on more than one occasion a server at a restaurant has assumed that we're brothers. Despite the fact that many of our other features are different, the salient features are organized based on similarity and the three of us are suddenly related.

We also organize information that we take in based on difference. In this case, we assume that the item that looks or acts different from the rest doesn't belong with the group. Perceptual errors involving people and assumptions of difference can be especially awkward, if not offensive. My friend's mother, who is Vietnamese American, was attending a conference at which another attendee assumed she was a hotel worker and asked her to throw something away for her. In this case, my friend's mother was a person of color at a convention with mostly white attendees, so an impression was formed based on the other person's perception of this difference.

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

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

contextually relative. Our perceptual patterns do become unproductive and even unethical when the judgments we associate with certain patterns are based on stereotypical or prejudicial thinking.

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

Where does a conflict begin and end? The answer to this question depends on how the people involved in the conflict punctuate, or structure, their conflict experience. Punctuation differences can often escalate conflict, which can lead to a variety of relationship problems (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). For example, Linda and Joe are on a project team at work and have a deadline approaching. Linda has been working on the project over the weekend in anticipation of her meeting with Joe first thing Monday morning. She has had some questions along the way and has e-mailed Joe for clarification and input, but he hasn't responded. On Monday morning, Linda walks into the meeting room, sees Joe, and says, "I've been working on this project all weekend and needed your help. I e-mailed you three times! What were you doing?" Joe responds, "I had no idea you e-mailed me. I was gone all weekend on a camping trip." In this instance, the conflict started for Linda two days ago and has just started for Joe. So, for the two of them to most effectively manage this conflict, they need to communicate so that their punctuation, or where the conflict started for each one, is clear and matches up. In this example, Linda made an impression about Joe's level of commitment to the project based on an interpretation she made after selecting and organizing incoming information. Being aware of punctuation is an important part of perception checking, which we will discuss later. Let's now take a closer look at how interpretation plays into the perception process.

Interpreting Information

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



Schemata are like lenses that help us make sense of the perceptual cues around us based on previous knowledge and experience.

Darren Shaw – [Glasses](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

It's important to be aware of schemata because our interpretations affect our behavior. For example, if you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your schema of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving him presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speakers. Schemata also guide our interactions, providing a script for our behaviors. We know, in general, how to act and communicate in a waiting room, in a classroom, on a first date, and on a game show. Even a person who has never been on a game show can develop a schema for how to act in that environment by watching *The Price Is Right*, for example. People go to great lengths to make shirts with clever sayings or act enthusiastically in hopes of being picked to be a part of the studio audience and hopefully become a contestant on the show.



We often include what we do for a living in our self-introductions, which then provides a schema through which others interpret our communication.

David Weekly – [Professions!](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

"Getting Real"

Police Officers, Schemata, and Perception/Interpretation

Prime-time cable and network television shows like the *Law and Order* franchise and *Southland* have long offered viewers a glimpse into the lives of law enforcement officers. *COPS*, the first and longest-running prime-time reality television show, and newer reality-themed and educational shows like *The First 48* and *Lockdown*, offer a more realistic look into techniques used by law enforcement. Perception is a crucial part of an officer's skill set. Specifically, during police-citizen encounters, where tensions may be high and time for decision making limited, officers rely on schemata developed through personal experience off the job and training and experience on the job (Rozelle & Baxter, 1975). Moreover, police officers often have to make perceptions based on incomplete and sometimes unreliable information. So, how do police officers use perception to help them do their jobs?

Research has examined how police officers use perception to make judgments about personality traits, credibility, deception, and the presence or absence of a weapon, among others things, and just like you and me, officers use the same process of selection, organization, and interpretation. This research has found that officers, like us, rely on schema to help them make decisions under time

and situational constraints. In terms of selection, expectations influence officer perception. At preshift meetings, officers are briefed on ongoing issues and “things to be on the lookout for,” which provides them with a set of expectations—for example, the make and model of a stolen car—that can guide their selection process. They must also be prepared for things that defy their expectations, which is not a job skill that many other professionals have to consider every day. They never know when a traffic stop could turn into a pursuit or a seemingly gentle person could turn violent. These expectations can then connect to organization strategies. For example, if an officer knows to be alert for a criminal suspect, they will actively organize incoming perceptual information into categories based on whether or not people look similar to or different from the suspect description. Proximity also plays into police work. If a person is in a car with a driver who has an unregistered handgun, the officer is likely to assume that the other person also has criminal intent. While these practices are not inherently bad, there are obvious problems that can develop when these patterns become rigid schema. Some research has shown that certain prejudices based on racial schema can lead to perceptual errors—in this case, police officers mistakenly perceiving a weapon in the possession of black suspects more often than white suspects (Payne, 2001). Additionally, racial profiling (think of how profiles are similar to schemata) has become an issue that’s gotten much attention since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the passage of immigration laws in states like Arizona and Alabama that have been critiqued as targeting migrant workers and other undocumented immigrants. As you can see, law enforcement officers and civilians use the same perception process, but such a career brings with it responsibilities and challenges that highlight the imperfect nature of the perception process.

1. What communication skills do you think are key for a law enforcement officer to have in order to do their job effectively and why?
2. Describe an encounter that you have had with a law enforcement officer (if you haven’t had a direct experience you can use a hypothetical or fictional example). What were your perceptions of the officer? What do you think his or her perceptions were of you? What schemata do you think contributed to each of your interpretations?
3. What perceptual errors create potential ethical challenges in law enforcement? For example, how should the organizing principles of proximity, similarity, and difference be employed?

Key Takeaways

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

Exercises

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

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Media Attributions

- 2.1.1N
- 2.1.2N
- 2.1.3N
- 2.1.4N

[6]

Perceiving Others

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Attribution and Interpretation

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

Attribution

In most interactions, we are constantly running an attribution script in our minds, which essentially tries to come up with explanations for what is happening. Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my officemate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others' behaviors to internal or external factors. Internal attributions connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. External attributions connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors. Attributions are important to consider because our reactions to others' behaviors are strongly influenced by the explanations we reach. Imagine that Gloria and Jerry are dating. One day, Jerry gets frustrated and raises his voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change.



Frustrated drivers often use internal attributions to explain other drivers' behaviors.

Beelgin – [ROAD RAGE FIST](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Conversely, Gloria may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Jerry's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Gloria may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Jerry has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed." This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.

One of the most common perceptual errors is the fundamental attribution error, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980). For example, imagine arriving at school to only find out that there are no parking spots readily available. Unfortunately, and in some occasions, we might park illegally just to grab a spot and get to class. Upon return to your car, you notice a parking ticket that was left for you when you parked illegally. You may begin to develop thoughts like, "Why don't they get a real job and stop ruining my life!" If you Google some clips from the reality television show *Parking Wars*, you will

see the ire that people often direct at parking enforcement officers. In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

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

The professor-student dyadic relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. Students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment often attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. Professors may attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence. In both cases, the behavior is explained using an internal attribution and is an example of the fundamental attribution error. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). On the other hand, when a student gets a good grade on a paper, s/he will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor. Both of these examples illustrate the self-serving bias. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively. Now that you are aware of these common errors, you can monitor them more and engage in perception checking, which we will learn more about later, to verify your attributions.

Impressions and Interpretation

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

First and Last Impressions



People who are able to form accurate first impressions tend to have more satisfying relationships and more quickly advance in their careers.

Reynermedia – [Businessmen shaking hands](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

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

The recency effect leads us to put more weight on the most recent impression we have of a person’s communication over earlier impressions. Even a positive first impression can be tarnished by a negative final impression. Imagine that a professor has maintained a relatively high level of credibility with you over the course of the semester. She made a good first impression by being organized, approachable, and interesting during the first days of class. The rest of the semester went fairly well with no major conflicts. However, during the last week of the term, she didn’t have final papers graded and ready to turn back by the time she said she would, which left

you with some uncertainty about how well you needed to do on the final exam to earn an A in the class. When you did get your paper back, on the last day of class, you saw that your grade was much lower than you expected. If this happened to you, what would you write on the instructor evaluation? Because of the recency effect, many students would likely give a disproportionate amount of value to the professor's actions in the final week of the semester, negatively skewing the evaluation, which is supposed to be reflective of the entire semester. Even though the professor only returned one assignment late, that fact is very recent in students' minds and can overshadow the positive impression that formed many weeks earlier.

Physical and Environmental Influences on Perception

We make first impressions based on a variety of factors, including physical and environmental characteristics. In terms of physical characteristics, style of dress and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. We have general schema regarding how to dress and groom for various situations ranging from formal, to business casual, to casual, to lounging around the house.

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

Think about the harm that has been done when people pose as police or doctors to commit crimes or other acts of malice. Seeing someone in a white lab coat automatically leads us to see that person as an authority figure, and we fall into a scripted pattern of deferring to the "doctor" and not asking too many questions. The Milgram experiments offer a startling example of how powerful these influences are. In the experiments, participants followed instructions from a man in a white lab coat (who was actually an actor), who prompted them to deliver electric shocks to a person in another room every time the other person answered a memory question incorrectly. The experiment was actually about how people defer to authority figures instead of acting independently. Although no one was actually being shocked in the other room, many participants continued to "shock," at very high levels of voltage, the other person even after that person supposedly being shocked complained of chest pains and became unresponsive (Encina, 2003).



Clothing, like a doctor's lab coat, forms powerful impressions that have noticeable effects on people's behavior.

Lisa Brewster – [Happy doctor](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

Finally, the material objects and people that surround a person influence our perception. In the MTV show *Room*

Raiders, contestants go into the bedrooms of three potential dates and choose the one they want to go on the date with based on the impressions made while examining each potential date's cleanliness, decorations, clothes, trophies and awards, books, music, and so on. Research supports the reliability of such impressions, as people have been shown to make reasonably accurate judgments about a person's personality after viewing his or her office or bedroom (Hargie, 2011). Although the artificial scenario set up in *Room Raiders* doesn't exactly match up with typical encounters, the link between environmental cues and perception is important enough for many companies to create policies about what can and can't be displayed in personal office spaces. It would seem odd for a bank manager to have an *Animal House* poster hanging in his office, and that would definitely influence customers' perceptions of the manager's personality and credibility. The arrangement of furniture also creates impressions. Walking into a meeting and sitting on one end of a long boardroom table is typically less inviting than sitting at a round table or on a sofa.

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

The Halo and Horn Effects

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

The halo effect occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Since impressions are especially important when a person is navigating the job market, let's imagine how the horn and halo effects could play out for a recent college graduate looking to land her first real job. Nell has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Nell's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Nell. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend the professor, and the professor thinks highly of Nell, then the executive will start his interaction with Nell with a positive impression and interpret her behaviors more positively than he would otherwise. The halo effect initiated by the professor's recommendation may even lead the executive to dismiss or overlook some negative behaviors. Let's say Nell doesn't have a third party to help make a connection and arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Nell presents as competent and friendly, the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

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

Culture

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

mean that you have to change your schema to match another cultural group's. Instead, it may offer you a chance to better understand why and how your schemata were constructed the way they were.



How we interpret basic sensory information, like smells, varies by culture. In some cultures, natural body odor isn't considered an offensive smell like it generally is in the United States.

Chris Korhonen – [B.O.](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

- **Sight.** People in different cultures “read” art in different ways, differing in terms of where they start to look at an image and the types of information they perceive and process.
- **Sound.** “Atonal” music in some Asian cultures is unpleasing; it is uncomfortable to people who aren't taught that these combinations of sounds are pleasing.
- **Touch.** In some cultures it would be very offensive for a man to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who isn't a relative.
- **Taste.** Tastes for foods vary greatly around the world. “Stinky tofu,” which is a favorite snack of people in Taipei, Taiwan's famous night market, would likely be very off-putting in terms of taste and smell to many foreign tourists.
- **Smell.** While US Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor, which we typically find unpleasant, with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find unpleasant or even notice what we consider “b.o.” Those same cultures may find a US American's “clean” (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

Aside from differences in reactions to basic information we take in through our senses, there is also cultural variation in how we perceive more complicated constructs, like marriage, politics, and privacy. In May of 2012, French citizens elected a new president. François Hollande moved into the presidential palace with his partner of five years, Valerie Trierweiler. They are the first unmarried couple in the country's history to occupy the presidential palace (de la Baume, 2012). Even though new census statistics show that more unmarried couples are

living together than ever before in the United States, many still disapprove of the practice, and it is hard to imagine a US president in a similar circumstance as France's Hollande. Other places like Saudi Arabia and the Vatican have strong cultural aversions to such a practice, which could present problems when France's first couple travels abroad.

As we've already learned, our brain processes information by putting it into categories and looking for predictability and patterns. The previous examples have covered how we do this with sensory information and with more abstract concepts like marriage and politics, but we also do this with people. When we categorize people, we generally view them as "like us" or "not like us." This simple us/them split affects subsequent interaction, including impressions and attributions. For example, we tend to view people we perceive to be like us as more trustworthy, friendly, and honest than people we perceive to be not like us (Brewer, 1999). We are also more likely to use internal attribution to explain negative behavior of people we perceive to be different from us. If a person of a different race cuts another driver off in traffic, the driver is even more likely to attribute that action to the other driver's internal qualities (thinking, for example, "He or she is inconsiderate and reckless!") than they would someone of their own race. Having such inflexible categories can have negative consequences, and later we will discuss how forcing people into rigid categories leads to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Of course, race isn't the only marker of difference that influences our perceptions, and the problem with our rough categorization of people into "like us" and "not like us" categories is that these differences aren't really as easy to perceive as we think. We cannot always tell whether or not someone is culturally like us through visual cues. For some cultural identities, like sexual orientation and ability, our awareness of any differences may only come when the other person discloses their identity to us.



Although gender stereotypes are perpetuated in the media and internalized by many people, men and women actually communicate much more similarly than differently.

Aislinn Ritchie – [gender stereotyping](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

You no doubt frequently hear people talking and writing about the “vast differences” between men and women. Whether it's communication, athletic ability, expressing emotions, or perception, people will line up to say that women are one way and men are the other way. While it is true that gender affects our perception, the reason for this difference stems more from social norms than genetic, physical, or psychological differences between men and women. We are socialized to perceive differences between men and women, which leads us to exaggerate and amplify what differences there actually are (McCornack, 2007). We basically see the stereotypes

and differences we are told to see, which helps to create a reality in which gender differences are “obvious.” However, numerous research studies have found that, especially in relation to multiple aspects of communication, men and women communicate much more similarly than differently. In summary, various cultural identities shape how we perceive others because beliefs, attitudes, and values of the cultural groups to which we belong are incorporated into our schema. Our personalities also present interesting perceptual advantages and challenges that we will now discuss.

Personality

Occasionally you may have potential employers that will call your professor or another individual to do “employment verifications” during which they ask general questions about the applicant. While they may ask a few questions about intellectual ability or academic performance, they typically ask questions that try to create a personality profile of the applicant. They basically want to know what kind of leader, coworker, and person he or she is. This is a smart move on their part, because our personalities greatly influence how we see ourselves in the world and how we perceive and interact with others.

Personality refers to a person’s general way of thinking, feeling, and behaving based on underlying motivations and impulses (McCornack, 2007). These underlying motivations and impulses form our personality traits. Personality traits are “underlying,” but they are fairly enduring once a person reaches adulthood. That is not to say that people’s personalities do not change, but major changes in personality are not common unless they result from some form of trauma. Although personality scholars believe there are thousands of personalities, they all comprise some combination of the same few traits. Much research has been done on personality traits, and the “Big Five” that are most commonly discussed are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (McCrea, 2001). These five traits appear to be representative of personalities across cultures, and you can read more about what each of these traits entails below. If you are interested in how you rank in terms of personality traits, there are many online tests you can take. A Big Five test can be taken at the following website: <http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive>.

The Big Five Personality Traits

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

Scholarship related to personality serves many purposes, and some of them tie directly to perception. Corporations and television studios spend millions of dollars on developing personality profiles and personality testing. Corporations can make hiring and promotion decisions based on personality test results, which can save them money and time if they can weed out those who don’t “fit” the position before they get in the door and drain resources. Television studios make casting decisions based on personality profiles because they know that certain personalities evoke strong and specific reactions from viewers. The reality television show *Survivor* has done more than one season where they bring back “Heroes and Villains,” which already indicates that the returning cast members made strong impressions on the show’s producers and audience members. Think about the reality television stars that you love to root for, want to see lose, and can’t stand to look at or look away from. Shows like

Celebrity Rehab intentionally cast fading stars who already have strong personalities and emotional and addiction issues in order to create the kind of human train wrecks that attract millions of viewers. So why does this work?

It is likely that you have more in common with that reality TV star than you care to admit. We tend to focus on personality traits in others that we feel are important to our own personality. What we like in ourselves, we like in others, and what we dislike in ourselves, we dislike in others (McCornack, 2007). If you admire a person's loyalty, then loyalty is probably a trait that you think you possess as well. If you work hard to be positive and motivated and suppress negative and unproductive urges within yourself, you will likely think harshly about those negative traits in someone else. After all, if you can suppress your negativity, why can't they do the same? This way of thinking isn't always accurate or logical, but it is common.

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

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

This process of assuming has its advantages and drawbacks. In terms of advantages, the use of implicit personality theories offers us a perceptual shortcut that can be useful when we first meet someone. Our assessment of their traits and subsequent assumptions about who they are as a person makes us feel like we "know the person," which reduces uncertainty and facilitates further interaction. In terms of drawbacks, our experience-based assumptions aren't always correct, but they are still persuasive and enduring. As we have already learned, first impressions carry a lot of weight in terms of how they influence further interaction. Positive and negative impressions formed early can also lead to a halo effect or a horn effect, which we discussed earlier. Personality-based impressions can also connect to impressions based on physical and environmental cues to make them even stronger. For example, perceiving another person as attractive can create a halo effect that then leads you to look for behavioral cues that you can then tie to positive personality traits. You may notice that the attractive person also says "please" and "thank you," which increases his or her likeability. You may notice that the person has clean and fashionable shoes, which leads you to believe he or she is professional and competent but also trendy and hip. Now you have an overall positive impression of this person that will affect your subsequent behaviors (Beer & Watson, 2008). But how accurate were your impressions? If on your way home you realize you just bought a car from this person, who happened to be a car salesperson, that was \$7,000 over your price range, you might have second thoughts about how good a person he or she actually is.

Key Takeaways

- We use attributions to interpret perceptual information, specifically, people's behavior. Internal attributions connect behavior to internal characteristics such as personality traits. External attributions connect behavior to external characteristics such as situational factors.
- Two common perceptual errors that occur in the process of attribution are the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.

- The fundamental attribution error refers to our tendency to overattribute other people's behaviors to internal rather than external causes.
- The self-serving bias refers to our tendency to overattribute our successes to internal factors and overattribute our failures to external factors.
- First and last impressions are powerful forces in the perception process. The primacy effect is a perceptual tendency to place more importance on initial impressions than later impressions. The recency effect is the perceptual tendency to place more importance on the most recent impressions over earlier impressions.
- Physical and environmental cues such as clothing, grooming, attractiveness, and material objects influence the impressions that we form of people.
- The halo effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial positive impressions lead us to view later interactions as positive. The horn effect describes a perceptual effect that occurs when initial negative impressions lead us to view later interactions as negative.
- Cultural identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make about basic sensory information such as sounds and smells as well as larger concepts such as marriage and privacy. Despite the fact that much popular knowledge claims that women and men communicate very differently, communication processes for each gender are more similar than different.
- Personality affects perception in many ways. Our personality traits, which are our underlying and enduring motivations for thinking and behaving the way we do, affect how we see others and ourselves. We use observed and implied personality traits to form impressions of others, which then influence how we act toward them.

Exercises

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

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Media Attributions

- 2.2.0N
- 2.2.1N
- 2.2.2N
- 2.2.3N
- 2.2.4N

[7]

Perceiving and Presenting Self

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the perception that we have about ourselves, our knowledge, our skills, our personality, our level of motivation, and our overall competency in a particular contextual situation. We can understand our current self-concept by simply answering the question, “Who are you?” Your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, your self-concept. Each person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that he or she finds important. But each person’s self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation we are in. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid back, traditional, funny, open minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, a Southerner, or a member of the track team.



Men are more likely than women to include group memberships in their self-concept descriptions.

Stefano Ravalli – [In control](#) – CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Our self-concept is also formed through our interactions with others and their reactions to us (Weiten, Dunn, and Hammer, 2012; Wylie, 1961). This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as “You’re a good listener,” and other people’s actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, “I’m glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems.”

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people (Wylie, 1961). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation should not be considered as negative, however your incongruent perception of self compared to how others perceive us can have negative repercussions on our overall self-esteem. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Having a more realistic reference group of people (e.g., individuals who have only recently started a fitness program) could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

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

We generally want to know where we fall in terms of ability and performance as compared to others, but what people do with this information and how it affects self-concept varies. Not all people feel they need to be at the top of the list, but some won't stop until they get the high score on the video game or set a new school record in a track-and-field event. Some people strive to be first chair in the clarinet section of the orchestra, while another person may be content to be second chair. The education system promotes social comparison through grades and rewards such as honor rolls and dean's lists. Although education and privacy laws prevent me from displaying each student's grade on a test or paper for the whole class to see, I do typically report the aggregate grades, meaning the total number of As, Bs, Cs, and so on. This doesn't violate anyone's privacy rights, but it allows students to see where they fell in the distribution. This type of social comparison can be used as motivation. The student who was one of only three out of twenty-three to get a D on the exam knows that most of her classmates are performing better than she is, which may lead her to think, "If they can do it, I can do it." But social comparison that isn't reasoned can have negative effects and result in negative thoughts like "Look at how bad I did. Man, I'm stupid!" These negative thoughts can lead to negative behaviors, because we try to maintain internal consistency, meaning we act in ways that match up with our self-concept. So if the student begins to question her academic abilities and then incorporates an assessment of herself as a "bad student" into her self-concept, she may then behave in ways consistent with that, which is only going to worsen her academic performance. Additionally, a student might be comforted to learn that he isn't the only person who got a D and then not feel the need to try to improve, since he has company. You can see in this example that evaluations we place on our self-concept can lead to cycles of thinking and acting. These cycles relate to self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are components of our self-concept.

Self-Esteem

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



Self-esteem varies throughout our lives, but some people generally think more positively of themselves and some people think more negatively.

RHINO NEAL – [\[trophy\]](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

How we judge ourselves affects our communication and our behaviors, but not every negative or positive judgment carries the same weight. The negative evaluation of a trait that isn't very important for our self-concept will likely not result in a loss of self-esteem. For example, I am not very good at drawing. While I appreciate drawing as an art form, I don't consider drawing ability to be a very big part of my self-concept. If someone critiqued my drawing ability, my self-esteem wouldn't take a big hit. I do consider myself a good teacher, however, and I have spent and continue to spend considerable time and effort on improving my knowledge of teaching and my teaching skills. If someone critiqued my teaching knowledge and/or abilities, my self-esteem would definitely be hurt. This doesn't mean that we can't be evaluated on something we find important. Even though teaching is very important to my self-concept, I am regularly evaluated on it. Every semester, I am evaluated by my students, and every year, I am evaluated by my dean, department chair, and colleagues. Most of that feedback is in the form of constructive criticism, which can still be difficult to receive, but when taken in the spirit of self-improvement, it is valuable and may even enhance our self-concept and self-esteem. In fact, in professional contexts, people with higher self-esteem are more likely to work harder based on negative feedback, are less negatively affected by work stress, are able to handle workplace conflict better, and are better able to work independently and solve problems (Brockner, 1988). Self-esteem isn't the only factor that contributes to our self-concept; perceptions about our competence also play a role in developing our sense of self.

Self-Efficacy refers to the judgments people make about their ability to perform a task within a specific context

(Bandura, 1997). As you can see in [Figure 2.2 “Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Self-Esteem, and Self-Concept”](#), judgments about our self-efficacy influence our self-esteem, which influences our self-concept. The following example also illustrates these interconnections.

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



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

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

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

These different selves can conflict with each other in various combinations. Discrepancies between the actual

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



People who feel that it's their duty to recycle but do not actually do it will likely experience a discrepancy between their actual and ought selves.

Matt Martin – [Recycle](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

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

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

Finally, when our actual self doesn't match up with what we think we should obtain, we are not meeting what we see as our duties or obligations, which can lead to feelings of agitation including guilt, weakness, and a feeling

that we have fallen short of our moral standard (Higgins, 1987). For example, if your ought self should volunteer more for the local animal shelter, then your actual self may be more inclined to do so due to the guilt of reading about the increasing number of animals being housed at the facility. The following is a review of the four potential discrepancies between selves:

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

Influences on Self-Perception

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

Social and Family Influences

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

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



Some experts have warned that overpraising children can lead to distorted self-concepts.

Rain0975 – [participation award](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Whether praise is warranted or not is very subjective and specific to each person and context, but in general there have been questions raised about the potential negative effects of too much praise. Motivation is the underlying force that drives us to do things. Sometimes we are intrinsically motivated, meaning we want to

do something for the love of doing it or the resulting internal satisfaction. Other times we are extrinsically motivated, meaning we do something to receive a reward or avoid punishment. If you put effort into completing a short documentary for a class because you love filmmaking and editing, you have been largely motivated by intrinsic forces. If you complete the documentary because you want an “A” and know that if you fail your parents will not give you money for your spring break trip, then you are motivated by extrinsic factors. Both can, of course, effectively motivate us. Praise is a form of extrinsic reward, and if there is an actual reward associated with the praise, like money or special recognition, some people speculate that intrinsic motivation will suffer. But what’s so good about intrinsic motivation? Intrinsic motivation is more substantial and long-lasting than extrinsic motivation and can lead to the development of a work ethic and sense of pride in one’s abilities. Intrinsic motivation can move people to accomplish great things over long periods of time and be happy despite the effort and sacrifices made. Extrinsic motivation dies when the reward stops. Additionally, too much praise can lead people to have a misguided sense of their abilities. College professors who are reluctant to fail students who produce failing work may be setting those students up to be shocked when their supervisor critiques their abilities or output once they get into a professional context (Hargie, 2011).

There are cultural differences in the amount of praise and positive feedback that teachers and parents give their children. For example, teachers give less positive reinforcement in Japanese and Taiwanese classrooms than do teachers in US classrooms. Chinese and Kenyan parents do not regularly praise their children because they fear it may make them too individualistic, rude, or arrogant (Wierzbicka, 2004). So the phenomenon of overpraising isn’t universal, and the debate over its potential effects is not resolved.

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

Culture

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

Race also plays a role in self-perception. For example, positive self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to be higher in African American adolescent girls than Caucasian girls (Stockton et al., 2009). In fact, more recent studies have discounted much of the early research on race and self-esteem that purported that African Americans of all ages have lower self-esteem than whites. Self-perception becomes more complex when we consider biracial individuals—more specifically those born to couples comprising an African American and a white parent (Bowles,

1993). In such cases, it is challenging for biracial individuals to embrace both of their heritages, and social comparison becomes more difficult due to diverse and sometimes conflicting reference groups. Since many biracial individuals identify as and are considered African American by society, living and working within a black community can help foster more positive self-perceptions in these biracial individuals. Such a community offers a more nurturing environment and a buffer zone from racist attitudes but simultaneously distances biracial individuals from their white identity. Conversely, immersion into a predominantly white community and separation from a black community can lead biracial individuals to internalize negative views of people of color and perhaps develop a sense of inferiority. Gender intersects with culture and biracial identity to create different experiences and challenges for biracial men and women. Biracial men have more difficulty accepting their potential occupational limits, especially if they have white fathers, and biracial women have difficulty accepting their black features, such as hair and facial features. All these challenges lead to a sense of being marginalized from both ethnic groups and interfere in the development of positive self-esteem and a stable self-concept.



Biracial individuals may have challenges with self-perception as they try to integrate both racial identities into their self-concept.

Javcon117* – [End of Summer Innocence](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

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

Media

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

Researchers have found that only 12 percent of prime-time characters are overweight, which is dramatically less than the national statistics for obesity among the actual US population (Patzner, 2008). Further, an analysis of how weight is discussed on prime-time sitcoms found that heavier female characters were often the targets of negative comments and jokes that audience members responded to with laughter. Conversely, positive comments about women's bodies were related to their thinness. In short, the heavier the character, the more negative the comments, and the thinner the character, the more positive the comments. The same researchers analyzed sitcoms for content regarding male characters' weight and found that although comments regarding their weight were made, they were fewer in number and not as negative, ultimately supporting the notion that overweight male characters are more accepted in media than overweight female characters. Much more attention has been paid in recent years to the potential negative effects of such narrow media representations. The following "Getting Critical" box explores the role of media in the construction of body image.

In terms of self-concept, media representations offer us guidance on what is acceptable or unacceptable and valued or not valued in our society. Mediated messages, in general, reinforce cultural stereotypes related to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and class. People from historically marginalized groups must look much harder than those in the dominant groups to find positive representations of their identities in media. As a critical thinker, it is important to question media messages and to examine who is included and who is excluded.

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

"Getting Critical"

Body Image and Self-Perception

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

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

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

in a positive, negative, or neutral way? Why do you think this person was chosen?

Self-Presentation

How we perceive ourselves manifests in how we present ourselves to others. Self-presentation is the process of strategically concealing or revealing personal information in order to influence others' perceptions (Human et al., 2012). We engage in this process daily and for different reasons. Although people occasionally intentionally deceive others in the process of self-presentation, in general we try to make a good impression while still remaining authentic. Since self-presentation helps meet our instrumental, relational, and identity needs, we stand to lose quite a bit if we are caught intentionally misrepresenting ourselves. In May of 2012, Yahoo!'s CEO resigned after it became known that he stated on official documents that he had two college degrees when he actually only had one. In a similar incident, a woman who had long served as the dean of admissions for the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology was dismissed from her position after it was learned that she had only attended one year of college and had falsely indicated she had a bachelor's and master's degree (Webber & Korn, 2012). Such incidents clearly show that although people can get away with such false self-presentation for a while, the eventual consequences of being found out are dire. As communicators, we sometimes engage in more subtle forms of inauthentic self-presentation. For example, a person may state or imply that they know more about a subject or situation than they actually do in order to seem smart or "in the loop." During a speech, a speaker works on a polished and competent delivery to distract from a lack of substantive content. These cases of strategic self-presentation may not ever be found out, but communicators should still avoid them as they do not live up to the standards of ethical communication.

Consciously and competently engaging in self-presentation can have benefits because we can provide others with a more positive and accurate picture of who we are. People who are skilled at impression management are typically more engaging and confident, which allows others to pick up on more cues from which to form impressions (Human et al., 2012). Being a skilled self-presenter draws on many of the practices used by competent communicators, including becoming a higher self-monitor. When self-presentation skills and self-monitoring skills combine, communicators can simultaneously monitor their own expressions, the reaction of others, and the situational and social context (Sosik, Avolio, & Jung, 2002). Sometimes people get help with their self-presentation. Although most people can't afford or wouldn't think of hiring an image consultant, some people have started generously donating their self-presentation expertise to help others. Many people who have been riding the tough job market for a year or more get discouraged and may consider giving up on their job search. Now a project called "Style Me Hired" has started offering free makeovers to jobless people in order to offer them new motivation and help them make favorable impressions and hopefully get a job offer.¹

1. "Style Me Hired," accessed June 6, 2012, <http://www.stylemehired.com>.



People who have been out of work for a while may have difficulty finding the motivation to engage in the self-presentation behaviors needed to form favorable impressions.

Steve Petrucelli – [Interview Time!](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

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

"Getting Plugged In"

Self-Presentation Online: Social Media, Digital Trails, and Your Reputation

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

Research shows that people overall engage in positive and honest self-presentation on Facebook (Kim & Lee, 2011). Since people know how visible the information they post is, they may choose to only reveal things they think will form favorable impressions. But the mediated nature of Facebook also leads some people to disclose more personal information than they might otherwise in such a public or semipublic forum. These hyperpersonal disclosures run the risk of forming negative impressions based on who sees them. In general, the ease of digital communication, not just on Facebook, has presented new challenges for our self-control and information management. Sending someone a sexually provocative image used to take some effort before the age of digital cameras, but now “sexting” an explicit photo only takes a few seconds. So people who would have likely not engaged in such behavior before are more tempted to now, and it is the desire to present oneself as desirable or cool that leads people to send photos they may later regret (DiBlasio, 2012). In fact, new technology in the form of apps is trying to give people a little more control over the exchange of digital information. An iPhone app called “Snapchat” allows users to send photos that will only be visible for a few seconds. Although this isn’t a guaranteed safety net, the demand for such apps is increasing, which illustrates the point that we all now leave digital trails of information that can be useful in terms of our self-presentation but can also create new challenges in terms of managing the information floating around from which others may form impressions of us.

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

Key Takeaways

- Our self-concept is the overall idea of who we think we are. It is developed through our interactions with others and through social comparison that allows us to compare our beliefs and behaviors to others.
- Our self-esteem is based on the evaluations and judgments we make about various characteristics of our self-concept. It is developed through an assessment and evaluation of our various skills and abilities, known as self-efficacy, and through a comparison and evaluation of who we are, who we would like to be, and who we should be (self-discrepancy theory).
- Social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory affect our self-concept and self-esteem because through comparison with others and comparison of our actual, ideal, and ought selves we make judgments about who we are and our self-worth. These judgments then affect how we communicate and behave.
- Socializing forces like family, culture, and media affect our self-perception because they give us feedback on who we are. This feedback can be evaluated positively or negatively and can lead to positive or negative patterns that influence our self-perception and then our communication.
- Self-presentation refers to the process of strategically concealing and/or revealing personal information in order to influence others’ perceptions. Prosocial self-presentation is intended to benefit others and self-serving self-presentation is intended to benefit the self at the expense of others. People also engage in self-enhancement, which is a self-presentation strategy by which people intentionally seek out positive evaluations.

Exercises

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

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Media Attributions

- 2.3.0N
- 2.3.1N
- 2.3.2
- 2.3.3N
- 2.3.4N
- 2.3.5N
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[8]

Improving Perception

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Improving Self-Perception

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

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



Having a child can lead to a major change in a person's self-concept.

Photophile – [Father & Son 2055](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively try to change your self-perceptions, do not be surprised if you encounter some resistance from significant others. When you change or improve your self-concept, your communication will also change, which may prompt other people to respond to you differently. Although you may have good reasons for changing certain aspects of your self-perception, others may become unsettled or confused by your changing behaviors and communication. Remember, people try to increase predictability and decrease uncertainty within personal relationships. For example, many students begin to take their college education more seriously during their junior and senior years. As these students begin to change their self-concept to include the role of “serious student preparing to graduate and enter the professional world,” they likely have friends that want to maintain the “semiserious student who doesn’t exert much consistent effort and prefers partying to studying” role that used to be a shared characteristic of both students’ self-concepts. As the first student’s behavior changes to accommodate this new aspect of his or her self-concept, it may upset the friend who was used to weeknights spent hanging out rather than studying. Let’s now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

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

missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

Be Critical of Socializing Forces

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

We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don't represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders, to depression, to poor self-esteem. A relatively overlooked but controversial and interesting movement that has emerged partially in response to these narrow representations of the body is the fat acceptance movement. The fat acceptance movement has been around for more than thirty years, but it has more recently gotten public attention due to celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Kirstie Alley, who after years of publicly struggling with weight issues have embraced a view that weight does not necessarily correspond to health. Many people have found inspiration in that message and have decided that being healthy and strong is more important than being thin (Katz, 2009). The "Healthy at Every Size" movement and the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance have challenged the narrative put out by the thirty-billion-dollar-a-year weight-loss industry that fat equals lazy, ugly, and unhealthy.¹ Conflicting scientific studies make it difficult to say conclusively how strong the correlation is between weight and health, but it seems clear that a view that promotes healthy living and positive self-esteem over unconditional dieting and a cult of thinness is worth exploring more given the potential public health implications of distorted body image and obesity.



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

[Pixabay](#) – CC0 public domain.

1. "About Us," NAAFA: the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, accessed June 6, 2012, <http://www.naafaonline.com/dev2/about/index.html>.

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

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Self-fulfilling prophecies are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyl et al., 2010). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student doesn't attend class regularly and doesn't listen actively when she does attend. Because of these behaviors, the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces her original belief that the instructor wasn't a good teacher.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was originally developed to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication. This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is again based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational belief. Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date he doesn't engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date wouldn't like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinson et al., 2011).

Create and Maintain Supporting Interpersonal Relationships

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

Beware of Distorted Patterns of Thinking and Acting

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



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

Kevin Dooley – [Midlife crisis car](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

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

Some people develop low self-esteem because they lack accurate information about themselves, which may be intentional or unintentional. A person can intentionally try to maintain high self-esteem by ignoring or downplaying negative comments and beliefs and focusing on positive evaluations. While this can be a good thing, it can also lead to a distorted self-concept. There is a middle ground between beating yourself up or dwelling on the negative and ignoring potentially constructive feedback about weaknesses and missing opportunities to grow as a person. Conversely, people who have low self-esteem or negative self-concepts may discount or ignore positive feedback. To wrap up this section, I'd like to turn to one of my favorite shows and a great source for examples relevant to the perception process: *American Idol*.

I've always enjoyed showing clips from *American Idol* auditions in my class when I teach about self-perception. As you probably know, the season always starts with audition footage shot in various cities. The range of singing abilities, not to mention personalities, of those who show up for a chance to sing in front of the judges leads millions of viewers to keep tuning in. While it's obvious that the producers let some people through who they know don't have a chance at making it on the show, they also know that certain personalities make for good reality television viewing. I've often found myself wondering, "Do these people really think they can sing?" The answer is sometimes a very clear "Yes!" Sure, some are there just to make a spectacle and hopefully make it on TV, but there are many who actually believe they have singing abilities—even to the point that they challenge and discount the judges' comments.



Some contestants on *American Idol* find it difficult to accept the constructive criticism they receive from the judges because they have distorted self-perceptions about their singing abilities.

Beth – [American Idol Experience 9258](#) – CC BY 2.0.

During the contestant's tearful and/or angry postrejection interview, they are often shown standing with their family and friends, who are also surprised at the judges' decision. These contestants could potentially avoid this emotional ending by following some of the previous tips. It's good that they have supportive interpersonal relationships, but people's parents and friends are a little biased in their feedback, which can lead to a skewed self-concept. These contestants could also set incremental goals. Singing at a local event or even at a karaoke bar might have helped them gain more accurate information about their abilities and led them to realize they didn't have what it takes to be an "American idol."

Overcoming Barriers to Perceiving Others

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

Develop Empathetic Listening Skills

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

I didn't know what a lazy listener I was until I started teaching and realized how much time and effort teachers have to put into their jobs. Honestly, at first it was challenging to attentively listen to student issues, thoughts, and questions, but I immediately saw the value in it. To be a good teacher, I had to become a better listener. As a result, I also gained more empathy skills and became a lot more patient. A valuable lesson I learned during this time is best stated as follows: "Everyone's biggest problem is his or her biggest problem." If one person's biggest problem is getting enough money together to buy a new cell phone and another person's biggest problem is getting enough money together to get much needed medication, each of these people is likely experiencing a similar amount of

stress. As an outsider, we might look at this example and think about how a cell phone isn't necessary to live but the medication is. But everyone's reality is his or her reality, and when you can concede that someone's reality isn't like yours and you are OK with that, then you have overcome a significant barrier to becoming more aware of the perception process.

I recently had a good student inform me that he was leaving school to pursue other things. He had given speeches about wildfire firefighting and beer brewing and was passionate about both of those things, but not school. As an academic and lover of and advocate for higher education, I wouldn't have made that choice for myself or for him. But I am not him, and I can't assume his perceptions are consistent with mine. I think he was surprised when I said, "I think you are a smart and capable adult, and this is your decision to make, and I respect that. School is not going anywhere, so it'll be here when you're ready to come back. In the meantime, I'd be happy to be a reference for any jobs you're applying for. Just let me know." I wanted to make it clear that I didn't perceive him as irresponsible, immature, misguided, or uncommitted. He later told me that he appreciated my reaction that day.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

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

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

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



Prejudice surrounding the disease we now know as AIDS delayed government investment in researching its causes and developing treatments.

Sassy mom – [AIDS Awareness](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, response by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice. Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease

that affected only “deviants” and therefore didn’t get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudice based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

Engage in Self-Reflection

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

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

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

Checking Perception

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

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

The Tony Award-winning play *Doubt: A Parable* and the Academy Award-winning movie based on it deal with the interplay of perception, doubt, and certainty. In the story, which is set in a Bronx, New York, Catholic school in 1964, a young priest with new ideas comes into the school, which is run by a traditional nun who, like many, is not fond of change. The older nun begins a campaign to get the young priest out of her school after becoming convinced that he has had an inappropriate relationship with one of the male students. No conclusive evidence is offered during the course of the story, and the audience is left, as are the characters in the story, to determine for themselves whether or not the priest is “guilty.” The younger priest doesn’t fit into the nun’s schema of how a priest should look and act. He has longer fingernails than other priests, he listens to secular music, and he takes three sugars in his tea. A series of perceptions like this lead the nun to certainty of the priest’s guilt, despite a lack of concrete evidence. Although this is a fictional example, it mirrors many high-profile cases of abuse that have been in the news in recent years. Hopefully we will not find ourselves in such an uncertain and dire position, but in these extreme cases and more mundane daily interactions, perception checking can be useful.

“Getting Competent”

Perception Checking

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

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

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

- Step 1: Describe the behavior or situation without evaluating or judging it.
 - Step 2: Think of some possible interpretations of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process.
 - Step 3: Verify what happened and ask for clarification from the other person’s perspective. Be aware of punctuation, since the other person likely experienced the event differently than you.
1. Getting integrated: Give an example of how perception checking might be useful to you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
 2. Which step of perception checking do you think is the most challenging and why?

Key Takeaways

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

Exercises

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

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Media Attributions

- 2.4.0N
- 2.4.1N
- 2.4.2N
- 2.4.3N
- 2.4.4N

[PART III]

Chapter 3: Verbal Communication



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[9]

Functions of Language

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Identify and discuss the four main types of linguistic expressions.
2. Discuss the power of language to express our identities, affect our credibility, control others, and perform actions.
3. Discuss some of the sources of fun within language.
4. Explain how neologisms and slang contribute to the dynamic nature of language.
5. Identify the ways in which language can separate people and bring them together.

What utterances make up our daily verbal communication? Some of our words convey meaning, some convey emotions, and some actually produce actions. Language also provides endless opportunities for fun because of its limitless, sometimes nonsensical, and always changing nature. In this section, we will learn about the five functions of language, which show us that language is expressive, language is powerful, language is fun, language is dynamic, and language is relational.

Language Is Expressive

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

Expressing Observations

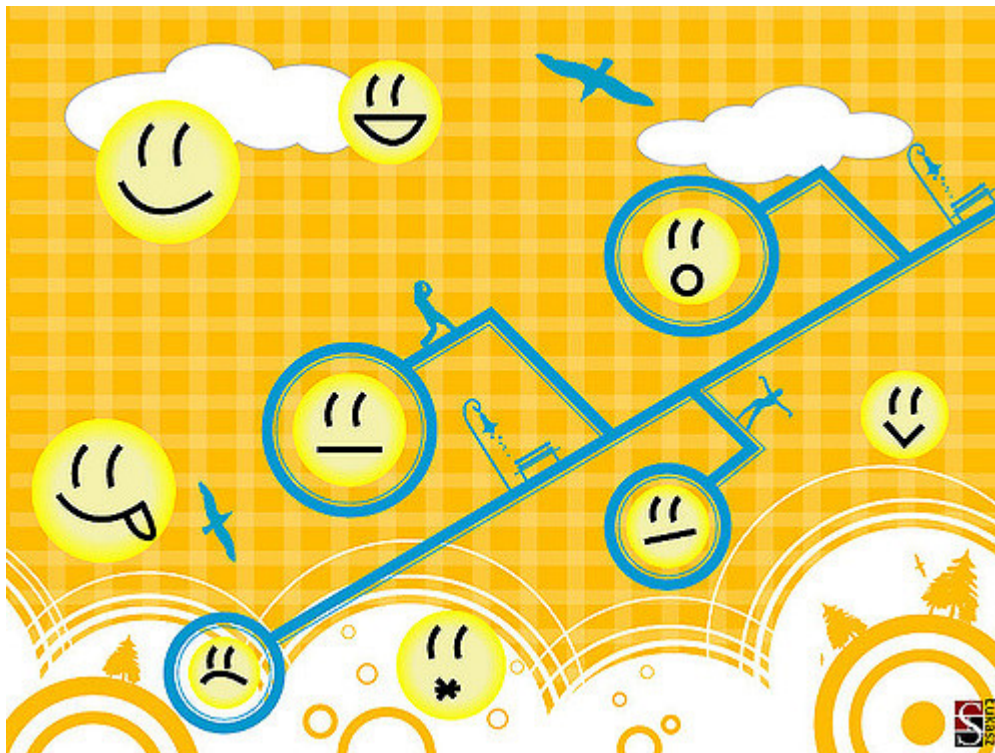
When we express observations, we report on the sensory information we are taking or have taken in. Eyewitness testimony is a good example of communicating observations. Witnesses are not supposed to make judgments or offer conclusions; they only communicate factual knowledge as they experienced it. For example, a witness could say, "I saw a white Mitsubishi Eclipse leaving my neighbor's house at 10:30 pm." As we learned in [Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception"](#) on perception, observation and description occur in the first step of the perception-checking process. When you are trying to make sense of an experience, expressing observations in a descriptive rather than evaluative way can lessen defensiveness, which facilitates competent communication.

Expressing Thoughts

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

Expressing Feelings

When we express feelings, we communicate our emotions. Expressing feelings is a difficult part of verbal communication, because there are many social norms about how, why, when, where, and to whom we express our emotions. Norms for emotional expression also vary based on nationality and other cultural identities and characteristics such as age and gender. In terms of age, young children are typically freer to express positive and negative emotions in public. Gendered elements intersect with age as boys grow older and are socialized into a norm of emotional restraint. Although individual men vary in the degree to which they are emotionally expressive, there is still a prevailing social norm that encourages and even expects women to be more emotionally expressive than men.



Expressing feelings is often the most difficult form of verbal expression.

Lucas – [emotion icon](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Expressing feelings can be uncomfortable for those listening. Some people are generally not good at or comfortable with receiving and processing other people's feelings. Even those with good empathetic listening skills can be positively or negatively affected by others' emotions. Expressions of anger can be especially difficult

to manage because they represent a threat to the face and self-esteem of others. Despite the fact that expressing feelings is more complicated than other forms of expression, emotion sharing is an important part of how we create social bonds and empathize with others, and it can be improved.

In order to verbally express our emotions, it is important that we develop an emotional vocabulary. The more specific we can be when we are verbally communicating our emotions, the less ambiguous our emotions will be for the person decoding our message. As we expand our emotional vocabulary, we are able to convey the intensity of the emotion we're feeling whether it is mild, moderate, or intense. For example, *happy* is mild, *delighted* is moderate, and *ecstatic* is intense; *ignored* is mild, *rejected* is moderate, and *abandoned* is intense (Hargie, 2011).

In a time when so much of our communication is electronically mediated, it is likely that we will communicate emotions through the written word in an e-mail, text, or instant message. We may also still use pen and paper when sending someone a thank-you note, a birthday card, or a sympathy card. Communicating emotions through the written (or typed) word can have advantages such as time to compose your thoughts and convey the details of what you're feeling. There are also disadvantages in that important context and nonverbal communication can't be included. Things like facial expressions and tone of voice offer much insight into emotions that may not be expressed verbally. There is also a lack of immediate feedback. Sometimes people respond immediately to a text or e-mail, but think about how frustrating it is when you text someone and they don't get back to you right away. If you're in need of emotional support or want validation of an emotional message you just sent, waiting for a response could end up negatively affecting your emotional state.

Expressing Needs

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

Table 3.1 Four Types of Verbal Expressions

Type	Description	Example
Observation	Report of sensory experiences or memories	"Pauline asked me to bring this file to you."
Thought	Conclusion about or judgment of experiences and observations	"Students today have much less respect for authority."
Feeling	Communicating emotions	"I feel at peace when we're together."
Need	Stating wants or requesting help or support	"I'm saving money for summer vacation. Is it OK if we skip our regular night out this week?"

Source: Adapted from Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, *Messages: Communication Skills Book*, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 34–36.

Language Is Powerful

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

Language Expresses Our Identities

In the opening to this chapter, I recounted how an undergraduate class in semantics solidified my love of language. I could have continued on to say that I have come to think of myself as a “word nerd.” Words or phrases like that express who we are and contribute to the impressions that others make of us. We’ve already learned about identity needs and impression management and how we all use verbal communication strategically to create a desired impression. But how might the label *word nerd* affect me differently if someone else placed it on me?



Telling people what state you are from may give them a sense of “who you are.”

Plitt, A. (2014) – [Welcome to Illinois](#)

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

Language Affects Our Credibility

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

Language Is a Means of Control

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

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

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

Language Is Performative

Some language is actually more like an action than a packet of information. Saying, “I promise,” “I guarantee,” or “I pledge,” does more than convey meaning; it communicates intent. Such utterances are called commissives, as they mean a speaker is committed to a certain course of action (Crystal, 2005). Of course, promises can be broken, and there can be consequences, but other verbal communication is granted official power that can guarantee action. The two simple words *I do* can mean that a person has agreed to an oath before taking a witness stand or assuming the presidency. It can also mean that two people are now bound in a relationship recognized by the government and/or a religious community. These two words, if said in the right context and in front of the right person, such as a judge or a reverend, bring with them obligations that cannot be undone without additional steps and potential negative repercussions. In that sense, language is much more than “mere words.”



Judges' words perform actions ranging from holding someone in contempt of court to sentencing someone to death.

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

Language Is Fun

Word games have long been popular. Before Words with Friends there was Apples to Apples, Boggle, Scrabble, and crossword puzzles. Writers, poets, and comedians have built careers on their ability to have fun with language and in turn share that fun with others. The fun and frivolity of language becomes clear as teachers get half-hearted laughs from students when they make puns, Jay Leno has a whole bit where he shows the hilarious mistakes people unintentionally make when they employ language, and people vie to construct the longest palindromic sentence (a sentence that as the same letters backward and forward).

The productivity and limitlessness of language we discussed earlier leads some people to spend an inordinate amount of time discovering things about words. Two examples that I have found fascinating are palindromes and contranymy. Palindromes, as noted, are words that read the same from left to right and from right to left. Racecar is a commonly cited example, but a little time spent looking through Google results for palindromes exposes many more, ranging from “Live not on evil” to “Doc, note I dissent. A fast never prevents a fatness. I diet on cod.”¹ Contranymy are words that have multiple meanings, two of which are opposites. For example, *sanction* can mean “to allow” and “to prevent,” and *dust* can mean “to remove particles” when used in reference to furniture or “to add particles” when used in reference to a cake. These are just two examples of humorous and contradictory features of the English language—the book *Crazy English* by Richard Lederer explores dozens more. A fun aspect of language enjoyed by more people than a small community of word enthusiasts is humor.

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

We first start to develop an understanding of humor as children when we realize that the words we use for objects are really arbitrary and can be manipulated. This manipulation creates a distortion or incongruous moment in the reality that we had previously known. Some humor scholars believe that this early word play—for example, calling a horse a turtle and a turtle a horse—leads us to appreciate language-based humor like puns and riddles (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006). It is in the process of encoding and decoding that humor emerges. People use encoding to decide how and when to use humor, and people use decoding to make sense of humorous communication. Things can go wrong in both of those processes. I’m sure we can all relate to the experience of witnessing a poorly timed or executed joke (a problem with encoding) and of not getting a joke (a problem with decoding).

1. “Neil/Fred’s Gigantic List of Palindromes,” accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.derf.net/palindromes/old.palindrome.html>.



Comedians make a living by making language fun, but humor is contextual and not always easy to pull off.

Gavin Golden – [Comedian](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Language Is Dynamic

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

Neologisms

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

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

Existing words also change in their use and meaning. The digital age has given rise to some interesting changes in word usage. Before Facebook, the word *friend* had many meanings, but it was mostly used as a noun referring to a companion. The sentence, *I'll friend you*, wouldn't have made sense to many people just a few years ago because *friend* wasn't used as a verb. *Google* went from being a proper noun referring to the company to a more

general verb that refers to searching for something on the Internet (perhaps not even using the Google search engine). Meanings can expand or contract without changing from a noun to a verb. *Gay*, an adjective for feeling happy, expanded to include *gay* as an adjective describing a person's sexual orientation. Perhaps because of the confusion that this caused, the meaning of *gay* has contracted again, as the earlier meaning is now considered archaic, meaning it is no longer in common usage.

The American Dialect Society names an overall "Word of the Year" each year and selects winners in several more specific categories. The winning words are usually new words or words that recently took on new meaning.² In 2011, the overall winner was *occupy* as a result of the Occupy Wall Street movement. The word named the "most likely to succeed" was *cloud* as a result of Apple unveiling its new online space for file storage and retrieval. Although languages are dying out at an alarming rate, many languages are growing in terms of new words and expanded meanings, thanks largely to advances in technology, as can be seen in the example of *cloud*.

Slang

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

When I first started teaching this course in the early 2000s, Cal Poly Pomona had been compiling a list of the top twenty college slang words of the year for a few years. The top slang word for 1997 was *da bomb*, which means "great, awesome, or extremely cool," and the top word for 2001 and 2002 was *tight*, which is used as a generic positive meaning "attractive, nice, or cool." Unfortunately, the project didn't continue, but I still enjoy seeing how the top slang words change and sometimes recycle and come back. I always end up learning some new words from my students. When I asked a class what the top college slang word should be for 2011, they suggested *deuces*, which is used when leaving as an alternative to *good-bye* and stems from another verbal/nonverbal leaving symbol—holding up two fingers for "peace" as if to say, "peace out."

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

"Getting Plugged In"

Is "Textese" Hurting Our Verbal Communication?

Textese, also called text-message-ese and txt talk, among other things, has been called a "new dialect" of English that mixes letters and numbers, abbreviates words, and drops vowels and punctuation to create concise words and statements. Although this "dialect" has primarily been relegated to the screens of smartphones and other text-capable devices, it has slowly been creeping into our spoken language (Huang, 2011). Some critics say textese is "destroying" language by "pillaging punctuation" and "savaging our

2. "All of the Words of the Year 1990 to Present," American Dialect Society, accessed June 7, 2012, <http://www.american-dialect.org/woty/all-of-the-words-of-the-year-1990-to-present>.

sentences” (Humphrys, 2007). A relatively straightforward *tk*s for “thanks” or *u* for “you” has now given way to textese sentences like *IMHO U R GR8*. If you translated that into “In my humble opinion, you are great,” then you are fluent in textese. Although teachers and parents seem convinced that this type of communicating will eventually turn our language into emoticons and abbreviations, some scholars aren’t. David Crystal, a well-known language expert, says that such changes to the English language aren’t new and that texting can actually have positive effects. He points out that Shakespeare also abbreviated many words, played with the rules of language, and made up several thousand words, and he is not considered an abuser of language. He also cites research that found, using experimental data, that children who texted more scored higher on reading and vocabulary tests. Crystal points out that in order to play with language, you must first have some understanding of the rules of language (Huang, 2011).

1. What effects, if any, do you think textese has had on your non-text-message communication?
2. Overall do you think textese and other forms of computer-mediated communication have affected our communication? Try to identify one potential positive and negative influence that textese has had on our verbal communication.

Language Is Relational

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

Language Can Bring Us Together

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



Verbal communication brings people together and helps maintain satisfying relationships.

Matus Laslofi – [Talk](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

Moving from the interpersonal to the sociocultural level, we can see that speaking the same language can bring people together. When a person is surrounded by people who do not speak his or her native language, it can be very comforting to run into another person who speaks the same language. Even if the two people are strangers, the ease of linguistic compatibility is comforting and can quickly facilitate a social bond. We've already learned that language helps shape our social reality, so a common language leads to some similar perspectives. Of course, there are individual differences within a language community, but the power of shared language to unite people has led to universal language movements that advocate for one global language.

Serious attempts to create a common language, sometimes referred to as a *lingua franca* or auxiliary language, began in the 1600s as world exploration brought increased trade and Latin was no longer effective as the language of international business. Since then, hundreds of auxiliary languages have been recorded but none have achieved widespread international usage or been officially recognized as an international language (Crystal, 2005). While some such movements were primarily motivated by business and profit, others hoped to promote mutual understanding, more effective diplomacy, and peaceful coexistence. Esperanto, which means "hopeful," is the most well-known and widely used auxiliary language that was intended to serve as a common international language. Esperanto was invented by a Polish eye doctor at the end of the 1800s and today has between one and two million fluent speakers worldwide. Many works of literature and important manuscripts like the Bible and the Qur'an have been translated into Esperanto, and many original works of literature and academic articles have been written in the language. Some countries also broadcast radio programs in Esperanto. Several barriers will have to be overcome in order for an auxiliary language like Esperanto to gain international acceptance. First, there would have to be a massive effort put into a period of simultaneous learning—otherwise it is difficult to motivate people to learn a language that is not necessary for their daily lives and that no one else speaks. Second, as we have learned, people take pride in their linguistic identity and find pleasure in playing with the rules of language,

creatively inventing new words and meanings that constantly change a language. Such changes may be impossible to accommodate in an auxiliary language. Lastly, the optimism of an internationally shared language eventually gives way to realism. If a shared language really brings peaceful coexistence, how do we explain all the civil wars and other conflicts that have been fought between people who speak the same language?

As new languages are invented, many more languages are dying. Linguists and native speakers of endangered languages have also rallied around so-called dying languages to preserve them. In the United States, Cajun French in Louisiana, French Canadian in Maine, and Pennsylvania Dutch are examples of language communities that are in danger of losing the language that has united them, in some cases for hundreds of years (Dorian, 1986). Although American English is in no danger of dying soon, there have been multiple attempts to make English the official language of the United States. Sometimes the argument supporting this proposition seems to be based on the notion that a shared language will lead to more solidarity and in-group identification among the speakers. However, many of these movements are politically and ideologically motivated and actually seek to marginalize and/or expel immigrants—typically immigrants who are also people of color. The United States isn't the only country that has debated the merits of officially recognizing only certain languages. Similar debates have been going on for many years regarding whether French, English, or both should be the official language in Quebec, Canada, and which language(s)—French, Dutch, or Flemish—should be used in what contexts in Belgium (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In such cases, we can see that verbal communication can also divide people.

Language Can Separate Us

Whether it's criticism, teasing, or language differences, verbal communication can also lead to feelings of separation. Language differences alone do not present insurmountable barriers. We can learn other languages with time and effort, there are other people who can translate and serve as bridges across languages, and we can also communicate quite a lot nonverbally in the absence of linguistic compatibility. People who speak the same language can intentionally use language to separate. The words *us* and *them* can be a powerful start to separation. Think of how language played a role in segregation in the United States as the notion of "separate but equal" was upheld by the Supreme Court and how apartheid affected South Africa as limits, based on finances and education, were placed on the black majority's rights to vote. Symbols, both words and images, were a very important part of Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s and '40s in Europe. Various combinations of colored stars, triangles, letters, and other symbols were sewn onto the clothing or uniforms of people persecuted by the Nazis in order to classify them. People were labeled and reduced to certain characteristics rather than seen as complete humans, which facilitated the Nazis' oppression, violence, and killing (Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center, 2012).

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

Common Types of Unsupportive Messages

1. **Global labels.** "You're a liar." Labeling someone irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy calls his or her whole identity as a person into question. Such sweeping judgments and generalizations are sure to only escalate a negative situation.
2. **Sarcasm.** "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Even though sarcasm is often disguised as humor, it usually represents passive-aggressive behavior through which a person indirectly communicates negative feelings.
3. **Dragging up the past.** "I should have known not to trust you when you never paid me back that \$100 I let you borrow." Bringing up negative past experiences is a tactic used by people when they don't want to discuss a current situation. Sometimes people have built up negative feelings that are suddenly let out by a seemingly small thing in the moment.
4. **Negative comparisons.** "Jade graduated from college without any credit card debt. I guess you're just not as responsible as her." Holding a person up to the supposed standards or characteristics of another

person can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.

5. **Judgmental “you” messages.** “You’re never going to be able to hold down a job.” Accusatory messages are usually generalized overstatements about another person that go beyond labeling but still do not describe specific behavior in a productive way.
6. **Threats.** “If you don’t stop texting back and forth with your ex, both of you are going to regret it.” Threatening someone with violence or some other negative consequence usually signals the end of productive communication. Aside from the potential legal consequences, threats usually overcompensate for a person’s insecurity.

Key Takeaways

- Language helps us express observations (reports on sensory information), thoughts (conclusions and judgments based on observations or ideas), feelings, and needs.
- Language is powerful in that it expresses our identities through labels used by and on us, affects our credibility based on how we support our ideas, serves as a means of control, and performs actions when spoken by certain people in certain contexts.
- The productivity and limitlessness of language creates the possibility for countless word games and humorous uses of language.
- Language is dynamic, meaning it is always changing through the addition of neologisms, new words or old words with new meaning, and the creation of slang.
- Language is relational and can be used to bring people together through a shared reality but can separate people through unsupportive and divisive messages.

Exercises

1. Based on what you are doing and how you are feeling at this moment, write one of each of the four types of expressions—an observation, a thought, a feeling, and a need.
2. Getting integrated: A key function of verbal communication is expressing our identities. Identify labels or other words that are important for your identity in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic. (Examples include *honors student* for academic, *trainee* for professional, *girlfriend* for personal, and *independent* for civic.)
3. Review the types of unsupportive messages discussed earlier. Which of them do you think has the potential to separate people the most? Why? Which one do you have the most difficulty avoiding (directing toward others)? Why?

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Using Words Effectively and Affectively

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Using Words Effectively

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

Level of Abstraction

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

Figure 3.2 Ladder of Abstraction



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

You can see the semanticist S. I. Hayakawa's classic example of the abstraction ladder with "Bessie the cow" in [Figure 3.2 "Ladder of Abstraction"](#) (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). At the lowest level, we have something that is very concrete. At this level we are actually in the moment of experiencing the stimuli that is coming in through our senses. We perceive the actual "thing," which is the "cow" in front of us (either in person or as an image). This is concrete, because it is unmediated, meaning it is actually the moment of experience. As we move up a level, we give the experience a name—we are looking at "Bessie." So now, instead of the direct experience with the "thing" in front of us, we have given the thing a name, which takes us one step away from the direct experience to the use of a more abstract symbol. Now we can talk and think about Bessie even when we aren't directly experiencing her. At the next level, the word *cow* now lumps Bessie in with other bovine creatures that share similar characteristics. As we go on up the ladder, *cow* becomes *livestock*, *livestock* becomes an *asset*, and then an *asset* becomes *wealth*. Note that it becomes increasingly difficult to define the meaning of the symbol as we go up the ladder and how with each step we lose more of the characteristics of the original concrete experience.

When shared referents are important, we should try to use language that is lower on the ladder of abstraction. Being intentionally concrete is useful when giving directions, for example, and can help prevent misunderstanding. We sometimes intentionally use abstract language. Since abstract language is often unclear or vague, we can use it as a means of testing out a potential topic (like asking a favor), offering negative feedback indirectly (to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to hint), or avoiding the specifics of a topic.

Definitions and Clarity

Knowing more about the role that abstraction plays in the generation of meaning can help us better describe and define the words we use. As we learned earlier, denotative definitions are those found in the dictionary—the official or agreed-on definition. Since definitions are composed of other words, people who compile dictionaries take for granted that there is a certain amount of familiarity with the words they use to define another word—otherwise we would just be going in circles. One challenge we face when defining words is our tendency to go up the ladder of abstraction rather than down (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). For example, if I asked you to define the word *blue*, you'd likely say it's a color. If I asked you what a color is, you'd tell me it's a tint or characteristic of the appearance of a particular thing. To define more clearly, by going down the ladder of abstraction, you could say, "It's the color of Frank Sinatra's eyes," or "It's what the sky looks like on a clear day." People often come to understanding more quickly when a definition is descriptive and/or ties into their personal experiences. Definitions aren't useless, but they are usually best when paired with examples. You'll notice that I include many key terms and definitions in this book, but knowing some of the challenges of generating meaning through language, I also include many examples and narratives that come from real life. Jargon refers to specialized words used by a certain group or profession. Since jargon is specialized, it is often difficult to relate to a diverse audience and should therefore be limited when speaking to people from outside the group—or at least be clearly defined when it is used.

Creating Whole Messages

Earlier we learned about the four types of expressions, which are observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs. Whole messages include all the relevant types of expressions needed to most effectively communicate in a given situation, including what you see, what you think, what you feel, and what you need (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). Partial messages are missing a relevant type of expression and can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. Whole messages help keep lines of communication open, which can help build solid relationships. On the other hand, people can often figure out a message is partial even if they can't readily identify what is left out. For example, if Roscoe says to Rachel, "I don't trust Bob anymore," Rachel may be turned off or angered by Roscoe's conclusion (an expression of thought) about their mutual friend. However, if Roscoe recounted his observation of Bob's behavior, how that behavior made him feel, and what he needs from Rachel in this situation, she will be better able to respond.

While partial messages lack relevant expressions needed to clearly communicate, contaminated messages include mixed or misleading expressions (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). For example, if Alyssa says to her college-aged daughter, "It looks like you wasted another semester," she has contaminated observations, feelings, and thoughts. Although the message appears to be an observation, there are underlying messages that are better brought to the surface. To decontaminate her message, and make it more whole and less alienating, Alyssa could more clearly express herself by saying, "Your dad and I talked, and he said you told him you failed your sociology class and are thinking about changing your major" (observation). "I think you're hurting your chances of graduating on time and getting started on your career" (thought). "I feel anxious because you and I are both taking out loans to pay for your education" (feeling).

Messages in which needs are contaminated with observations or feelings can be confusing. For example, if Shea says to Duste, "You're so lucky that you don't have to worry about losing your scholarship over this stupid biology final," it seems like he's expressing an observation, but it's really a thought, with an underlying feeling and need. To make the message more whole, Shea could bring the need and feeling to the surface: "I noticed you did really well on the last exam in our biology class" (observation). "I'm really stressed about the exam next week and the possibility of losing my scholarship if I fail it" (feeling). "Would you be willing to put together a study group with me?" (need). More clarity in language is important, but as we already know, communication isn't just about exchanging information—the words we use also influence our emotions and relationships.

Using Words Affectively

Affective language refers to language used to express a person's feelings and create similar feelings in another person (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). Affective language can be intentionally used in relational contexts to create or enhance interpersonal bonds and can also be effectively employed in public speaking to engage an audience and motivate them in particular ways. We also use affective language spontaneously and less intentionally. People

who “speak from the heart” connect well with others due to the affective nature of their words. Sometimes people become so filled with emotion that they have to express it, and these exclamations usually arouse emotions in others. Hearing someone exclaim, “I’m so happy!” can evoke similar feelings of joy, while hearing someone exclaim, “Why me!?” while sobbing conjures up similar feelings of sadness and frustration. There are also specific linguistic devices that facilitate affective communication.



Affective language expresses a person’s feelings and creates similar feelings in another person.

Marcia furman – [spoken](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Figurative Language

When people say something is a “figure of speech,” they are referring to a word or phrase that deviates from expectations in some way in meaning or usage (Yaguello, 1998). Figurative language is the result of breaking semantic rules, but in a way that typically enhances meaning or understanding rather than diminishes it. To understand figurative language, a person has to be familiar with the semantic rules of a language and also with social norms and patterns within a cultural and/or language group, which makes it difficult for nonnative speakers to grasp. Figurative language has the ability to convey much meaning in fewer words, because some of the meaning lies in the context of usage (what a listener can imply by the deviation from semantic norms) and in the listener (how the listener makes meaning by connecting the figurative language to his or her personal experience). Some examples of figurative speech include simile, metaphor, and personification.

A simile is a direct comparison of two things using the words *like* or *as*. Similes can be very explicit for the purpose of conveying a specific meaning and can help increase clarity and lead people to personally connect to a meaning since they have to visualize the comparison in their mind. For example, Forrest Gump’s famous simile, “Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get,” conjures up feelings of uncertainty and excitement. More direct similes like “I slept like a baby” and “That bread was hard as a rock” do not necessarily stir the imagination but still offer an alternative way of expressing something.

A metaphor is an implicit comparison of two things that are not alike and/or are not typically associated. They become meaningful as people realize the speaker’s purpose for relating the two seemingly disparate ideas. Metaphors are figurative devices that can make our writing and speaking richer, but they require a person to balance creative associations among ideas with the common rules of the language if people are expected to figure

out the meaning behind the association. A speaker must have the linguistic knowledge and insight to realize when a nonliteral use of words or ideas will be more meaningful than a literal and conventional use of those words. Metaphors challenge the imagination, which can cause each person to make sense of the metaphor in his or her own way (Olbricht, 1968).

In 1946, just after World War II ended, Winston Churchill stated the following in a speech: “An iron curtain has descended across the continent of Europe.” Even though people knew there was no literal heavy metal curtain that had been lowered over Europe, the concepts of iron being strong and impenetrable and curtains being a divider combined to create a stirring and powerful image of a continent divided by the dark events of the previous years (Carpenter, 1999). Some communication scholars argue that metaphors serve a much larger purpose and function to structure our human thought processes (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The metaphor “time is money” doesn’t just represent an imaginative connection; it shapes our social realities. We engage in specific actions that “save time,” “spend time,” or “waste time” because we have been socialized to see time as a resource.

Many metaphors spring from our everyday experiences. For example, many objects have been implicitly compared to human body parts; for example, we say a clock has hands and a face. Personification refers to the attribution of human qualities or characteristics of other living things to nonhuman objects or abstract concepts. This can be useful when trying to make something abstract more concrete and can create a sense of urgency or “realness” out of something that is hard for people to conceive. Personification has been used successfully in public awareness campaigns because it allows people to identify with something they think might not be relevant to them, as you can see in the following examples: “Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a sleeping enemy that lives in many people and will one day wake up and demand your attention if you do not address it now.” “Crystal meth is a stalking your children whether you see it or not. You never know where it’s hiding.”

Evocative Language

Vivid language captures people’s attention and their imagination by conveying emotions and action. Think of the array of mental images that a poem or a well-told story from a friend can conjure up. Evocative language can also lead us to have physical reactions. Words like *shiver* and *heartbroken* can lead people to remember previous physical sensations related to the word. As a speaker, there may be times when evoking a positive or negative reaction could be beneficial. Evoking a sense of calm could help you talk a friend through troubling health news. Evoking a sense of agitation and anger could help you motivate an audience to action. When we are conversing with a friend or speaking to an audience, we are primarily engaging others’ visual and auditory senses. Evocative language can help your conversational partner or audience members feel, smell, or taste something as well as hear it and see it. Good writers know how to use words effectively and affectively. A well-written story, whether it is a book or screenplay, will contain all the previous elements. The rich fantasy worlds conceived in *Star Trek*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, and *Harry Potter* show the power of figurative and evocative language to capture our attention and our imagination.

Some words are so evocative that their usage violates the social norms of appropriate conversations. Although we could use such words to intentionally shock people, we can also use euphemisms, or less evocative synonyms for or indirect references to words or ideas that are deemed inappropriate to discuss directly. We have many euphemisms for things like excretory acts, sex, and death (Allan & Burridge, 2006). While euphemisms can be socially useful and creative, they can also lead to misunderstanding and problems in cases where more direct communication is warranted despite social conventions.

“Getting Competent”

Using Words Well

This chapter discusses several playful, creative, and engaging aspects of verbal communication. Employing language in an engaging way requires some effort for most people in terms of learning the rules of a language system, practicing, and expanding your vocabulary and expressive repertoire. Only milliseconds pass before a thought is verbalized and “out there” in the world. Since we’ve already learned that we have to be accountable for the short- and long-term effects of our communication, we know being able to monitor our verbal communication and follow the old adage to “think before we speak” is an asset. Using language for effect is difficult, but it can make your speech unique whether it is in a conversation or in front of a larger audience. Aside from communicating ideas,

speech also leaves lasting impressions. The following are some tips for using words well that can apply to various settings but may be particularly useful in situations where one person is trying to engage the attention of an audience.

- Use concrete words to make new concepts or ideas relevant to the experience of your listeners.
 - Use an appropriate level of vocabulary. It is usually obvious when people are trying to speak at a level that is out of their comfort zone, which can hurt credibility.
 - Avoid public speeches that are too rigid and unnatural. Even though public speaking is more formal than conversation, it is usually OK to use contractions and personal pronouns. Not doing so would make the speech awkward and difficult to deliver since it is not a typical way of speaking.
 - Avoid “bloating” your language by using unnecessary words. Don’t say “it is ever apparent” when you can just say “it’s clear.”
 - Use vivid words to paint mental images for your listeners. Take them to places outside of the immediate setting through rich description.
 - Use repetition to emphasize key ideas.
 - When giving a formal speech that you have time to prepare for, record your speech and listen to your words. Have your outline with you and take note of areas that seem too bland, bloated, or confusing and then edit them before you deliver the speech.
1. What are some areas of verbal communication that you can do well on? What are some areas of verbal communication that you could improve?
 2. Think of a time when a speaker’s use of language left a positive impression on you. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to their verbal communication to help explain why it was so positive?
 3. Think of a time when a speaker’s use of language left a negative impression on you. What concepts from this chapter can you apply to their verbal communication to help explain why it was so negative?

Using Words Ethically

We learned in [Chapter 1 “Introduction to Communication Studies”](#) that communication is irreversible. We also learned that, among other things, the National Communication Association’s “Credo for Ethical Communication” states that we should be accountable for the long- and short-term effects of our communication (National Communication Association, 2012). The way we talk, the words we choose to use, and the actions we take after we are done speaking are all important aspects of communication ethics. Earlier we learned that language is performative, meaning that it can exceed the exchange of information and actually perform certain actions. Knowing that language can have real effects for people increases our need to be aware of the ethical implications of what we say. Hate speech and bias are important aspects of communication ethics that will be discussed more in [Section 3.4 “Language, Society, and Culture”](#) on language and culture. In this section, we will focus on civility and accountability.

Civility

Our strong emotions regarding our own beliefs, attitudes, and values can sometimes lead to incivility in our verbal communication. Incivility occurs when a person deviates from established social norms and can take many forms, including insults, bragging, bullying, gossiping, swearing, deception, and defensiveness, among others (Miller, 2001). Some people lament that we live in a time when civility is diminishing, but since standards and expectations for what is considered civil communication have changed over time, this isn’t the only time such claims have been made (Miller, 2001). As individualism and affluence have increased in many societies, so have the number of idiosyncratic identities that people feel they have the right to express. These increases could contribute to the impression that society is becoming less civil, when in fact it is just becoming different. As we learned in our section on perception and personality, we tend to assume other people are like us, and we may be disappointed or offended when we realize they are not. Cultural changes have probably contributed to making people less willing to engage in self-restraint, which again would be seen as uncivil by people who prefer a more restrained and self-controlled expression (Miller, 2001).

Some journalists, media commentators, and scholars have argued that the “flaming” that happens on comment sections of websites and blogs is a type of verbal incivility that presents a threat to our democracy (Brooks & Greer, 2007). Other scholars of communication and democracy have not as readily labeled such communication

“uncivil” (Cammaerts, 2009). It has long been argued that civility is important for the functioning and growth of a democracy (Kingwell, 1995). But in the new digital age of democracy where technologies like Twitter and Facebook have started democratic revolutions, some argue that the Internet and other new media have opened spaces in which people can engage in cyberactivism and express marginal viewpoints that may otherwise not be heard (Dahlberg, 2007). In any case, researchers have identified several aspects of language use online that are typically viewed as negative: name-calling, character assassination, and the use of obscene language (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011). So what contributes to such uncivil behavior—online and offline? The following are some common individual and situational influences that may lead to breaches of civility (Miller, 2001):

- **Individual differences.** Some people differ in their interpretations of civility in various settings, and some people have personality traits that may lead to actions deemed uncivil on a more regular basis.
- **Ignorance.** In some cases, especially in novel situations involving uncertainty, people may not know what social norms and expectations are.
- **Lack of skill.** Even when we know how to behave, we may not be able to do it. Such frustrations may lead a person to revert to undesirable behavior such as engaging in personal attacks during a conflict because they don’t know what else to do.
- **Lapse of control.** Self-control is not an unlimited resource. Even when people know how to behave and have the skill to respond to a situation appropriately, they may not do so. Even people who are careful to monitor their behavior have occasional slipups.
- **Negative intent.** Some people, in an attempt to break with conformity or challenge societal norms, or for self-benefit (publicly embarrassing someone in order to look cool or edgy), are openly uncivil. Such behavior can also result from mental or psychological stresses or illnesses.

Polarizing Language

Philosophers of language have long noted our tendency to verbally represent the world in very narrow ways when we feel threatened (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This misrepresents reality and closes off dialogue. Although in our everyday talk we describe things in nuanced and measured ways, quarrels and controversies often narrow our vision, which is reflected in our vocabulary. In order to maintain a civil discourse in which people interact ethically and competently, it has been suggested that we keep an open mind and an open vocabulary.

One feature of communicative incivility is polarizing language, which refers to language that presents people, ideas, or situations as polar opposites. Such language exaggerates differences and overgeneralizes. Things aren’t simply black or white, right or wrong, or good or bad. Being able to only see two values and clearly accepting one and rejecting another doesn’t indicate sophisticated or critical thinking. We don’t have to accept every viewpoint as right and valid, and we can still hold strongly to our own beliefs and defend them without ignoring other possibilities or rejecting or alienating others. A citizen who says, “All cops are corrupt,” is just as wrong as the cop who says, “All drug users are scum.” In avoiding polarizing language we keep a more open mind, which may lead us to learn something new. A citizen may have a personal story about a negative encounter with a police officer that could enlighten us on his or her perspective, but the statement also falsely overgeneralizes that experience. Avoiding polarizing language can help us avoid polarized thinking, and the new information we learn may allow us to better understand and advocate for our position. Avoiding sweeping generalizations allows us to speak more clearly and hopefully avoid defensive reactions from others that result from such blanket statements.

Swearing

Scholars have identified two main types of swearing: social swearing and annoyance swearing (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). People engage in social swearing to create social bonds or for impression management (to seem cool or attractive). This type of swearing is typically viewed as male dominated, but some research studies have shown that the differences in frequency and use of swearing by men and women aren’t as vast as perceived. Nevertheless, there is generally more of a social taboo against women swearing than men, but as you already know, communication is contextual. Annoyance swearing provides a sense of relief, as people use it to manage stress and tension, which can be a preferred alternative to physical aggression. In some cases, swearing can be cathartic, allowing a person to release emotions that might otherwise lead to more aggressive or violent actions.

In the past few decades, the amount of profanity used in regular conversations and on television shows and movies has increased. This rise has been connected to a variety of factors, including increasing social informality since the 1960s and a decrease in the centrality of traditional/conservative religious views in many Western cultures (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). As a result of these changes, the shock value that swearing once had is lessening, and this desensitization has contributed to its spread. You have probably even noticed in your lifetime that the amount of swearing on television has increased, and in June of 2012 the Supreme Court stripped the Federal Communications Commission of some of its authority to fine broadcasters for obscenities (Liptak, 2012). There has also been a reaction, or backlash, to this spread, which is most publicly evidenced by the website, book, and other materials produced by the Cuss Control Academy (<http://www.cusscontrol.com>) (O'Connor, 2012). Although swearing is often viewed as negative and uncivil, some scholars argue for its positive effects (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). Specifically, swearing can help people to better express their feelings and to develop social bonds. In fact, swearing is typically associated more with the emotional part of the brain than the verbal part of the brain, as evidenced by people who suffer trauma to the verbal part of their brain and lose all other language function but are still able to swear (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Accountability

The complexity of our verbal language system allows us to present inferences as facts and mask judgments within seemingly objective or oblique language. As an ethical speaker and a critical listener, it is important to be able to distinguish between facts, inferences, and judgments (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). Inferences are conclusions based on thoughts or speculation, but not direct observation. Facts are conclusions based on direct observation or group consensus. Judgments are expressions of approval or disapproval that are subjective and not verifiable.

Linguists have noted that a frequent source of miscommunication is inference-observation confusion, or the misperception of an inference (conclusion based on limited information) as an observation (an observed or agreed-on fact) (Haney, 1992). We can see the possibility for such confusion in the following example: If a student posts on a professor-rating site the statement “This professor grades unfairly and plays favorites,” then they are presenting an inference and a judgment that could easily be interpreted as a fact. Using some of the strategies discussed earlier for speaking clearly can help present information in a more ethical way—for example, by using concrete and descriptive language and owning emotions and thoughts through the use of “I language.” To help clarify the message and be more accountable, the student could say, “I worked for three days straight on my final paper and only got a C,” which we will assume is a statement of fact. This could then be followed up with “But my friend told me she only worked on hers the day before it was due and she got an A. I think that’s unfair and I feel like my efforts aren’t recognized by the professor.” Of the last two statements, the first states what may be a fact (note, however, that the information is secondhand rather than directly observed) and the second states an inferred conclusion and expresses an owned thought and feeling. Sometimes people don’t want to mark their statements as inferences because they want to believe them as facts. In this case, the student may have attributed her grade to the professor’s “unfairness” to cover up or avoid thoughts that her friend may be a better student in this subject area, a better writer, or a better student in general. Distinguishing between facts, inferences, and judgments, however, allows your listeners to better understand your message and judge the merits of it, which makes us more accountable and therefore more ethical speakers.

Key Takeaways

- The symbolic nature of language means that misunderstanding can easily occur when words and their definitions are abstract (far removed from the object or idea to which the symbol refers). The creation of whole messages, which contain relevant observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs, can help reduce misunderstandings.
- Affective language refers to language used to express a person’s feelings and create similar feelings in another person. Metaphor, simile, personification, and vivid language can evoke emotions in speaker and listener.
- Incivility occurs when people deviate from accepted social norms for communication and behavior and manifests in swearing and polarized language that casts people and ideas as opposites. People can reduce incivility by being more accountable for the short- and long-term effects of their communication.

Exercises

1. Following the example in the ladder of abstraction, take a common word referring to an object (like *bicycle* or *smartphone*) and write its meaning, in your own words, at each step from most concrete to most abstract. Discuss how the meaning changes as the word/idea becomes more abstract and how the word becomes more difficult to define.
2. Decontaminate the following messages by rewriting them in a way that makes them whole (separate out each type of relevant expression). You can fill in details if needed to make your expressions more meaningful.
 - "I feel like you can't ever take me seriously."
 - "It looks like you've ruined another perfectly good relationship."
3. Find a famous speech (for example, at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com>) and identify components of figurative language. How do these elements add to the meaning of the speech?
4. Getting integrated: Review the section on using words ethically. Identify a situation in which language could be used unethically in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic. Specifically tie your example to civility, polarizing language, swearing, or accountability.

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Media Attributions

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Language, Society, and Culture

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. Such a cyclical relationship can be difficult to understand, but many of the examples throughout this chapter and examples from our own lives help illustrate this point. One of the best ways to learn about society, culture, and language is to seek out opportunities to go beyond our typical comfort zones. Studying abroad, for example, brings many challenges that can turn into valuable lessons. The following example of such a lesson comes from my friend who studied abroad in Vienna, Austria.

Although English used to employ formal (*thou, thee*) and informal pronouns (*you*), today *you* can be used when speaking to a professor, a parent, or a casual acquaintance. Other languages still have social norms and rules about who is to be referred to informally and formally. My friend, as was typical in the German language, referred to his professor with the formal pronoun *Sie* but used the informal pronoun *Du* with his fellow students since they were peers. When the professor invited some of the American exchange students to dinner, they didn't know they were about to participate in a cultural ritual that would change the way they spoke to their professor from that night on. Their professor informed them that they were going to *duzen*, which meant they were going to now be able to refer to her with the informal pronoun—an honor and sign of closeness for the American students. As they went around the table, each student introduced himself or herself to the professor using the formal pronoun, locked arms with her and drank (similar to the champagne toast ritual at some wedding ceremonies), and reintroduced himself or herself using the informal pronoun. For the rest of the semester, the American students still respectfully referred to the professor with her title, which translated to “Mrs. Doctor,” but used informal pronouns, even in class, while the other students not included in the ceremony had to continue using the formal. Given that we do not use formal and informal pronouns in English anymore, there is no equivalent ritual to the German *duzen*, but as we will learn next, there are many rituals in English that may be just as foreign to someone else.

Language and Social Context

We arrive at meaning through conversational interaction, which follows many social norms and rules. As we've already learned, rules are explicitly stated conventions (“Look at me when I'm talking to you.”) and norms are implicit (saying you've got to leave before you actually do to politely initiate the end to a conversation). To help conversations function meaningfully, we have learned social norms and internalized them to such an extent that we do not often consciously enact them. Instead, we rely on routines and roles (as determined by social forces) to

help us proceed with verbal interaction, which also helps determine how a conversation will unfold. Our various social roles influence meaning and how we speak. For example, a person may say, “As a longtime member of this community...” or “As a first-generation college student...” Such statements cue others into the personal and social context from which we are speaking, which helps them better interpret our meaning.

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

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

Travis:

“How are you?”

Wanda:

“Did someone tell you I’m sick?”

Darrell:

“I just wanted to let you know the meeting has been moved to three o’clock.”

Leigh:

“I had cake for breakfast this morning.”

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



Social norms influence how conversations start and end and how speakers take turns to keep the conversation going.

Felipe Cabrera – [conversation](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Ending a conversation is similarly complex. I'm sure we've all been in a situation where we are "trapped" in a conversation that we need or want to get out of. Just walking away or ending a conversation without engaging in socially acceptable "leave-taking behaviors" would be considered a breach of social norms. Topic changes are often places where people can leave a conversation, but it is still routine for us to give a special reason for leaving, often in an apologetic tone (whether we mean it or not). Generally though, conversations come to an end through the cooperation of both people, as they offer and recognize typical signals that a topic area has been satisfactorily covered or that one or both people need to leave. It is customary in the United States for people to say they have to leave before they actually do and for that statement to be dismissed or ignored by the other person until additional leave-taking behaviors are enacted. When such cooperation is lacking, an awkward silence or abrupt ending can result, and as we've already learned, US Americans are not big fans of silence. Silence is not viewed the same way in other cultures, which leads us to our discussion of cultural context.

Language and Cultural Context

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

From birth we are socialized into our various cultural identities. As with the social context, this acculturation process is a combination of explicit and implicit lessons. A child in Colombia, which is considered a more collectivist country in which people value group membership and cohesion over individualism, may not be explicitly told, "You are a member of a collectivistic culture, so you should care more about the family and community than yourself." This cultural value would be transmitted through daily actions and through language use. Just as babies acquire knowledge of language practices at an astonishing rate in their first two years of life, so do they acquire cultural knowledge and values that are embedded in those language practices. At nine months old, it is possible to distinguish babies based on their language. Even at this early stage of development, when most babies are babbling and just learning to recognize but not wholly reproduce verbal interaction patterns, a

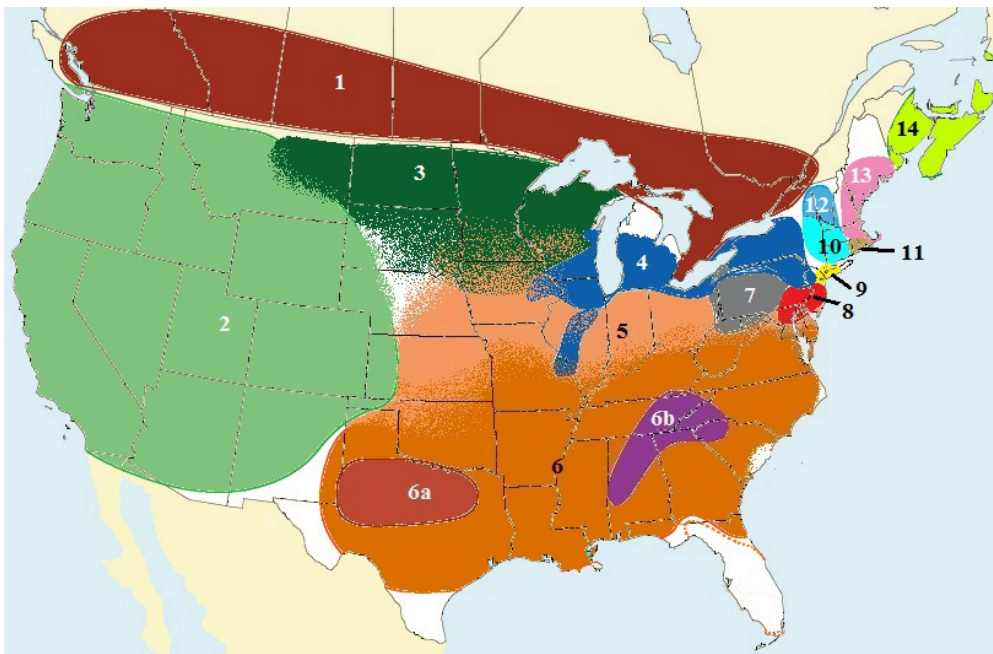
Colombian baby would sound different from a Brazilian baby, even though neither would actually be using words from their native languages of Spanish and Portuguese (Crystal, 2005).

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

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

Accents and Dialects

The documentary *American Tongues*, although dated at this point, is still a fascinating look at the rich tapestry of accents and dialects that makes up American English. Dialects are versions of languages that have distinct words, grammar, and pronunciation. Accents are distinct styles of pronunciation (Lustig & Koester, 2006). There can be multiple accents within one dialect. For example, people in the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States speak a dialect of American English that is characterized by remnants of the linguistic styles of Europeans who settled the area a couple hundred years earlier. Even though they speak this similar dialect, a person in Kentucky could still have an accent that is distinguishable from a person in western North Carolina.



American English has several dialects that vary based on region, class, and ancestry.

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

Customs and Norms

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

Gender also affects how we use language, but not to the extent that most people think. Although there is a widespread belief that men are more likely to communicate in a clear and straightforward way and women are more likely to communicate in an emotional and indirect way, a meta-analysis of research findings from more than two hundred studies found only small differences in the personal disclosures of men and women (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Men and women's levels of disclosure are even more similar when engaging in cross-gender communication, meaning men and woman are more similar when speaking to each other than when men speak to men or women speak to women. This could be due to the internalized pressure to speak about the other gender in socially sanctioned ways, in essence reinforcing the stereotypes when speaking to the same gender but challenging them in cross-gender encounters. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters (Dindia, 1987). These findings, which state that men and women communicate more similarly during cross-gender

encounters and then communicate in more stereotypical ways in same-gender encounters, can be explained with communication accommodation theory.

Communication Accommodation and Code-Switching

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

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



People who work or live in multilingual settings may engage in code-switching several times a day.

Eltpics – [Welsh](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Additionally, people who work or live in multilingual settings may code-switch many times throughout the day, or even within a single conversation. Increasing outsourcing and globalization have produced heightened pressures for code-switching. Call center workers in India have faced strong negative reactions from British and American customers who insist on “speaking to someone who speaks English.” Although many Indians learn English in schools as a result of British colonization, their accents prove to be off-putting to people who want to get their cable package changed or book an airline ticket. Now some Indian call center workers are going through intense training to be able to code-switch and accommodate the speaking style of their customers. What is being called the “Anglo-Americanization of India” entails “accent-neutralization,” lessons on American culture (using things like *Sex and the City* DVDs), and the use of Anglo-American-sounding names like Sean and Peggy (Pal, 2004). As our interactions continue to occur in more multinational contexts, the expectations for code-switching and accommodation are sure to increase. It is important for us to consider the intersection of culture and power and think critically about the ways in which expectations for code-switching may be based on cultural biases.

Language and Cultural Bias

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

Cultural bias is a skewed way of viewing or talking about a group that is typically negative. Bias has a way of creeping into our daily language use, often under our awareness. Culturally biased language can make reference to one or more cultural identities, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability. There are other sociocultural identities that can be the subject of biased language, but we will focus our discussion on these five. Much biased language is based on stereotypes and myths that influence the words we use. Bias is both intentional and unintentional, but as we’ve already discussed, we have to be accountable for what we say even if we didn’t “intend” a particular meaning—remember, meaning is generated; it doesn’t exist inside our thoughts or words. We will discuss specific ways in which cultural bias manifests in our language and ways to become more aware of bias. Becoming aware of and addressing cultural bias is not the same thing as engaging in “political correctness.” Political correctness takes awareness to the extreme but doesn’t do much to address cultural bias aside from make people feel like they are walking on eggshells. That kind of pressure can lead people to avoid discussions about cultural identities or avoid people with different cultural identities. Our goal is not to eliminate all cultural bias from verbal communication or to never offend anyone, intentionally or otherwise. Instead, we will continue to use guidelines for ethical communication that we have already discussed and strive to increase our competence. The following discussion also focuses on bias rather than preferred terminology or outright discriminatory language, which will be addressed more in [Chapter 8 “Culture and Communication”](#), which discusses culture and communication.

Race

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

color to indicate solidarity among groups, but it is likely that they still prefer a more specific label when referring to an individual or referencing a specific racial group.

Gender

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

Age

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



Age bias can appear in language directed toward younger or older people.

Davide Mauro – [Old and young](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Sexual Orientation

Discussions of sexual and affectional orientation range from everyday conversations to contentious political and personal debates. The negative stereotypes that have been associated with homosexuality, including deviance, mental illness, and criminal behavior, continue to influence our language use (American Psychological Association, 2012). Terminology related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) people can be confusing, so let's spend some time raise our awareness about preferred labels. First, *sexual orientation* is the term preferred to *sexual preference*. *Preference* suggests a voluntary choice, as in someone has a preference for cheddar or American cheese, which doesn't reflect the experience of most GLB people or research findings that show sexuality is more complex. You may also see *affectional orientation* included with *sexual orientation* because it acknowledges that GLB relationships, like heterosexual relationships, are about intimacy and closeness (affection) that is not just sexually based. Most people also prefer the labels *gay*, *lesbian*, or *bisexual* to *homosexual*, which is clinical and doesn't so much refer to an identity as a sex act. Language regarding romantic relationships contains bias when heterosexuality is assumed. Keep in mind that individuals are not allowed to marry someone of the same gender in most states in the United States. For example, if you ask a gay man who has been in a committed partnership for ten years if he is "married or single," how should he answer that question? Comments comparing GLB people to "normal" people, although possibly intended to be positive, reinforces the stereotype that GLB people are abnormal. Don't presume you can identify a person's sexual orientation by looking at them or talking to them. Don't assume that GLB people will "come out" to you. Given that many GLB people have faced and continue to face regular discrimination, they may be cautious about disclosing their identities. However, using gender neutral terminology like *partner* and avoiding other biased language mentioned previously may create a climate in which a GLB person feels comfortable disclosing his or her sexual orientation identity. Conversely, the casual use of phrases like *that's gay* to mean "that's stupid" may create an environment in which GLB people do not feel comfortable. Even though people don't often use the phrase to actually refer to sexual orientation, campaigns like "ThinkB4YouSpeak.com" try to educate people about the power that language has and how we should all be more conscious of the words we use.

Ability

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

"Getting Critical"

Hate Speech

Hate is a term that has many different meanings and can be used to communicate teasing, mild annoyance, or anger. The term *hate*, as it relates to hate speech, has a much more complex and serious meaning. *Hate* refers to extreme negative beliefs and feelings toward a group or member of a group because of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or ability (Waltman & Haas, 2011). We can get a better understanding of the intensity of hate by distinguishing it from anger, which is an emotion that we experience much

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

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

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

1. Do you think the First Amendment of the Constitution, guaranteeing free speech to US citizens, should protect hate speech? Why or why not?
2. Visit the Southern Poverty Law Center's "Hate Map" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012) (<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map>) to see what hate groups they have identified in your state. Are you surprised by the number/nature of the groups listed in your state? Briefly describe a group that you didn't know about and identify the target of its hate and the reasons it gives for its hate speech.

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Social context influences the ways in which we use language, and we have been socialized to follow implicit social rules like those that guide the flow of conversations, including how we start and end our interactions and how we change topics. The way we use language changes as we shift among academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- The language that we speak influences our cultural identities and our social realities. We internalize norms and rules that help us function in our own culture but that can lead to misunderstanding when used in other cultural contexts.
- We can adapt to different cultural contexts by purposely changing our communication. Communication accommodation theory explains that people may adapt their communication to be more similar to or different from others based on various contexts.
- We should become aware of how our verbal communication reveals biases toward various cultural identities based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability.

Exercises

1. Recall a conversation that became awkward when you or the other person deviated from the social norms that manage conversation flow. Was the awkwardness at the beginning, end, or during a topic change? After reviewing some of the common norms discussed in the chapter, what do you think was the source of the awkwardness?
2. Describe an accent or a dialect that you find pleasing/interesting. Describe an accent/dialect that you do not find pleasing/interesting. Why do you think you evaluate one positively and the other negatively?
3. Review how cultural bias relates to the five cultural identities discussed earlier. Identify something you learned about bias related to one of these identities that you didn't know before. What can you do now to be more aware of how verbal

communication can reinforce cultural biases?

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Media Attributions

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[12]

Developing Your Ability to Use Effective Language in Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize language used for power and the power of language choices.
2. Explain the standard of clarity.
3. Choose language appropriate for audiences.
4. Choose clear language.
5. Begin to develop her/his own language ability in speaking.

What Language Is and Does

The Ancient Romans who studied and taught rhetoric divided its study and process into five “canons:” invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery. The term “style” does not refer to clothing styles but language choices. Should a public speaker use very basic language because the audience is unfamiliar with his topic? Or more technical language with many acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon because the audience has expertise in the topic? Or academic language with abstract vocabulary, or flowery, poetic language with lots of metaphors? Perhaps you have never thought about those questions, but they are ones that influence both the clarity of the message as well as the credibility a speaker will gain during the presentation.

However, we would be wrong if we treated language as an “add-on” to the ideas and structure of the speech. Language is a far too complex and foundational aspect of our lives for us to consider it as an afterthought for a speech. In this chapter we will look at how language functions in communication, what standards language choices should meet in public speaking, and how you can become more proficient in using language in public speaking.

Language is any formal system of gestures, signs, sounds, and symbols used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, either through written, enacted, or spoken means. Linguists believe there are far more than 6,900 languages and distinct dialects spoken in the world today (Anderson, 2012). The language spoken by the greatest number of people on the planet is Mandarin (a dialect of Chinese). Other widely spoken languages are English, Spanish, and Arabic. English is spoken widely on every continent (thanks to the British Empire) but Mandarin is spoken by the most people. While we tend to think of language in its print form, for most of history and for most of the world, language has been or is spoken, or oral. More than half of spoken languages have not even been put into written form yet (<https://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/langhotspots/fastfacts.html>).

We have already seen in earlier chapters that public speakers have to make adjustments to language for audiences. For example, spoken language is more wordy and repetitive than written language needs to be or should be. It is accompanied by gestures, vocal emphasis, and facial expressions. Additionally, spoken language includes more personal pronouns and more expressive, emotional, colloquial, slang, and nonstandard words.

The study of language is, believe it or not, controversial. If you are an education, social sciences, pre-law, or English major, you will somewhere in your college career come up against this truth. While we use words everyday and don't think about it, scholars in different fields concern themselves with how we choose words, why we choose words, what effect words have on us, and how the powerful people of the world use words. One theory of language, general semantics, says that meaning resides in the person using the word, not in the word ("Basic Understandings," 2015). It is helpful for the public speaker to keep this mind, especially in regard to **denotative** and **connotative** (see Chapter 1) meaning. Wrench, Goding, Johnson, and Attias (2011) use this example to explain the difference:

Language

any formal system of gestures, signs, sounds, and symbols used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, either through written, enacted, or spoken means

When we hear or use the word "blue," we may be referring to a portion of the visual spectrum dominated by energy with a wavelength of roughly 440–490 nano-meters. You could also say that the color in question is an equal mixture of both red and green light. While both of these are technically correct ways to interpret the word "blue," we're pretty sure that neither of these definitions is how you thought about the word. When hearing the word "blue," you may have thought of your favorite color, the color of the sky on a spring day, or the color of a really ugly car you saw in the parking lot. When people think about language, there are two different types of meanings that people must be aware of: denotative and connotative. (p. 407)

Denotative meaning is the specific meaning associated with a word. We sometimes refer to denotative meanings as dictionary definitions. The [scientific] definitions provided above for the word "blue" are examples of definitions that might be found in a dictionary. Connotative meaning is the idea suggested by or associated with a word at a cultural or personal level. In addition to the examples above, the word "blue" can evoke many other ideas:

- State of depression (feeling blue)
- Indication of winning (a blue ribbon)
- Side during the Civil War (blues vs. grays)
- Sudden event (out of the blue).
- States that lean toward the Democratic Party in their voting
- A slang expression for obscenity (blue comedy)

Language is not just something we *use*; it is part of who we are and how we think. When we talk about language, we have to use words to do so, and language is also hard to separate from who we are. Each of us has our own way of expressing ourselves. Even more, it is almost impossible to separate language from thinking. Many people think the federal government should enact a law that only English is spoken in the United States (in government offices, schools, etc.). This is opposed by some groups because it seems discriminatory to immigrants, based on the belief that everyone's language is part of his or her identity and self-definition.

Not only is language about who we are; it is about power. In fact, some educational and political theorists believe that language is all about power. For instance, **euphemisms** are often used to make something unpleasant sound more tolerable. In one of the more well-known examples of the use of euphemisms, the government commonly tries to use language to "soften" what many would see as bad. During the Vietnam War, "air support" was invented to cover the real meaning: "bombing." When you hear air support, you probably think "planes bringing supplies in," not "bombing."

Even today, terms like "revenue enhancement" are used instead of "tax increases." The word euphemism has at its core "eu," (which is a prefix from Greek meaning "good" or "pleasant") and "phem" (a root word for speaking). Just as blasphemy is speaking evil about sacred things, "euphemism" is "pleasant speaking about unpleasant things." We use euphemisms every day, but we have to be careful not to obscure meaning or use them deceptively.

Euphemism

language devices often used to make something unpleasant sound more tolerable

There's an old saying in debate, "He who defines the terms wins the debate." In the 1988 election, George H.W. Bush was running against Michael Dukakis, who was the governor of Massachusetts. Vice President Bush was able to stick a label on Dukakis and it stuck, that of "liberal." He not only labeled Governor Dukakis, but he also defined what "liberal" meant. The word was in disuse after that, and you don't hear it as much now. The word in use now is "progressive." Unfortunately, this incident in 1988 politics obscured the fact that the U.S. has always been a "liberal"

democratic republic. The word “liberal” has shifted meaning, another trait of language, since meaning exists in the minds of users, not in some protected, never-changing space or form. In the majority of Americans’ minds, “liberal” has become associated with specific political positions rather than a form of government in general.

To most people “progressive” sounds better, although an historian could argue the word is technically being used incorrectly. It doesn’t matter, because a word doesn’t “have” meaning; meaning exists in the minds of people using the word. If “progressive” hits people and evokes or stirs up ideas of forward-thinking, young, active, problem-solving people, then good. For most people it doesn’t bring up pictures of Woodrow Wilson and suffragists.

These examples bring up another issue with language: words change meaning over time, or more specifically, the meaning we attached to them changes. “Pretty” used to mean “clever” 250 years ago. “Prevent” meant to “precede,” not to keep from happening. Language is simply not static, as much as we might like it to be. One of the main reasons we find Shakespeare daunting is that so many of the Elizabethan words either no longer are used or they have changed meanings.

With regard to the use of language for power, even unknowingly, feminists in the 1970s argued that the common way we use English language was biased against women. King-sized means “big and powerful,” but “queen-sized” means “for overweight women.” “Master” was not equivalent to “mistress.” “Madame” had taken on a bad connotation, even though it should have been equivalent to “sir.” Many words referring to women had to add a suffix that was often “less than,” such as “-ess” or “-ette” or “co-ed.” In the last thirty years we have gotten away from that, so that you often hear a female actor referred to as “actor” rather than “actress,” but old habits die hard.

We see another example of power in language in the abortion debate. Prior to 1973, abortions could be obtained legally, to some extent, in three states: California, New York, and Hawaii. After the Roe v. Wade decision in January of 1973, they could, at least theoretically, be obtained in all fifty states. Roe v. Wade did not make abortions legal so much as it made anti-abortion laws illegal or unconstitutional, so the effect was generally the same. The people who were against abortion were now on the defensive, and they had to start fighting. It’s generally better to be “pro-”something rather than “anti-”something, so they became “pro-life.” Those favoring abortion rights then automatically became “pro-death.” One side had defined the terms of the debate, and the other had to come up with something comparable. “Pro-choice” takes advantage of the American belief in capitalism and freedoms.

These examples show how “defining the terms” gives a person control of the discourse. As you progress as a public speaker, you will become more aware of the power certain words have over audiences. An ethical communicator will use language in a way that encourages respect for others, freedom of thought, and informed decision making. First, however, a speaker should seek to meet the standards of clarity, effectiveness, appropriateness, and elegance in language, which are discussed in the next section.

Standards for Language in Public Speaking

Clear language is powerful language. Clarity is the first concern of a public speaker when it comes to choosing how to phrase the ideas of his or her speech. If you are not clear, specific, precise, detailed, and sensory with your language, you won’t have to worry about being emotional or persuasive, because you won’t be understood. There are many aspects of clarity in language, listed below.

Achieving Clarity

The first aspect of clarity is concreteness. We usually think of concreteness as the opposite of abstraction. Language that evokes many different visual images in the minds of your audience is **abstract language**. Unfortunately, when abstract language is used, the images evoked might not be the ones you really want to evoke. A word such as “art” is very abstract; it brings up a range of mental pictures or associations: dance, theatre, painting, drama, a child’s drawing on a refrigerator, sculpture, music, etc. When asked to identify what an abstract term like “art” means, twenty people will have twenty different ideas.

Figure 10.1 - Ladder of Abstraction

Figure 10.1 – Ladder of Abstraction

Figure 10.2 - Renaissance David (Michelangelo) vs. Bernini’s David.

Figure 10.2 – Renaissance *David* (Michelangelo) vs. Bernini’s *David*.

In order to show how language should be more specific, the “ladder of abstraction” (Hayakawa, 1939) was developed. The ladder of abstraction in Figure 10.1 helps us see how our language can range from abstract (general and sometimes vague) to very precise and specific (such as an actual person that everyone in your audience will

Abstract language

language that evokes many different visual images in the minds of your audience

know). You probably understood the ladder in Figure 10.2 until it came to the word “Baroque.” At Bernini’s, you might get confused if you do not know much about art history. If the top level said “Bernini’s David,” a specific sculpture, that would be confusing to some because while almost everyone is familiar with Michelangelo’s *David*, Bernini’s version is very different. It’s life-sized, moving, and clothed. Bernini’s is as much a symbol of the Baroque Age as Michelangelo’s is of the Renaissance. But unless you’ve taken an art history course, the reference, though very specific, is meaningless to you, and even worse, it might strike you as showing off. In fact, to make my point, here they are in Figure 10.2. A picture is worth a thousand words, right?

Related to the issue of specific vs. abstract is the use of the right word. Mark Twain said, “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” For example, the words “prosecute” and “persecute” are commonly confused, but not interchangeable. Two others are peremptory/pre-emptive and prerequisites/perquisites. Can you think of other such word pair confusion?

In the attempt to be clear, which is your first concern, you will also want to be simple and familiar in your language. Familiarity is a factor of attention (Chapter 7); familiar language draws in the audience. Simple does not mean simplistic, but the avoidance of multi-syllable words. If a speaker said, “A collection of pre-adolescence fabricated an obese personification comprised of compressed mounds of minute aquatic crystals,” you might recognize it as “Some children made a snowman,” but maybe not. The language is not simple or familiar and therefore does not communicate well, although the words are correct and do mean the same thing, technically.

Along with language needing to be specific and correct, language can use appropriate similes and metaphors to become clearer. **Literal language** does not use comparisons like similes and metaphors; **figurative language** uses comparisons with objects, animals, activities, roles, or historical or literary figures. Literal says, “The truck is fast.” Figurative says “The truck is as fast as...” or “The truck runs like...” or “He drives that truck like Kyle Busch at Daytona.” **Similes** use some form of “like” or “as” in the comparisons. **Metaphors** are direct comparisons, such as “He is Kyle Busch at Daytona when he gets behind the wheel of that truck.” Here are some more examples of metaphors:

Love is a *battlefield*.

Upon hearing the charges, the accused *clammed up* and refused to speak without a lawyer.

Every year a new crop of activists is *born*.

Figurative language

language that uses metaphors and similes to compare things that may not be literally alike

Metaphors

a figure of speech that identifies something as being the same as some unrelated thing for rhetorical effect, thus highlighting the similarities between the two

Literal language

language that does not use comparisons like similes and metaphors

Similes

a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind (specifically using the terms “like” or “as”), used to make a description more emphatic or vivid

For rhetorical purposes, metaphors are considered stronger, but both can help you achieve clearer language, if chosen wisely. To think about how metaphor is stronger than simile, think of the difference “Love is a battlefield” and “Love is *like* a battlefield.” Speakers are encouraged to pick their metaphors and not overuse them. Also, avoid mixed metaphors, as in this example: “That’s awfully thin gruel for the right wing to hang their hats on.” Or “He found himself up a river and had to change horses.” The mixed metaphor here is the use of “up a river” and “change horses” together; you would either need to use an all river-based metaphor (dealing with boats, water, tides, etc.) or a metaphor dealing specifically with horses. The example above about a “new crop” “being born,” is actually a mixed metaphor, since crops aren’t born, but planted and harvested. Additionally, in choosing metaphors and similes, speakers want to avoid clichés, discussed next.

Clichés are expressions, usually similes, that are predictable. You know what comes next because they are overused and sometimes out of date. Clichés do not have to be linguistic—we often see clichés in movies, such as teen horror films where you know exactly what will happen next! It is not hard to think of clichés: “Scared out of my . . .” or “When life gives you lemons. . .” or “All is fair in. . .” or, when describing a reckless driver, “She drives like a . . .” If you filled in the blanks with “wits,” “make lemonade,” “love and war,” or “maniac,” those are clichés.

Clichés are not just a problem because they are overused and boring; they also sometimes do not communicate what you need, especially to audiences whose second language is English. “I will give you a ballpark figure” is not as clear as “I will give you an estimate,” and assumes the person is familiar with American sports. Therefore, they also will make you appear less credible in the eyes of the audience because you are not analyzing them and taking their knowledge, background, and needs into account.

Clichés

predictable and generally overused expressions; usually similes

As the United States becomes more diverse, being aware of your audience members whose first language is not English is a valuable tool for a speaker.

Additionally, some clichés are so outdated that no one knows what they mean. “The puppy was as cute as a button” is an example. You might hear your great-grandmother say this, but who really thinks buttons are cute nowadays? Clichés are also imprecise. Although clichés do have a comfort level to them, comfort puts people to sleep. Find fresh ways, or just use basic, literal language. “The bear was big” is imprecise in terms of giving your audience an idea of how frightful an experience faced by a bear would be. “The bear was as big as a house” is a cliché and an exaggeration, therefore imprecise. A better alternative might be, “The bear was two feet taller than I am when he stood on his back legs.” The opposite of clichés is clear, vivid, and fresh language.

In trying to avoid clichés, use language with **imagery**, or sensory language. This is language that makes the recipient smell, taste, see, hear, and feel a sensation. Think of the word “ripe.” What is “ripe?” Do ripe fruits feel a certain way? Smell a certain way? Taste a certain way? Ripe is a sensory word. Most words just appeal to one sense, like vision. Think of color. How can you make the word “blue” more sensory? How can you make the word “loud” more sensory? How would you describe the current state of your bedroom or dorm room to leave a sensory impression? How would you describe your favorite meal to leave a sensory impression? A thunderstorm to leave a sensory impression?

image

Poetry uses much imagery, so to end this section on fresh, clear language, here is a verse from “Daffodils” by William Wordsworth. Notice the metaphors (“daffodils dancing,” “host,” which brings to mind great heavenly numbers), simile (“as the stars”) and the imagery (“golden” rather than “yellow,” and other appeals to feeling and sight):

A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way.

Imagery

language that makes the recipient smell, taste, see, hear, and feel a sensation; also known as sensory language

Effectiveness

Language achieves effectiveness by communicating the right message to the audience. Clarity contributes to effectiveness, but there are some other aspects of effectiveness. To that end, language should be a means of inclusion and identification, rather than exclusion. Let’s establish this truth: Language is for communication; communication is symbolic, and language is the main (but not only) symbol system we use for communication. If language is for communication, then its goal should be to bring people together and to create understanding.

Unfortunately, we habitually use language for exclusion rather than inclusion. We can push people away with our word choices rather than bringing them together. We discussed the concepts of stereotyping and totalizing in Chapter 2, and they serve as examples of what we’re talking about here. What follows are some examples of language that can exclude members of your audience from understanding what you are saying.

Jargon

Jargon (which we discussed in Chapter 2) used in your profession or hobby should only be used with audiences who share your profession or hobby. Not only will the audience members who don’t share your profession or hobby miss your meaning, but they will feel that you are not making an honest effort to communicate or are setting yourself above them in intelligence or rank. Lawyers are often accused of using “legalese,” but other professions and groups do the same. If an audience member does not understand your references, jargon, or vocabulary, it is unlikely that he or she will sit there and say, “This person is so smart! I wish I could be smart like this speaker.” The audience member is more likely to be thinking, “Why can’t this speaker use words we understand and get off the high horse?” (which I admit, is a cliché!)

What this means for you is that you need to be careful about

Jargon

assumptions of your audience's knowledge and their ability to interpret jargon. For example, if you are trying to register for a class at Dalton State and your adviser asks for the CRN, most other people would have no idea what you are talking about. Acronyms, such as NPO, are common in jargon. Those trained in the medical field know it is based on the Latin for "nothing by mouth." The military has many acronyms, such as MOS (military occupational specialty, or career field in civilian talk). If you are speaking to an audience who does not know the jargon of your field, using it will only make them annoyed by the lack of clarity.

language used in a specific field that may or may not be understood by others

Sometimes we are not even aware of our jargon and its inadvertent effects. A student once complained to one of the authors about her reaction when she heard that she had been "purged." The word sounds much worse than the meaning it had in that context, which that her name was taken off the official roll for nonpayment at the beginning of the semester.

Slang

The whole point of **slang** is for a subculture or group to have its own code, almost like secret words. Once slang is understood by the larger culture, it is no longer slang and may be classified as "informal" or "colloquial" language. "Bling" was slang; now it's in the dictionary. Sports have a great deal of slang used by the players and fans that then gets used in everyday language. For example, "That was a slam dunk" is used to describe something easy, not just in basketball. At the authors' college, many groups and organizations "paint the rock" located on the campus quad. Anyone not affiliated with our campus would probably be a little lost if you excitedly told them that you "painted the rock for spirit week."

Complicated vocabulary

If a speaker used the word "recalcitrant," some audience members would know the meaning or figure it out ("Calci-" is like calcium, calcium is hard, etc.), but many would not. It would make much more sense for them to use a word readily understandable—"stubborn." Especially in oral communication, we should use language that is immediately accessible. However, do not take this to mean "dumb down for your audience." It means being clear and not showing off. For a speaker to say "I am cognizant of the fact that..." instead of "I know" or "I am aware of..." adds nothing to communication.

Slang

a type of language that consists of words and phrases that are specific to a subculture or group that others may not understand

Profanity and cursing

It is difficult to think of many examples, other than artistic or comedy venues, where profanity or cursing would be effective or useful with most audiences, so this kind of language is generally discouraged.

Credibility

Another aspect of effectiveness is that your language should enhance your credibility. First, audiences trust speakers who use clear, vivid, respectful, engaging, and honest language. On the other hand, audiences tend *not* to trust speakers who use language that excludes others or who exhibit uneducated language patterns. All of us make an occasional grammatical or usage error. However, constant verb and pronoun errors and just plain getting words confused will hurt the audience's belief that you are competent and know what you are talking about. In addition, a speaker who uses language and references that are not immediately accessible or that are unfamiliar will have diminished credibility. Finally, you should avoid the phrase "I guess" in a speech. A credible speaker should know what he/she is talking about.

Rhetorical Techniques

There are several traditional techniques that have been used to engage audiences and make ideas more attention-getting and memorable. These are called rhetorical techniques. Although "rhetorical" is associated with persuasive speech, these techniques are also effective with other types of speeches. We will not mention all of them here, but some important ones are listed below. Several of them are based on a form of repetition. You can refer to an Internet source for a full list of the dozens of rhetorical devices.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in a sentence or passage. As such, it is a kind of rhyme. Minister

Tony Campolo said, “When Jesus told his disciples to pray for the kingdom, this was no pie in the sky by and by when you *die* kind of prayer.”

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in a sentence or passage. In his “I Have a Dream Speech,” Dr. Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Not only does this sentence use alliteration, it also uses the next rhetorical technique on our list, antithesis.

Assonance
the repetition of vowel sounds in a sentence or passage

Antithesis is the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced or parallel words, phrases, or grammatical structures. Usually antithesis goes: Not this, but this. John F. Kennedy’s statement from his 1961 inaugural address is one of the most quoted examples of antithesis:

Alliteration
the repetition of initial consonant sounds in a sentence or passage

“Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” In that speech he gave another example, “If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”

Parallelism is the repetition of sentence structures. It can be useful for stating your main ideas. Which one of these sounds better?

Antithesis
the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas in balanced or parallel words, phrases, or grammatical structures

“Give me liberty or I’d rather die.”

Parallelism
the repetition of grammatical structures that correspond in sound, meter, or meaning

“Give me liberty or give me death.”

The second one uses parallelism. Quoting again from JFK’s inaugural address: “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” The repetition of the three-word phrases in this sentence (including the word “any” in each) is an example of parallelism.

Anaphora is a succession of sentences beginning with the same word or group of words. In his inaugural address, JFK began several succeeding paragraphs with “To”: “To those old allies,” “To those new states,” “To those people,” etc.

Hyperbole is intentional exaggeration for effect. Sometimes it is for serious purposes, other times for humor. Commonly we use hyperbolic language in our everyday speech to emphasize our emotions, such as when we say “I’m having the worst day ever” or “I would kill for a piece of gum right now.” Neither of those statements is (hopefully) true, but it stresses to others the way you are feeling. Ronald Reagan, who was often disparaged for being the oldest president, would joke about his age. In one case he said, “The chamber is celebrating an important milestone this week: your 70th anniversary. I remember the day you started.”

Anaphora
the succession of sentences beginning with the same word or group of words

Irony is the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect. Although most people think they understand irony as sarcasm (such as saying to a friend who trips, “That’s graceful”), it is a much more complicated topic. A speaker may use it when he professes to say one thing but clearly means something else, or he says something that is obviously untrue. Irony in oral communication can be difficult to use in a way that affects everyone equally.

Hyperbole
intentional exaggeration for effect

Using these techniques alone will not make you an effective speaker. Dr. King and President Kennedy combined them with strong metaphors and images as well; for example, Dr. King described the promises of the founding fathers as a “blank check” returned with the note “insufficient funds” as far as the black Americans of his time were concerned. That was a very concrete, human, and familiar metaphor to his listeners and still speaks to us today.

Irony
the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect

Appropriateness

Appropriateness relates to several categories involving how persons and groups should be referred to and addressed based on inclusiveness and context. The term “politically correct” has been overused to describe the

growing sensitivity to how the power of language can marginalize or exclude individuals and groups. While there are silly extremes such as the term “vertically challenged” for “short,” these humorous examples overlook the need to be inclusive about language. Overall, people and groups should be respected and referred to in the way they choose to be. Using inclusive language in your speech will help ensure you aren’t alienating or diminishing any members of your audience.

Gender-Inclusive Language

Appropriateness

how persons and groups should be referred to and addressed based on inclusiveness and context

The first common form of non-inclusive language is language that privileges one of the sexes over the other. There are three common problem areas that speakers run into while speaking: using “he” as generic, using “man” to mean all humans, and gender-typing jobs. Consider the statement, “Every morning when an officer of the law puts on his badge, he risks his life to serve and protect his fellow citizens.” Obviously, both male and female police officers risk their lives when they put on their badges.

A better way to word the sentence would be, “Every morning when officers of the law put on their badges, they risk their lives to serve and protect their fellow citizens.” Notice that in the better sentence, we made the subject plural (“officers”) and used neutral pronouns (“they” and “their”) to avoid the generic “he.” Likewise, speakers of English have traditionally used terms like “man,” and “mankind” when referring to both females and males. Instead of using the word “man,” refer to the “human race.”

Table 10.1 - Gender-inclusive job titles.

Table 10.1 – Gender-inclusive job titles.

The last common area where speakers get into trouble with gender and language has to do with job titles. It is not unusual for people to assume, for example, that doctors are male and nurses are female. As a result, they may say “she is a woman doctor” or “he is a male nurse” when mentioning someone’s occupation, perhaps not realizing that the statements “she is a doctor” and “he is a nurse” already inform the listener as to the sex of the person holding that job.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to a group an individual identifies with based on a common culture. For example, within the United States we have numerous ethnic groups, including Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Japanese Americans, Vietnamese Americans, Cuban Americans, and Mexican Americans. As with the earlier example of “male nurse,” avoid statements such as “The committee is made up of four women and a Vietnamese man.” All that should be said is, “The committee is made up of five people.”

Table 10.2 - Inclusive Language for Disabilities

Table 10.2 – Inclusive Language for Disabilities

Ethnic Identity

a group an individual identifies with based on a common culture

If for some reason gender and ethnicity have to be mentioned—and usually it does not—the gender and ethnicity of each member should be mentioned equally. “The committee is made up of three European-American women, one Latina, and one Vietnamese male.” In recent years, there has been a trend toward steering inclusive language away from broad terms like “Asians” and “Hispanics” because these terms are not considered precise labels for the groups they actually represent. If you want to be safe, the best thing you can do is ask a couple of people who belong to an ethnic group how they prefer to be referred to in that context.

Disability

The last category of exclusive versus inclusive language that causes problems for some speakers relates to individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities or forms of mental illness. Sometimes it happens that we take a characteristic of someone and make that the totality or all of what that person is. For example, some people are still uncomfortable around persons who use wheelchairs and don’t know how to react. They may totalize and think that the wheelchair defines and therefore limits the user. The person in the wheelchair might be a great guitarist, sculptor, parent, public speaker, or scientist, but that’s not seen, only the wheelchair.

Although the terms “visually impaired” and “hearing impaired” are sometimes used for “blind” and “deaf,” this is another situation where the person should be referred to as he or she prefers. “Hearing impaired” denotes a wide

range of hearing deficit, as does “visually impaired.” “Deaf” and “blind” are not generally considered offensive by these groups.

Another example is how to refer to what used to be called “autism.” Saying someone is “autistic” is similar to the word “retarded” in that neither is appropriate any longer. Preferable terms are “a person with an autism diagnosis” or “a person on the autism spectrum.” In place of “retarded,” “a person with intellectual disabilities” should be used.

Other Types of Appropriateness

Language in a speech should be appropriate to the speaker and the speaker’s background and personality, to the context, to the audience, and to the topic. Let’s say that you’re an engineering student. If you’re giving a presentation in an engineering class, you can use language that other engineering students will know. On the other hand, if you use that engineering vocabulary in a public speaking class, many audience members will not understand you. As another example, if you are speaking about the Great Depression to an audience of young adults or recent immigrants, you can’t assume they will know the meaning of terms like “New Deal” and “WPA,” which would be familiar to an audience of senior citizens. Audience analysis is a key factor in choosing the language to use in a speech.

Likewise, the language you may employ if you’re addressing a student assembly in a high school auditorium will differ from the language you would use at a business meeting in a hotel ballroom. If you are speaking about the early years of The Walt Disney Company, would you want to refer to Walt Disney as a “thaumaturgic” individual (i.e., one who works wonders or miracles)? While the word “thaumaturgic” may be accurate, is it the most appropriate for the topic at hand?

Developing Your Ability to Use Effective Language in Public Speaking

At this point, we will make some applications and suggestions about using language as you grow as a public speaker.

First, get in the habit of using “stipulated definitions” with concrete examples (defining operationally). In other words, define your terms for the audience. If you are using jargon, a technical term, a word that has multiple meanings in different contexts, or an often-misunderstood word, you can say at the beginning of the body of your speech, “In this speech I am going to be using the word, ‘X,’ and what I mean by it is...” And then the best way to define a word is with a picture or example of what you mean, and perhaps also an example of what you *don’t* mean (visual aids can help here). Don’t worry; this is not insulting to most audiences if the word is technical or unfamiliar to them. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier in the textbook, providing dictionary definitions of common words such as “love” or “loyalty” would be insulting to an audience and pretty boring.

Second, develop specific language. The general semantics movement suggested ways to develop more specific language that reflects the imperfection of our perceptions and the fact that reality changes. You can develop specific language by the following:

- Distinguishing between individuals and the group (that is, avoid stereotyping). Arab 1 is not Arab 2 is not Arab 3, etc., and none of them are all the Arabs in the world.
- Specifying time and place of behavior instead of making broad statements. What was a true of a person in 1999 is not necessarily true of the person now.
- Using names for jobs or roles (“accountants,” “administrative assistants,” “instructors”) instead of “people” or “workers.”
- Avoid “always/never” language. “Always” and “never” usually do not reflect reality and tend to make listeners defensive.
- Avoid confusing opinion for fact. If I say, “Forrest Gump is a stupid movie,” I am stating an opinion in the language of fact. If you preface opinions with “I believe,” or “It is my opinion” you will be truthful and gain the appearance of being fair-minded and non-dogmatic. What should be said is “The first time I saw Forrest Gump, I didn’t realize it was a farce, but after I saw it a second time, I understood it better.” This sentence is much more specific and clarifying than “Forrest Gump is a stupid movie.”

Third, personalize your language. In a speech it’s fine to use personal pronouns as opposed to third person. That

means “I,” “me,” “we,” “us,” “you,” etc. are often helpful in a speech. It gives more immediacy to the speech. Be careful of using “you” for examples that might be embarrassing. “Let’s say you are arrested for possession of a concealed weapon,” sounds like the audience members are potential criminals.

Finally, develop your vocabulary, but not to show it off. One of the benefits of a college education is that your vocabulary will expand greatly, and it should. A larger vocabulary will give you access to more complicated reading material and allow you to understand the world better. But knowing the meaning of a more complicated word doesn’t mean you have to use it with every audience.

Conclusion

Although the placement of this chapter may seem to indicate that language choices, or what the ancient rhetoricians called “style,” are not as important as other parts of speaking, language choices are important from the very beginning of your speech preparation, even to your research and choice of search terms. Audience analysis will help you to develop language that is clear, vivid, appropriate, credible, and persuasive.

Something to Think About

What are some of the clichés and slang that have become popular recently? What do they mean? Why would they not be useful in public speaking? As a class, check out the Banned Words website by Lake Superior State University.

[PART IV]

Chapter 4: Nonverbal Communication



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=100>

Chapter Preview

- 4.1 – Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication
- 4.2 – Types of Nonverbal Communication
- 4.3 – Nonverbal Communication Competence
- 4.4 – Nonverbal Communication in Context
- 4.5 – The Importance of Delivery

Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define nonverbal communication.
2. Compare and contrast verbal communication and nonverbal communication.
3. Discuss the principles of nonverbal communication.
4. Provide examples of the functions of nonverbal communication.

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

To further define nonverbal communication, we need to distinguish between vocal and verbal aspects of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication include both vocal and nonvocal elements, and [Table 4.1 "Vocal and Nonvocal Elements of Communication"](#) shows the relationship among vocal, nonvocal, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication. A vocal element of verbal communication is spoken words—for example, "Come back here." A vocal element of nonverbal communication is paralanguage, which is the vocalized but not verbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and pitch. Nonvocal elements of verbal communication include the use of unspoken symbols to convey meaning. Writing and American Sign Language (ASL) are nonvocal examples of verbal communication and are not considered nonverbal communication. Nonvocal elements of nonverbal communication include body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Gestures are nonvocal and nonverbal since most of them do not refer to a specific word like a written or signed symbol does.

Table 4.1 Vocal and Nonvocal Elements of Communication

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

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

Principles of Nonverbal Communication

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

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Important Interpersonal and Emotional Messages

You've probably heard that more meaning is generated from nonverbal communication than from verbal. Some studies have claimed that 90 percent of our meaning is derived from nonverbal signals, but more recent and reliable findings claim that it is closer to 65 percent (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). We may rely more on nonverbal signals in situations where verbal and nonverbal messages conflict and in situations where emotional or relational communication is taking place (Hargie, 2011). For example, when someone asks a question and we're not sure about the "angle" they are taking, we may hone in on nonverbal cues to fill in the meaning. For example, the question "What are you doing tonight?" could mean any number of things, but we could rely on posture, tone of voice, and eye contact to see if the person is just curious, suspicious, or hinting that they would like company for the evening. We also put more weight on nonverbal communication when determining a person's credibility. For example, if a classmate delivers a speech in class and her verbal content seems well-researched and unbiased, but her nonverbal communication is poor (her voice is monotone, she avoids eye contact, she fidgets), she will likely not be viewed as credible. Conversely, in some situations, verbal communication might carry more meaning than nonverbal. In interactions where information exchange is the focus, at a briefing at work, for example, verbal communication likely accounts for much more of the meaning generated. Despite this exception, a key principle of nonverbal communication is that it often takes on more meaning in interpersonal and/or emotional exchanges.



About 65 percent of the meaning we derive during interactions comes from nonverbal communication.

Gideon – [In Perfect Congruence](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Involuntary than Verbal

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

The involuntary nature of much nonverbal communication makes it more difficult to control or “fake.” For example, although you can consciously smile a little and shake hands with someone when you first see them, it’s difficult to fake that you’re “happy” to meet someone. Nonverbal communication leaks out in ways that expose our underlying thoughts or feelings. Spokespeople, lawyers, or other public representatives who are the “face” of a politician, celebrity, corporation, or organization must learn to control their facial expressions and other nonverbal communication so they can effectively convey the message of their employer or client without having their personal thoughts and feelings leak through. Poker players, therapists, police officers, doctors, teachers, and actors are also in professions that often require them to have more awareness of and control over their nonverbal communication.

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

Nonverbal Communication Is More Ambiguous

In [Chapter 3 “Verbal Communication”](#), we learn that the symbolic and abstract nature of language can lead to

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

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

Nonverbal Communication Is More Credible

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

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

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

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Meaning

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

Nonverbal communication can substitute for verbal communication in a variety of ways. Nonverbal communication can convey much meaning when verbal communication isn't effective because of language barriers. Language barriers are present when a person hasn't yet learned to speak or loses the ability to speak. For example, babies who have not yet developed language skills make facial expressions, at a few months old, that are similar to those of adults and therefore can generate meaning (Oster, Hegley, & Nagel, 1992). People who have developed language skills but can't use them because they have temporarily or permanently lost them or because they are using incompatible language codes, like in some cross-cultural encounters, can still communicate nonverbally. Although it's always a good idea to learn some of the local language when you travel, gestures such as pointing or demonstrating the size or shape of something may suffice in basic interactions.

Nonverbal communication is also useful in a quiet situation where verbal communication would be disturbing;

for example, you may use a gesture to signal to a friend that you're ready to leave the library. Crowded or loud places can also impede verbal communication and lead people to rely more on nonverbal messages. Getting a server or bartender's attention with a hand gesture is definitely more polite than yelling, "Hey you!" Finally, there are just times when we know it's better not to say something aloud. If you want to point out a person's unusual outfit or signal to a friend that you think his or her date is a loser, you're probably more likely to do that nonverbally.

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



We send mixed messages when our verbal and nonverbal communication contradict each other. If this woman said she was excited about seeing you, would you believe her?

Helena Peixoto – [bored](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Nonverbal Communication Influences Others

Nonverbal communication can be used to influence people in a variety of ways, but the most common way is through deception. Deception is typically thought of as the intentional act of altering information to influence another person, which means that it extends beyond lying to include concealing, omitting, or exaggerating information. While verbal communication is to blame for the content of the deception, nonverbal communication partners with the language through deceptive acts to be more convincing. Since most of us intuitively believe that nonverbal communication is more credible than verbal communication, we often intentionally try to control our nonverbal communication when we are engaging in deception. Likewise, we try to evaluate other people's nonverbal communication to determine the veracity of their messages. Students initially seem surprised when

we discuss the prevalence of deception, but their surprise diminishes once they realize that deception isn't always malevolent, mean, or hurtful. Deception obviously has negative connotations, but people engage in deception for many reasons, including to excuse our own mistakes, to be polite to others, or to influence others' behaviors or perceptions.

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

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

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversational Flow

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

Nonverbal Communication Affects Relationships

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

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

Immediacy behaviors play a central role in bringing people together and have been identified by some scholars as the most important function of nonverbal communication (Andersen & Andersen, 2005). Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between

communicators and include things like smiling, nodding, making eye contact, and occasionally engaging in social, polite, or professional touch (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Immediacy behaviors are a good way of creating rapport, or a friendly and positive connection between people. Skilled nonverbal communicators are more likely to be able to create rapport with others due to attention-getting expressiveness, warm initial greetings, and an ability to get “in tune” with others, which conveys empathy (Riggio, 1992). These skills are important to help initiate and maintain relationships.

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

“Getting Real”

Teachers and Immediacy Behaviors

A considerable amount of research has been done on teachers’ use of immediacy behaviors, which points to the importance of this communication concept in teaching professions (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Specific nonverbal behaviors have been found to increase or decrease perceived levels of immediacy, and such behaviors impact student learning, teacher’s evaluations, and the teacher-student relationship (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). Even those who do not plan on going into teaching as a career can benefit from learning about immediacy behaviors, as they can also be used productively in other interpersonal contexts such as between a manager and employee, a salesperson and a client, or a politician and constituent. Much of this research in teaching contexts has focused on the relationship between immediacy behaviors and student learning, and research consistently shows that effective use of immediacy behaviors increases learning in various contexts and at various levels. Aside from enhancing student learning, the effective use of immediacy behaviors also leads to better evaluations by students, which can have a direct impact on a teacher’s career. While student evaluations of teachers take various factors into consideration, judgments of personality may be formed, as we learned in [Chapter 2 “Communication and Perception”](#), after only brief initial impressions. Research shows that students make character assumptions about teachers after only brief exposure to their nonverbal behaviors. Based on nonverbal cues such as frowning, head nodding, pointing, sitting, smiling, standing, strong gestures, weak gestures, and walking, students may or may not evaluate a teacher as open, attentive, confident, dominant, honest, likable, anxious, professional, supportive, or enthusiastic. The following are examples of immediacy behaviors that can be effectively used by teachers:

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

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

1. Recall a teacher you have had that exhibited effective immediacy behaviors. Recall a teacher you have had that didn’t exhibit immediacy behaviors. Make a column for each teacher and note examples of specific behaviors of each. Discuss your list with a classmate and compare and contrast your lists.
2. Think about the teachers that you listed in the previous question. Discuss how their behaviors affected your learning and

your relationship.

3. How much should immediacy behaviors, relative to other characteristics such as professionalism, experience, training, and content knowledge, factor into the evaluation of teachers by their students, peers, and supervisors? What, if anything, should schools do to enhance teachers' knowledge of immediacy behaviors?

Nonverbal Communication Expresses Our Identities

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

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

Key Takeaways

- Nonverbal communication is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words. Nonverbal communication includes vocal elements, which is referred to as *paralanguage* and includes pitch, volume, and rate, and nonvocal elements, which are usually referred to as *body language* and includes gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, among other things.
- Although verbal communication and nonverbal communication work side by side as part of a larger language system, there are some important differences between the two. They are processed by different hemispheres of the brain, nonverbal communication conveys more emotional and affective meaning than does verbal communication, nonverbal communication isn't governed by an explicit system of rules in the same way that grammar guides verbal communication, and while verbal communication is a uniquely human ability, many creatures including plants, birds, and mammals communicate nonverbally.
- Nonverbal communication operates on the following principles: nonverbal communication typically conveys more meaning than verbal communication, nonverbal communication is more involuntary than verbal communication, nonverbal communication is often more ambiguous than verbal communication, and nonverbal communication is often more credible than verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication serves several functions.
- Nonverbal communication affects verbal communication in that it can complement, reinforce, substitute, or contradict verbal messages.
- Nonverbal communication influences others, as it is a key component of deception and can be used to assert dominance or to engage in compliance gaining.
- Nonverbal communication regulates conversational flow, as it provides important cues that signal the beginning and end of conversational turns and facilitates the beginning and end of an interaction.
- Nonverbal communication affects relationships, as it is a primary means through which we communicate emotions, establish social bonds, and engage in relational maintenance.
- Nonverbal communication expresses our identities, as who we are is conveyed through the way we set up our living and

working spaces, the clothes we wear, our personal presentation, and the tones in our voices.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: To better understand nonverbal communication, try to think of an example to illustrate each of the four principles discussed in the chapter. Be integrative in your approach by including at least one example from an academic, professional, civic, and personal context.
2. When someone sends you a mixed message in which the verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other, which one do you place more meaning on? Why?
3. Our personal presentation, style of dress, and surroundings such as a dorm room, apartment, car, or office send nonverbal messages about our identities. Analyze some of the nonverbal signals that your personal presentation or environment send. What do they say about who you are? Do they create the impression that you desire?

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Media Attributions

- 4-1-On
- 4-1-In

[14]

Types of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define kinesics.
2. Define haptics.
3. Define vocalics.
4. Define proxemics.
5. Define chronemics.
6. Provide examples of types of nonverbal communication that fall under these categories.
7. Discuss the ways in which personal presentation and environment provide nonverbal cues.

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

Kinesics

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

Gestures

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators (Andersen, 1999). Adaptors are touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way to do something with our excess energy. Public speaking students who watch video recordings of their speeches notice nonverbal adaptors that they didn’t know they used. In public speaking situations, people most commonly use self- or object-focused adaptors. Common self-touching behaviors like scratching, twirling hair, or fidgeting with fingers or hands are considered self-adaptors. Some self-adaptors manifest internally, as coughs or throat-clearing sounds. We all have personal self-adaptors that we subconsciously gravitate toward like metallic objects or bending or fidgeting with note cards while speaking. Others may play with dry-erase markers, the change in their pockets, or the lectern while speaking. Use of object adaptors can also signal boredom as people play with the straw in their drink or peel the label off a bottle of beer. Smartphones have become common object adaptors, as people can fiddle with their phones to help ease anxiety. Finally, as noted, other adaptors are more common in social situations than in

public speaking situations given the speaker's distance from audience members. Other adaptors involve adjusting or grooming others, similar to how primates like chimpanzees pick things off each other. It would definitely be strange for a speaker to approach an audience member and pick lint off his or her sweater, fix a crooked tie, tuck a tag in, or pat down a flyaway hair in the middle of a speech.

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



Emblems are gestures that have a specific meaning. In the United States, a thumbs-up can mean "I need a ride" or "OK!"

Kreg Steppe – [Thumbs Up](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

Illustrators are the most common type of gesture and are used to illustrate the verbal message they accompany. For example, you might use hand gestures to indicate the size or shape of an object. Unlike emblems, illustrators do not typically have meaning on their own and are used more subconsciously than emblems. These largely involuntary and seemingly natural gestures flow from us as we speak but vary in terms of intensity and frequency based on context. Although we are never explicitly taught how to use illustrative gestures, we do it automatically.

Think about how you still gesture when having an animated conversation on the phone even though the other person can't see you.

Head Movements and Posture

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

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

Eye Contact

We also communicate through eye behaviors, primarily eye contact. While eye behaviors are often studied under the category of kinesics, they have their own branch of nonverbal studies called oculesics, which comes from the Latin word *oculus*, meaning “eye.” The face and eyes are the main point of focus during communication, and along with our ears our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us. The saying “The eyes are the window to the soul” is actually accurate in terms of where people typically think others are “located,” which is right behind the eyes (Andersen, 1999). Certain eye behaviors have become tied to personality traits or emotional states, as illustrated in phrases like “hungry eyes,” “evil eyes,” and “bedroom eyes.” To better understand oculesics, we will discuss the characteristics and functions of eye contact and pupil dilation.

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

Aside from regulating conversations, eye contact is also used to monitor interaction by taking in feedback and other nonverbal cues and to send information. Our eyes bring in the visual information we need to interpret people's movements, gestures, and eye contact. A speaker can use his or her eye contact to determine if an audience is engaged, confused, or bored and then adapt his or her message accordingly. Our eyes also send information to others. People know not to interrupt when we are in deep thought because we naturally look away from others when we are processing information. Making eye contact with others also communicates that we are paying attention and are interested in what another person is saying. As we will learn in [Chapter 5 “Listening”](#), eye contact is a key part of active listening.

Eye contact can also be used to intimidate others. We have social norms about how much eye contact we make with people, and those norms vary depending on the setting and the person. Staring at another person in some contexts could communicate intimidation, while in other contexts it could communicate flirtation. As we learned, eye contact is a key immediacy behavior, and it signals to others that we are available for communication. Once communication begins, if it does, eye contact helps establish rapport or connection. We can also use our eye contact to signal that we do not want to make a connection with others. For example, in a public setting like an airport or a gym where people often make small talk, we can avoid making eye contact with others to indicate that we do not want to engage in small talk with strangers. Another person could use eye contact to try to coax you into speaking, though. For example, when one person continues to stare at another person who is not reciprocating eye contact, the person avoiding eye contact might eventually give in, become curious, or become irritated and say, “Can I help you with something?” As you can see, eye contact sends and receives important communicative messages that help us interpret others’ behaviors, convey information about our thoughts and feelings, and facilitate or impede rapport or connection. This list reviews the specific functions of eye contact:

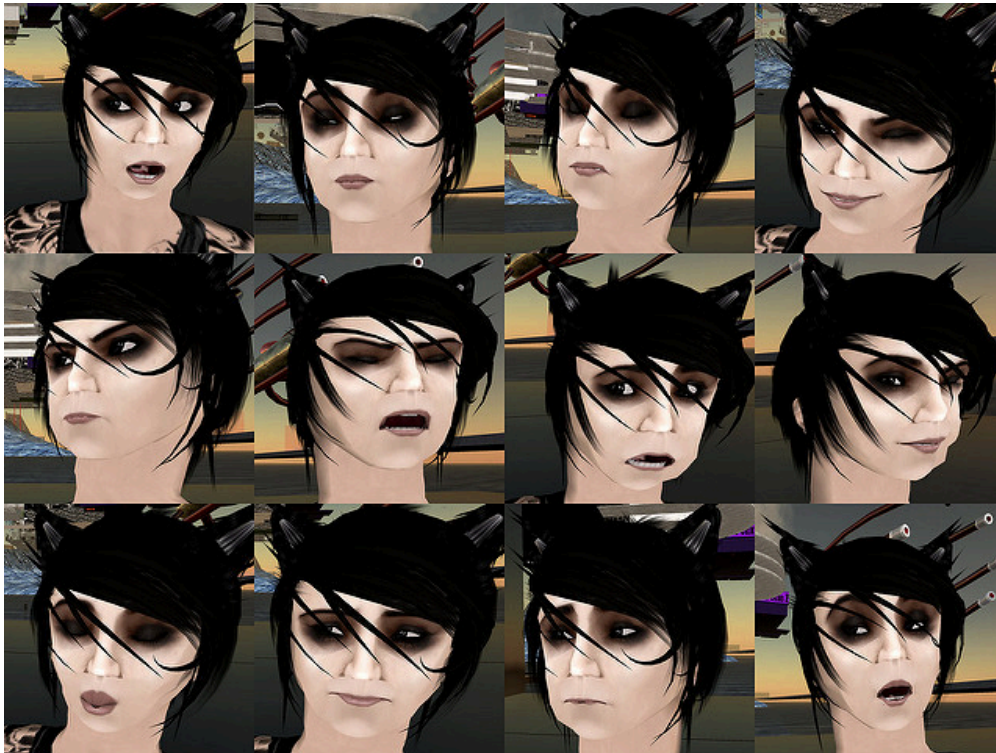
- Regulate interaction and provide turn-taking signals
- Monitor communication by receiving nonverbal communication from others
- Signal cognitive activity (we look away when processing information)
- Express engagement (we show people we are listening with our eyes)
- Convey intimidation
- Express flirtation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

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

Facial Expressions

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

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



Our faces are the most expressive part of our body and can communicate an array of different emotions.

Elif Ayiter – [Facial Expression Test](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

We will learn more about competent encoding and decoding of facial expressions in [Section 4.3 “Nonverbal Communication Competence”](#) and [Section 4.4 “Nonverbal Communication in Context”](#), but since you are likely giving speeches in this class, let's learn about the role of the face in public speaking. Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech. In order to set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile to communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Beyond your opening and welcoming facial expressions, facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and can be used to infer personality traits and make judgments about a speaker's credibility and competence. Facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored. Even if you aren't bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which isn't likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably, and that will help you achieve your speech goals. Also make sure your facial expressions match the content of your speech. When delivering something light-hearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance your verbal message. When delivering something serious or somber, a furrowed brow,

a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message. If your facial expressions and speech content are not consistent, your audience could become confused by the mixed messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Haptics

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

There are several types of touch, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy, and sexual-arousal touch (Heslin & Apler, 1983). At the functional-professional level, touch is related to a goal or part of a routine professional interaction, which makes it less threatening and more expected. For example, we let barbers, hairstylists, doctors, nurses, tattoo artists, and security screeners touch us in ways that would otherwise be seen as intimate or inappropriate if not in a professional context. At the social-polite level, socially sanctioned touching behaviors help initiate interactions and show that others are included and respected. A handshake, a pat on the arm, and a pat on the shoulder are examples of social-polite touching. A handshake is actually an abbreviated hand-holding gesture, but we know that prolonged hand-holding would be considered too intimate and therefore inappropriate at the functional-professional or social-polite level. At the functional-professional and social-polite levels, touch still has interpersonal implications. The touch, although professional and not intimate, between hair stylist and client, or between nurse and patient, has the potential to be therapeutic and comforting. In addition, a social-polite touch exchange plays into initial impression formation, which can have important implications for how an interaction and a relationship unfold.

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

Touch is also used in many other contexts—for example, during play (e.g., arm wrestling), during physical conflict (e.g., slapping), and during conversations (e.g., to get someone's attention) (Jones, 1999). We also inadvertently send messages through accidental touch (e.g., bumping into someone). One of my interpersonal communication professors admitted that she enjoyed going to restaurants to observe "first-date behavior" and boasted that she could predict whether or not there was going to be a second date based on the couple's nonverbal communication. What sort of touching behaviors would indicate a good or bad first date?



On a first date, it is less likely that you will see couples sitting “school-bus style” (sharing the same side of a table or booth) or touching for an extended time.

[Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain.

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

Hugging behavior is particularly interesting to some people because of experiences growing up in very hug-friendly environments versus other geographic locations that do not place emphasis on such intimate behaviors. For example, a hug can be obligatory, meaning that you do it because you feel like you have to, not because you want to. Even though you may think that this type of hug doesn’t communicate emotions, it definitely does. A limp, weak, or retreating hug may communicate anger, ambivalence, or annoyance. Think of other types of hugs and how you hug different people. Some types of hugs are the crisscross hug, the neck-waist hug, and the engulfing hug (Floyd, 2006). The crisscross hug is a rather typical hug where each person’s arm is below or above the other person’s arm. This hug is common among friends, romantic partners, and family members, and perhaps even coworkers. The neck-waist hug usually occurs in more intimate relationships as it involves one person’s arms around the other’s neck and the other person’s arms around the other’s waist. You may think of this type of hug as the “slow-dance hug.” The engulfing hug is similar to a bear hug in that one person completely wraps the arms around the other as that person basically stands there. This hugging behavior usually occurs when someone is very excited and hugs the other person without warning.

Some other types of hugs are the “shake-first-then-tap hug” and the “back-slap hug.” Perhaps you have observed

these hugs amongst men. The shake-first-then-tap hug involves a modified hand-shake where the hands are joined more with the thumb and fingers than the palm and the elbows are bent so that the shake occurs between the two huggers' chests. The hug comes after the shake has been initiated with one arm going around the other person for usually just one tap, then a step back and release of the handshake. In this hugging behavior, the handshake that is maintained between the chests minimizes physical closeness and the intimacy that may be interpreted from the crisscross or engulfing hug where the majority of the huggers' torsos are touching. This move away from physical closeness likely stems from a US norm that restricts men's physical expression of affection due to homophobia or the worry of being perceived as gay. The slap hug is also a less physically intimate hug and involves a hug with one or both people slapping the other person's back repeatedly, often while talking to each other. I've seen this type of hug go on for many seconds and with varying degrees of force involved in the slap. When the slap is more of a tap, it is actually an indication that one person wants to let go. The video footage of then-president Bill Clinton hugging Monica Lewinsky that emerged as allegations that they had an affair were being investigated shows her holding on, while he was tapping from the beginning of the hug.

"Getting Critical"

Airport Pat-Downs: The Law, Privacy, and Touch

Everyone who has flown over the past ten years has experienced the steady increase in security screenings. Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, airports around the world have had increased security. While passengers have long been subject to pat-downs if they set off the metal detector or arouse suspicion, recently foiled terrorist plots have made passenger screening more personal. The "shoe bomber" led to mandatory shoe removal and screening, and the more recent use of nonmetallic explosives hidden in clothing or in body cavities led to the use of body scanners that can see through clothing to check for concealed objects (Thomas, 2011). Protests against and anxiety about the body scanners, more colloquially known as "naked x-ray machines," led to the new "enhanced pat-down" techniques for passengers who refuse to go through the scanners or passengers who are randomly selected or arouse suspicion in other ways. The strong reactions are expected given what we've learned about the power of touch as a form of nonverbal communication. The new pat-downs routinely involve touching the areas around a passenger's breasts and/or genitals with a sliding hand motion. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) notes that the areas being examined haven't changed, but the degree of the touch has, as screeners now press and rub more firmly but used to use a lighter touch (Kravitz, 2010). Interestingly, police have long been able to use more invasive pat-downs, but only with probable cause. In the case of random selection at the airport, no probable cause provision has to be met, giving TSA agents more leeway with touch than police officers. Experts in aviation security differ in their assessment of the value of the pat-downs and other security procedures. Several experts have called for a revision of the random selection process in favor of more targeted screenings. What civil rights organizations critique as racial profiling, consumer rights activists and some security experts say allows more efficient use of resources and less inconvenience for the majority of passengers (Thomas, 2011). Although the TSA has made some changes to security screening procedures and have announced more to come, some passengers have started a backlash of their own. There have been multiple cases of passengers stripping down to their underwear or getting completely naked to protest the pat-downs, while several other passengers have been charged with assault for "groping" TSA agents in retaliation. Footage of pat-downs of toddlers and grandmothers in wheelchairs and self-uploaded videos of people recounting their pat-down experiences have gone viral on YouTube.

1. What limits, if any, do you think there should be on the use of touch in airport screening procedures?
2. In June of 2012 a passenger was charged with battery after "groping" a TSA supervisor to, as she claims, demonstrate the treatment that she had received while being screened. You can read more about the story and see the video here: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/carol-jean-price-accused-groping-tsa-agent-florida-woman-demonstrating-treatment-received-article-1.1098521>. Do you think that her actions were justified? Why or why not?
3. Do you think that more targeted screening, as opposed to random screenings in which each person has an equal chance of being selected for enhanced pat-downs, is a good idea? Why? Do you think such targeted screening could be seen as a case of unethical racial profiling? Why or why not?

Vocalics

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

Pitch helps convey meaning, regulate conversational flow, and communicate the intensity of a message. Even babies recognize a sentence with a higher pitched ending as a question. We also learn that greetings have a rising emphasis and farewells have falling emphasis. Of course, no one ever tells us these things explicitly; we learn

them through observation and practice. We do not pick up on some more subtle and/or complex patterns of paralanguage involving pitch until we are older. Children, for example, have a difficult time perceiving sarcasm, which is usually conveyed through paralinguistic characteristics like pitch and tone rather than the actual words being spoken. Adults with lower than average intelligence and children have difficulty reading sarcasm in another person's voice and instead may interpret literally what they say (Andersen, 1999).

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

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

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

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

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

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

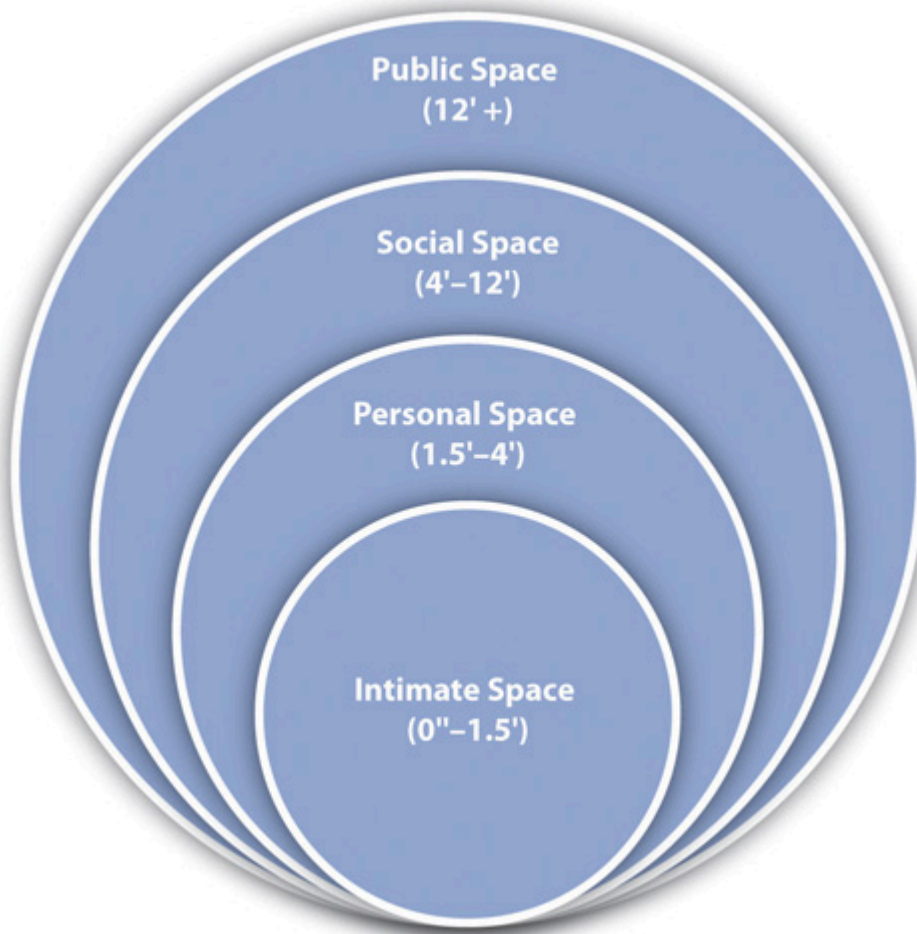
Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication. We only need look at the ways in which space shows up in common metaphors to see that space, communication, and relationships are closely related. For example, when we are content with and attracted to someone, we say we are “close” to him or her. When we lose connection with someone, we may say he or she is “distant.” In general, space influences how people communicate and behave. Smaller spaces with a higher density of people often lead to breaches of our personal space bubbles. If this is a setting in which this type of density is expected beforehand, like at a crowded concert or on a train during rush hour, then we make various communicative adjustments to manage the space issue. Unexpected breaches of personal space can lead to negative reactions, especially if we feel someone has violated our space voluntarily, meaning that a crowding situation didn’t force them into our space. Additionally, research has shown that crowding can lead to criminal or delinquent behavior, known as a “mob mentality” (Andersen, 1999). To better understand how proxemics functions in nonverbal communication, we will more closely examine the proxemic distances associated with personal space and the concept of territoriality.

Proxemic Distances

We all have varying definitions of what our “personal space” is, and these definitions are contextual and depend on the situation and the relationship. Although our bubbles are invisible, people are socialized into the norms of personal space within their cultural group. Scholars have identified four zones for US Americans, which are public, social, personal, and intimate distance (Hall, 1968). The zones are more elliptical than circular, taking up more space in our front, where our line of sight is, than at our side or back where we can’t monitor what people are doing. You can see how these zones relate to each other and to the individual in [Figure 4.1 “Proxemic Zones of Personal Space”](#). Even within a particular zone, interactions may differ depending on whether someone is in the outer or inner part of the zone.

Figure 4.1 Proxemic Zones of Personal Space



Public Space (12 Feet or More)

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

Social Space (4-12 Feet)

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

obligated to at least acknowledge their presence. In many typically sized classrooms, much of your audience for a speech will actually be in your social zone rather than your public zone, which is actually beneficial because it helps you establish a better connection with them. 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. Students who talk to me after class typically stand about four to five feet away when they speak to me, which keeps them in the outer part of the social zone, typical for professional interactions. When students have more personal information to discuss, they will come closer, which brings them into the inner part of the social zone.

Personal Space (1.5–4 Feet)

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

Intimate Space

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

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

Territoriality

Territoriality is an innate drive to take up and defend spaces. This drive is shared by many creatures and entities, ranging from packs of animals to individual humans to nations. Whether it's a gang territory, a neighborhood claimed by a particular salesperson, your preferred place to sit in a restaurant, your usual desk in the classroom, or the seat you've marked to save while getting concessions at a sporting event, we claim certain spaces as our own. There are three main divisions for territory: primary, secondary, and public (Hargie, 2011). Sometimes our claim to a space is official. These spaces are known as our primary territories because they are marked or understood to be exclusively ours and under our control. A person's house, yard, room, desk, side of the bed, or shelf in the medicine cabinet could be considered primary territories.

Secondary territories don't belong to us and aren't exclusively under our control, but they are associated with us, which may lead us to assume that the space will be open and available to us when we need it without us taking any further steps to reserve it. This happens in classrooms regularly. Students often sit in the same desk or at least same general area as they did on the first day of class. There may be some small adjustments during the first couple of weeks, but by a month into the semester, many students have claimed their secondary territory and will gravitate toward his/her respective "claimed" space. If another student decides to take up residence in another student's desk, the individual who has claimed the secondary territory will more than likely be negatively affected by the claim to their secondary territory space.

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

Chronemics

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

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

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

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

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

Personal Presentation and Environment

Personal presentation involves two components: our physical characteristics and the artifacts with which we adorn and surround ourselves. Physical characteristics include body shape, height, weight, attractiveness, and other physical features of our bodies. We do not have as much control over how these nonverbal cues are encoded as we do with many other aspects of nonverbal communication. As [Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception"](#) noted, these characteristics play a large role in initial impression formation even though we know we "shouldn't judge a book by its cover." Although ideals of attractiveness vary among cultures and individuals, research consistently indicates that people who are deemed attractive based on physical characteristics have distinct advantages in many aspects of life. This fact, along with media images that project often unrealistic ideals of beauty, have contributed to booming health and beauty, dieting, gym, and plastic surgery industries. While there have been some controversial reality shows that seek to transform people's physical characteristics, like *Extreme Makeover*, *The Swan*, and *The Biggest Loser*, the relative ease with which we can change the artifacts that send nonverbal cues about us has led to many more style and space makeover shows.

Have you ever tried to consciously change your "look?" Think about a time in your past that you can distinctly remember making changes in how you presented yourself in terms of clothing and accessories. In high school, you might have been influenced by the latest craze (e.g., grunge music, thrift-store, putting color in your hair) and started to wear clothes that demonstrated your new "look." Then, perhaps again, in college, you might have made another transformation of "self-look," as you enter into a new stage of adulthood. Maybe you are starting to wear business-casual clothes to school every day, embracing the "dress for the job you want" philosophy. In both cases, these changes definitely impacted how others perceived you. Television programs like *What Not to Wear* seek to show the power of wardrobe and personal style changes in how people communicate with others.

Aside from clothes, jewelry, visible body art, hairstyles, and other political, social, and cultural symbols send messages to others about who we are. In the United States, body piercings and tattoos have been shifting from subcultural to mainstream over the past few decades. The physical location, size, and number of tattoos and piercings play a large role in whether or not they are deemed appropriate for professional contexts, and many people with tattoos and/or piercings make conscious choices about when and where they display their body art. Hair also sends messages whether it is on our heads or our bodies. Men with short hair are generally judged to be more conservative than men with long hair, but men with shaved heads may be seen as aggressive. Whether a person has a part in their hair, a mohawk, faux-hawk, ponytail, curls, or bright pink hair also sends nonverbal signals to others.

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



The objects that surround us send nonverbal cues that may influence how people perceive us. What impression does a messy, crowded office make?

Phil Stripling – [My desk](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Last, the environment in which we interact affects our verbal and nonverbal communication. This is included because we can often manipulate the nonverbal environment similar to how we would manipulate our gestures or tone of voice to suit our communicative needs. The books that we display on our coffee table, the magazines a doctor keeps in his or her waiting room, the placement of fresh flowers in a foyer, or a piece of mint chocolate on a hotel bed pillow all send particular messages and can easily be changed. The placement of objects and furniture in a physical space can help create a formal, distant, friendly, or intimate climate. In terms of formality, we can use nonverbal communication to convey dominance and status, which helps define and negotiate power and roles within relationships. Fancy cars and expensive watches can serve as symbols that distinguish a CEO from an entry-level employee. A room with soft lighting, a small fountain that creates ambient sounds of water flowing, and a comfy chair can help facilitate interactions between a therapist and a patient. In summary, whether we know it or not, our physical characteristics and the artifacts that surround us communicate much.

“Getting Plugged In”

Avatars

Avatars are computer-generated images that represent users in online environments or are created to interact with users in online and offline situations. Avatars can be created in the likeness of humans, animals, aliens, or other nonhuman creatures (Allmendinger, 2010). Avatars vary in terms of functionality and technical sophistication and can include stationary pictures like buddy icons, cartoonish but humanlike animations like a Mii character on the Wii, or very humanlike animations designed to teach or assist people in virtual environments. More recently, 3-D holographic avatars have been put to work helping travelers at airports in Paris and New York (Strunksy, 2012; Tecca, 2012). Research has shown, though, that humanlike avatars influence people even when they are not sophisticated in terms of functionality and adaptability (Baylor, 2011). Avatars are especially motivating and influential when they are similar to the observer or user but more closely represent the person’s ideal self. Appearance has been noted as one of the most important attributes of an avatar designed to influence or motivate. Attractiveness, coolness (in terms of clothing and hairstyle), and age were shown to be factors that increase or decrease the influence an avatar has over users (Baylor, 2011).

People also create their own avatars as self-representations in a variety of online environments ranging from online role-playing games like *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* to some online learning management systems used by colleges and universities. Research shows that the line between reality and virtual reality can become blurry when it comes to avatar design and identification. This can become even more pronounced when we consider that some users, especially of online role-playing games, spend about twenty hours a week as their avatar.

Avatars do more than represent people in online worlds; they also affect their behaviors offline. For example, one study found that people who watched an avatar that looked like them exercising and losing weight in an online environment exercised more and ate healthier in the real world (Fox & Bailenson, 2009). Seeing an older version of them online led participants to form a more concrete

social and psychological connection with their future selves, which led them to invest more money in a retirement account. People's actions online also mirror the expectations for certain physical characteristics, even when the user doesn't exhibit those characteristics and didn't get to choose them for his or her avatar. For example, experimental research showed that people using more attractive avatars were more extroverted and friendly than those with less attractive avatars, which is also a nonverbal communication pattern that exists among real people. In summary, people have the ability to self-select physical characteristics and personal presentation for their avatars in a way that they can't in their real life. People come to see their avatars as part of themselves, which opens the possibility for avatars to affect users' online and offline communication (Kim, Lee, & Kang, 2012).

1. Describe an avatar that you have created for yourself. What led you to construct the avatar the way you did, and how do you think your choices reflect your typical nonverbal self-presentation? If you haven't ever constructed an avatar, what would you make your avatar look like and why?
2. In 2009, a man in Japan became the first human to marry an avatar (that we know of). Although he claims that his avatar is better than any human girlfriend, he has been criticized as being out of touch with reality. You can read more about this human-avatar union through the following link: http://articles.cnn.com/2009-12-16/world/japan.virtual.wedding_1_virtual-world-sal-marry?_s=PM:WORLD. Do you think the boundaries between human reality and avatar fantasy will continue to fade as we become a more technologically fused world? How do you feel about interacting more with avatars in customer service situations like the airport avatar mentioned above? What do you think about having avatars as mentors, role models, or teachers?

Key Takeaways

- **Kinesics** refers to body movements and posture and includes the following components:
 - Gestures are arm and hand movements and include adaptors like clicking a pen or scratching your face, emblems like a thumbs-up to say "OK," and illustrators like bouncing your hand along with the rhythm of your speaking.
 - Head movements and posture include the orientation of movements of our head and the orientation and positioning of our body and the various meanings they send. Head movements such as nodding can indicate agreement, disagreement, and interest, among other things. Posture can indicate assertiveness, defensiveness, interest, readiness, or intimidation, among other things.
 - Eye contact is studied under the category of oculosics and specifically refers to eye contact with another person's face, head, and eyes and the patterns of looking away and back at the other person during interaction. Eye contact provides turn-taking signals, signals when we are engaged in cognitive activity, and helps establish rapport and connection, among other things.
 - Facial expressions refer to the use of the forehead, brow, and facial muscles around the nose and mouth to convey meaning. Facial expressions can convey happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and other emotions.
- **Haptics** refers to touch behaviors that convey meaning during interactions. Touch operates at many levels, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, and love-intimacy.
- **Vocalics** refers to the vocalized but not verbal aspects of nonverbal communication, including our speaking rate, pitch, volume, tone of voice, and vocal quality. These qualities, also known as paralanguage, reinforce the meaning of verbal communication, allow us to emphasize particular parts of a message, or can contradict verbal messages.
- **Proxemics** refers to the use of space and distance within communication. US Americans, in general, have four zones that constitute our personal space: the public zone (12 or more feet from our body), social zone (4–12 feet from our body), the personal zone (1.5–4 feet from our body), and the intimate zone (from body contact to 1.5 feet away). Proxemics also studies territoriality, or how people take up and defend personal space.
- **Chronemics** refers the study of how time affects communication and includes how different time cycles affect our communication, including the differences between people who are past or future oriented and cultural perspectives on time as fixed and measured (monochronic) or fluid and adaptable (polychronic).
- **Personal presentation and environment** refers to how the objects we adorn ourselves and our surroundings with, referred to as *artifacts*, provide nonverbal cues that others make meaning from and how our physical environment—for example, the layout of a room and seating positions and arrangements—influences communication.

Exercises

1. Provide some examples of how eye contact plays a role in your communication throughout the day.
2. One of the key functions of vocalics is to add emphasis to our verbal messages to influence the meaning. Provide a meaning for each of the following statements based on which word is emphasized: "She is my friend." "She is *my* friend." "She is my *friend*."
3. Getting integrated: Many people do not think of time as an important part of our nonverbal communication. Provide an example of how chronemics sends nonverbal messages in academic settings, professional settings, and personal settings.

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Media Attributions

- 4-2-0n

- 4-2-1n
- 4-2-2n
- 4-2-3
- 4-2-4n

[15]

Nonverbal Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency of children to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them (Andersen, 1999). Likewise, as we become more experienced communicators we tend to think that we become better at interpreting nonverbal messages. In this section we will discuss some strategies for effectively encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. As we've already learned, we receive little, if any, official instruction in nonverbal communication, but you can think of this chapter as a training manual to help improve your own nonverbal communication competence. As with all aspects of communication, improving your nonverbal communication takes commitment and continued effort. However, research shows that education and training in nonverbal communication can lead to quick gains in knowledge and skill (Riggio, 1992). Additionally, once the initial effort is put into improving your nonverbal encoding and decoding skills and those new skills are put into practice, people are encouraged by the positive reactions from others. Remember that people enjoy interacting with others who are skilled at nonverbal encoding and decoding, which will be evident in their reactions, providing further motivation and encouragement to hone your skills.

Guidelines for Sending Nonverbal Messages

As is stressed in [Chapter 2 “Communication and Perception”](#), first impressions matter. Nonverbal cues account for much of the content from which we form initial impressions, so it's important to know that people make judgments about our identities and skills after only brief exposure. Our competence regarding and awareness of nonverbal communication can help determine how an interaction will proceed and, in fact, whether it will take place at all. People who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages are more favorably evaluated after initial encounters. This is likely due to the fact that people who are more nonverbally expressive are also more attention getting and engaging and make people feel more welcome and warm due to increased immediacy behaviors, all of which enhance perceptions of charisma.



People who are more nonverbally expressive typically form more positive initial impressions, because expressivity in the form of immediacy behaviors is attention getting and welcoming.

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Understand That Nonverbal Communication Is Multichannel

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

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

Understand That Nonverbal Communication Affects Our Interactions

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

because that nonverbal cluster reinforces and heightens your feelings. Increased awareness about these cycles can help you make conscious moves to change your nonverbal communication and, subsequently, your cognitive and emotional states (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

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

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

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Creates Rapport

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

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversations

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

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Relates to Listening

Part of being a good listener involves nonverbal-encoding competence, as nonverbal feedback in the form of head nods, eye contact, and posture can signal that a listener is paying attention and the speaker’s message is received and understood. Active listening, for example, combines good cognitive listening practices with outwardly visible cues that signal to others that we are listening. We will learn more about active listening in [Chapter 5 “Listening”](#), but we all know from experience which nonverbal signals convey attentiveness and which convey a lack of attentiveness. Listeners are expected to make more eye contact with the speaker than the speaker makes with them, so it’s important to “listen with your eyes” by maintaining eye contact, which signals attentiveness. Listeners

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

Understand How Nonverbal Communication Relates to Impression Management

The nonverbal messages we encode also help us express our identities and play into impression management, which as we learned in [Chapter 1 “Introduction to Communication Studies”](#) is a key part of communicating to achieve identity goals. Being able to control nonverbal expressions and competently encode them allows us to better manage our persona and project a desired self to others—for example, a self that is perceived as competent, socially attractive, and engaging. Being nonverbally expressive during initial interactions usually leads to more favorable impressions. So smiling, keeping an attentive posture, and offering a solid handshake help communicate confidence and enthusiasm that can be useful on a first date, during a job interview, when visiting family for the holidays, or when running into an acquaintance at the grocery store. Nonverbal communication can also impact the impressions you make as a student. Research has also found that students who are more nonverbally expressive are liked more by their teachers and are more likely to have their requests met by their teachers (Mottet et al., 2004).

Increase Competence in Specific Channels of Nonverbal Communication

While it is important to recognize that we send nonverbal signals through multiple channels simultaneously, we can also increase our nonverbal communication competence by becoming more aware of how it operates in specific channels. Although no one can truly offer you a rulebook on how to effectively send every type of nonverbal signal, there are several nonverbal guidebooks that are written from more anecdotal and less academic perspectives. While these books vary tremendously in terms of their credibility and quality, some, like Allan Pease and Barbara Pease's *The Definitive Book of Body Language*, are informative and interesting to read.

Kinesics

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

Gestures

- Illustrators make our verbal communication more engaging. Speech communication professionals often recommend that people doing phone interviews or speaking on the radio make an effort to gesture as they speak, even though people can't see the gestures, because it will make their words sound more engaging.
- Remember that adaptors can hurt your credibility in more formal or serious interactions. Figure out what your common adaptors are and monitor them so you can avoid creating unfavorable impressions.
- Gestures send messages about your emotional state. Since many gestures are spontaneous or subconscious, it is important to raise your awareness of them and monitor them. Be aware that clenched hands may signal aggression or anger, nail biting or fidgeting may signal nervousness, and finger tapping may signal boredom.

Eye Contact

- Eye contact is useful for initiating and regulating conversations. To make sure someone is available for interaction and to avoid being perceived as rude, it is usually a good idea to “catch their eye” before you start talking to them.
- Avoiding eye contact or shifting your eye contact from place to place can lead others to think you are being deceptive or inattentive. Minimize distractions by moving a clock, closing a door, or closing window blinds to help minimize distractions that may lure your eye contact away.
- Although avoiding eye contact can be perceived as sign of disinterest, low confidence, or negative emotionality, eye contact avoidance can be used positively as a face-saving strategy. The notion of civil

inattention refers to a social norm that leads us to avoid making eye contact with people in situations that deviate from expected social norms, such as witnessing someone fall or being in close proximity to a stranger expressing negative emotions (like crying). We also use civil inattention when we avoid making eye contact with others in crowded spaces (Goffman, 2010).

Facial Expressions

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

Haptics

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

- Remember that culture, status, gender, age, and setting influence how we send and interpret touch messages.
- In professional and social settings, it is generally OK to touch others on the arm or shoulder. Although we touch others on the arm or shoulder with our hand, it is often too intimate to touch your hand to another person's hand in a professional or social/casual setting.

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

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

Vocalics

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

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

Proxemics

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

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

Chronemics

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

- In terms of talk time and turn taking, research shows that people who take a little longer with their turn, holding the floor slightly longer than normal, are actually seen as more credible than people who talk too much or too little (Andersen, 1999).
- Our lateness or promptness can send messages about our professionalism, dependability, or other personality traits. Formal time usually applies to professional situations in which we are expected to be on time or even a few minutes early. You generally wouldn't want to be late for work, a job interview, a medical appointment, and so on. Informal time applies to casual and interpersonal situations in which there is much more variation in terms of expectations for promptness. For example, people who live in a large city may arrive to dinner parties or other social gatherings about thirty minutes after the announced time, given the possibility of interference by heavy traffic or people's hectic schedules. Whereas, individuals who live in a smaller towns (like in the Midwest), are expected to arrive at or close to the announced time. For most social meetings with one other person or a small group, you can be five minutes late without having to offer much of an apology or explanation. For larger social gatherings you can usually be fifteen minutes late as long as your late arrival doesn't interfere with the host's plans or preparations.
- Quality time is an important part of interpersonal relationships, and sometimes time has to be budgeted so that it can be saved and spent with certain people or on certain occasions—like date nights for couples or family time for parents and children or other relatives.

Personal Presentation and Environment

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

- Recognize that personal presentation carries much weight in terms of initial impressions, so meeting the expectations and social norms for dress, grooming, and other artifactual communication is especially important for impression management.
- Recognize that some environments facilitate communication and some do not. A traditional front-facing business or educational setup is designed for one person to communicate with a larger audience. People in the audience cannot as easily interact with each other because they can't see each other face-to-face without turning. A horseshoe or circular arrangement allows everyone to make eye contact and facilitates interaction. Even close proximity doesn't necessarily facilitate interaction. For example, a comfortable sofa may bring four people together, but eye contact among all four is nearly impossible if they're all facing the same direction.

- Where you choose to sit can also impact perceived characteristics and leadership decisions. People who sit at the head or center of a table are often chosen to be leaders by others because of their nonverbal accessibility—a decision which may have more to do with where the person chose to sit than the person's perceived or actual leadership abilities. Research has found that juries often select their foreperson based on where he or she happens to sit (Andersen, 1999). Keep this in mind the next time you take your seat at a meeting.

Guidelines for Interpreting Nonverbal Messages

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

There Is No Nonverbal Dictionary

The first guideline for decoding nonverbal communication is to realize that there is no nonverbal dictionary. Some nonverbal scholars and many nonverbal skill trainers have tried to catalog nonverbal communication like we do verbal communication to create dictionary-like guides that people can use to interpret nonverbal signals. Although those guides may contain many valid “rules” of nonverbal communication, those rules are always relative to the individual, social, and cultural contexts in which an interaction takes place. In short, you can't read people's nonverbal communication like a book, and there are no *A-to-Z* guides that capture the complexity of nonverbal communication (DePaulo, 1992). Rather than using a list of specific *rules*, your speech class may suggest people develop more general *tools* that will be useful in and adaptable to a variety of contexts rather than developing a set of tools that can be applied to myriad situations.

Recognize That Certain Nonverbal Signals Are Related

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



Although cultural patterns exist, people also exhibit idiosyncratic nonverbal behavior, meaning they don't always follow the norms of the group.

Jed Scattergood – [School](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Read Nonverbal Cues in Context

We will learn more specifics about nonverbal communication in relational, professional, and cultural contexts in [Section 4.1 “Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication”](#), but we can also gain insight into how to interpret nonverbal cues through personal contexts. People have idiosyncratic nonverbal behaviors, which create an individual context that varies with each person. Even though we generally fit into certain social and cultural patterns, some people deviate from those norms. For example, some cultures tend toward less touching and greater interpersonal distances during interactions. The United States falls into this general category, but there are people who were socialized into these norms who as individuals deviate from them and touch more and stand closer to others while conversing. As the idiosyncratic communicator inches toward his or her conversational partner, the partner may inch back to reestablish the interpersonal distance norm. Such deviations may lead people to misinterpret sexual or romantic interest or feel uncomfortable. While these actions could indicate such interest, they could also be idiosyncratic. As this example shows, these individual differences can increase the ambiguity of nonverbal communication, but when observed over a period of time, they can actually help us generate meaning. Try to compare observed nonverbal cues to a person's typical or baseline nonverbal behavior to help avoid misinterpretation. In some instances it is impossible to know what sorts of individual nonverbal behaviors or idiosyncrasies people have because there isn't a relational history. In such cases, we have to turn to our knowledge about specific types of nonverbal communication or draw from more general contextual knowledge.

Interpreting Cues within Specific Channels

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

Kinesics

Gestures (Pease & Pease, 2004)

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

Head Movements and Posture

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

Eye Contact

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

Facial Expressions

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

Haptics

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

Vocalics

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

Proxemics

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

Personal Presentation and Environment

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

Detecting Deception

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

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

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



There is no one “tell” that gives away when someone is lying.

Kevin Trotman – [You Lie!](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

“Getting Competent”

Deception and Communication Competence

The research on deception and nonverbal communication indicates that heightened arousal and increased cognitive demands contribute to the presence of nonverbal behaviors that can be associated with deception. Remember, however, that these nonverbal behaviors are not solely related to deception and also manifest as a result of other emotional or cognitive states. Additionally, when people are falsely accused of deception, the signs that they exhibit as a result of the stress of being falsely accused are very similar to the signals exhibited by people who are actually engaging in deception.

There are common misconceptions about what behaviors are associated with deception. Behaviors mistakenly linked to deception include longer response times, slower speech rates, decreased eye contact, increased body movements, excessive swallowing, and less smiling. None of these have consistently been associated with deception (Andersen, 1999). As we've learned, people also tend to give more weight to nonverbal than verbal cues when evaluating the truthfulness of a person or her or his message. This predisposition can lead us to focus on nonverbal cues while overlooking verbal signals of deception. A large study found that people were better able to detect deception by sound alone than they were when exposed to both auditory and visual cues (Andersen, 1999). Aside from nonverbal cues, also listen for inconsistencies in or contradictions between statements, which can also be used to tell when others are being deceptive. The following are some nonverbal signals that have been associated with deception in research studies, but be cautious about viewing these as absolutes since individual and contextual differences should also be considered.

Gestures. One of the most powerful associations between nonverbal behaviors and deception is the presence of adaptors. Self-touches like wringing hands and object-adaptors like playing with a pencil or messing with clothing have been shown to correlate to deception. Some highly experienced deceivers, however, can control the presence of adaptors (Andersen, 1999).

Eye contact. Deceivers tend to use more eye contact when lying to friends, perhaps to try to increase feelings of immediacy or warmth, and less eye contact when lying to strangers. A review of many studies of deception indicates that increased eye blinking is associated with deception, probably because of heightened arousal and cognitive activity (Andersen, 1999).

Facial expressions. People can intentionally use facial expressions to try to deceive, and there are five primary ways that this may occur. People may show feelings that they do not actually have, show a higher intensity of feelings than they actually have, try to show no feelings, try to show less feeling than they actually have, or mask one feeling with another.

Vocalics. One of the most common nonverbal signs of deception is speech errors. As you'll recall, verbal fillers and other speech disfluencies are studied as part of vocalics; examples include false starts, stutters, and fillers. Studies also show that an increase in verbal pitch is associated with deception and is likely caused by heightened arousal and tension.

Chronemics. Speech turns are often thought to correspond to deception, but there is no consensus among researchers as to the exact relationship. Most studies reveal that deceivers talk less, especially in response to direct questions (Andersen, 1999).

1. Studies show that people engage in deception much more than they care to admit. Do you consider yourself a good deceiver? Why or why not? Which, if any, of the nonverbal cues discussed do you think help you deceive others or give you away?
2. For each of the following scenarios, note (1) what behaviors may indicate deception, (2) alternative explanations for the behaviors (aside from deception), and (3) questions you could ask to get more information before making a judgment.

Scenario 1. A politician is questioned by a reporter about allegations that she used taxpayer money to fund personal vacations. She looks straight at the reporter, crosses one leg over the other, and says, "I've worked for the people of this community for ten years and no one has ever questioned my ethics until now." As she speaks, she points her index finger at the politician and uses a stern and clear tone of voice.

Scenario 2. You ask your roommate if you can borrow his car to go pick up a friend from the train station about ten miles away. He says, "Um, well...I had already made plans to go to dinner with Cal and he drove last time so it's kind of my turn to drive this time. I mean, is there someone else you could ask or someone else who could get her? You know I don't mind sharing things with you, and I would totally let you, you know, if I didn't have this thing to do. Sorry." As he says, "Sorry," he raises both of his hands, with his palms facing toward you, and shrugs.

Scenario 3. A professor asks a student to explain why he didn't cite sources for several passages in his paper that came from various websites. The student scratches his head and says, "What do you mean? Those were my ideas. I did look at several websites, but I didn't directly quote anything so I didn't think I needed to put the citations in parentheses." As he says this, he rubs the back of his neck and then scratches his face and only makes minimal eye contact with the professor.

Key Takeaways

- To improve your competence encoding nonverbal messages, increase your awareness of the messages you are sending and receiving and the contexts in which your communication is taking place. Since nonverbal communication is multichannel, it is important to be aware that nonverbal cues can complement, enhance, or contradict each other. Also realize that the norms and expectations for sending nonverbal messages, especially touch and personal space, vary widely between relational and professional contexts.
- To improve your competence decoding nonverbal messages, look for multiple nonverbal cues, avoid putting too much weight on any one cue, and evaluate nonverbal messages in relation to the context and your previous experiences with the other person. Although we put more weight on nonverbal communication than verbal when trying to detect deception, there is no set guide that can allow us to tell whether or not another person is being deceptive.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: As was indicated earlier, research shows that instruction in nonverbal communication can lead people to make gains in their nonverbal communication competence. List some nonverbal skills that you think are important in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.
2. Using concepts from this section, analyze your own nonverbal encoding competence. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Do the same for your nonverbal decoding competence
3. To understand how chronemics relates to nonverbal communication norms, answer the following questions: In what situations is it important to be early? In what situations can you arrive late? How long would you wait on someone you were meeting for a group project for a class? A date? A job interview?

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Nonverbal Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in relational contexts.
2. Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in professional contexts.
3. Provide examples of cultural differences in nonverbal communication.
4. Provide examples of gender differences in nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal communication receives less attention than verbal communication as a part of our everyday lives. Learning more about nonverbal communication and becoming more aware of our own and others' use of nonverbal cues can help us be better relational partners and better professionals. In addition, learning about cultural differences in nonverbal communication is important for people traveling abroad but also due to our increasingly multinational business world and the expanding diversity and increased frequency of intercultural communication within our own borders.

Nonverbal Communication in Relational Contexts

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

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

Nonverbal communication helps maintain relationships once they have moved beyond the initial stages by helping us communicate emotions and seek and provide social and emotional support. In terms of communicating emotions, competent communicators know when it is appropriate to express emotions and when more self-regulation is needed. They also know how to adjust their emotional expressions to fit various contexts and individuals, which is useful in preventing emotional imbalances within a relationship. Emotional imbalances occur when one relational partner expresses too much emotion in a way that becomes a burden for the other

person. Ideally, each person in a relationship is able to express his or her emotions in a way that isn't too taxing for the other person. Occasionally, one relational partner may be going through an extended period of emotional distress, which can become very difficult for other people in his or her life. Since people with nonverbal communication competence are already more likely to have larger social support networks, it is likely that they will be able to spread around their emotional communication, specifically related to negative emotions, in ways that do not burden others. Unfortunately, since people with less nonverbal skill are likely to have smaller social networks, they may end up targeting one or two people for their emotional communication, which could lead the other people to withdraw from the relationship.



Nonverbal communication allows us to give and request emotional support, which is a key part of relational communication.

Kevin Dooley – [Hug](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

Nonverbal Communication in Professional Contexts

Surveys of current professionals and managers have found that most report that nonverbal skills are important to their jobs (DePaulo, 1992). Although important, there is rarely any training or instruction related to nonverbal communication, and a consistent issue that has been reported by employees has been difficulty with mixed messages coming from managers. Interpreting contradictory verbal and nonverbal messages is challenging in any context and can have negative effects on job satisfaction and productivity. As a supervisor who gives positive and negative feedback regularly and/or in periodic performance evaluations, it is important to be able to match nonverbal signals with the content of the message. For example, appropriate nonverbal cues can convey the seriousness of a customer or coworker complaint, help ease the delivery of constructive criticism, or reinforce positive feedback. Professionals also need to be aware of how context, status, and power intersect with specific channels of nonverbal communication. For example, even casual touching of supervisees, mentees, or employees may be considered condescending or inappropriate in certain situations. A well-deserved pat on the back is different from an unnecessary hand on the shoulder to say hello at the start of a business meeting.

In professional contexts, managers and mentors with nonverbal decoding skills can exhibit sensitivity to others' nonverbal behavior and better relate to employees and mentees. In general, interpreting emotions from nonverbal cues can have interpersonal and professional benefits. One study found that salespeople who were skilled at recognizing emotions through nonverbal cues sold more products and earned higher salaries (Byron, Terranova, & Nowicki Jr., 2007). Aside from bringing financial rewards, nonverbal communication also helps create supportive climates. Bosses, supervisors, and service providers like therapists can help create rapport and a positive climate by consciously mirroring the nonverbal communication of their employees or clients. In addition, mirroring the nonverbal communication of others during a job interview, during a sales pitch, or during a performance evaluation can help put the other person at ease and establish rapport. Much of the mirroring we do is natural, so trying to overcompensate may actually be detrimental, but engaging in self-monitoring and making small adjustments could be beneficial (DePaulo, 1992).

You can also use nonverbal communication to bring positive attention to yourself. Being able to nonverbally encode turn-taking cues can allow people to contribute to conversations at relevant times, and getting an idea or a piece of information or feedback in at the right time can help bring attention to your professional competence. Being able to encode an appropriate amount of professionalism and enthusiasm during a job interview can also aid in desired impression formation since people make judgments about others' personalities based on their nonverbal cues. A person who comes across as too enthusiastic may be seen as pushy or fake, and a person who comes across as too relaxed may be seen as unprofessional and unmotivated.

Nonverbal Communication and Culture

As with other aspects of communication, norms for nonverbal communication vary from country to country and also among cultures within a particular country. We've already learned that some nonverbal communication behaviors appear to be somewhat innate because they are universally recognized. Two such universal signals are the "eyebrow flash" of recognition when we see someone we know and the open hand and the palm up gesture that signals a person would like something or needs help (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Smiling is also a universal nonverbal behavior, but the triggers that lead a person to smile vary from culture to culture. The expansion of media, particularly from the United States and other Western countries around the world, is leading to more nonverbal similarities among cultures, but the biggest cultural differences in nonverbal communication occur within the categories of eye contact, touch, and personal space (Pease & Pease, 2004). Next, we will overview some interesting and instructive differences within several channels of nonverbal communication that we have discussed so far. As you read, remember that these are not absolute, in that nonverbal communication like other forms of communication is influenced by context and varies among individuals within a particular cultural group as well.

Kinesics

Cultural variations in the way we gesture, use head movements, and use eye contact fall under the nonverbal category of kinesics.

Gestures

Remember that emblems are gestures that correspond to a word and an agreed-on meaning. When we use our fingers to count, we are using emblematic gestures, but even our way of counting varies among cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). It is fairly easy to accurately separate British people and US Americans from French, Greek, and German people based on a simple and common gesture. Let's try this exercise: First, display with your hand the number five. Second, keeping the five displayed, change it to a two. If you are from the United States or Britain you are probably holding up your index finger and your middle finger. If you are from another European country you are probably holding up your thumb and index finger. While Americans and Brits start counting on their index finger and end with five on their thumb, other Europeans start counting on their thumb and end with five on their pinky finger.



This common gesture for “five” or as a signal to get someone’s attention is called a *moutza* in Greece and is an insult gesture that means you want to rub excrement in someone’s face. See example in [Note 4.38 “Video Clip 4.1”](#).

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How you use your hands can also get you into trouble if you’re unaware of cultural differences (Pease & Pease, 2004). For example, the “thumbs up” gesture, as we just learned, can mean “one” in mainland Europe, but it also means “up yours” in Greece (when thrust forward) and is recognized as a signal for hitchhiking or “good,” “good job / way to go,” or “OK” in many other cultures. Two hands up with the palms out can signal “ten” in many Western countries and is recognized as a signal for “I’m telling the truth” or “I surrender” in many cultures. The same gesture, however, means “up yours twice” in Greece. So using that familiar gesture to say you surrender might actually end up escalating rather than ending a conflict if used in Greece.

You can take a cross-cultural awareness quiz to learn some more interesting cultural variations in gestures at the following link: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/quiz/gestures.php>.

Video Clip 4.1

Soccer Player Directs Insult Gesture to Referee

[" data-url="http://youtube.com/watch?v=xCzolzhy_vk">\(click to see video\)](http://youtube.com/watch?v=xCzolzhy_vk)

Head Movements

Bowing is a nonverbal greeting ritual that is more common in Asian cultures than Western cultures, but the head nod, which is a common form of acknowledgement in many cultures, is actually an abbreviated bow. Japan is considered a noncontact culture, which refers to cultural groups in which people stand farther apart while talking, make less eye contact, and touch less during regular interactions. Because of this, bowing is the preferred nonverbal greeting over handshaking. Bows vary based on status, with higher status people bowing the least. For example, in order to indicate the status of another person, a Japanese businessperson may bow deeply. An interesting ritual associated with the bow is the exchange of business cards when greeting someone in Japan. This exchange allows each person to view the other's occupation and title, which provides useful information about the other's status and determines who should bow more. Since bowing gives each person a good view of the other person's shoes, it is very important to have clean shoes that are in good condition, since they play an important part of initial impression formation.

Eye Contact

In some cultures, avoiding eye contact is considered a sign of respect. Such eye contact aversion, however, could be seen as a sign that the other person is being deceptive, is bored, or is being rude. Some Native American nations teach that people should avoid eye contact with elders, teachers, and other people with status. This can create issues in classrooms when teachers are unaware of this norm and may consider a Native American student's lack of eye contact as a sign of insubordination or lack of engagement, which could lead to false impressions that the student is a troublemaker or less intelligent.

Haptics

As we've learned, touch behaviors are important during initial interactions, and cultural differences in these nonverbal practices can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Shaking hands as a typical touch greeting, for example, varies among cultures (Pease & Pease, 2004). It is customary for British, Australian, German, and US American colleagues to shake hands when seeing each other for the first time and then to shake again when departing company. In the United States, the colleagues do not normally shake hands again if they see each other again later in the day, but European colleagues may shake hands with each other several times a day. Once a certain level of familiarity and closeness is reached, US American colleagues will likely not even shake hands daily unless engaging in some more formal interaction, but many European colleagues will continue to shake each time they see each other. Some French businesspeople have been known to spend up to thirty minutes a day shaking hands. The squeezes and up-and-down shakes used during handshakes are often called "pumps," and the number of pumps used in a handshake also varies among cultures. Although the Germans and French shake hands more often throughout the day, they typically only give one or two pumps and then hold the shake for a couple seconds before letting go. Brits tend to give three to five pumps, and US Americans tend to give five to seven pumps. This can be humorous to watch at a multinational business event, but it also affects the initial impressions people make of each other. A US American may think that a German is being unfriendly or distant because of his or her single hand pump, while a German may think that a US American is overdoing it with seven.

Contact cultures are cultural groups in which people stand closer together, engage in more eye contact, touch more frequently, and speak more loudly. Italians are especially known for their vibrant nonverbal communication in terms of gestures, volume, eye contact, and touching, which not surprisingly places them in the contact culture category. Italians use hand motions and touching to regulate the flow of conversations, and when non-Italians don't know how to mirror an Italian's nonverbals they may not get to contribute much to the conversation, which likely feeds into the stereotype of Italians as domineering in conversations or overexpressive. For example, Italians speak with their hands raised as a way to signal that they are holding the floor for their conversational turn. If their conversational partner starts to raise his or her hands, the Italian might gently touch the other person and keep on talking. Conversational partners often interpret this as a sign of affection or of the Italian's passion for what he or she is saying. In fact, it is a touch intended to keep the partner from raising his or her hands, which would signal that the Italian's conversational turn is over and the other person now has the floor. It has been suggested that in order to get a conversational turn, you must physically grab their hands in midair and pull them down. While this

would seem very invasive and rude to northern Europeans and US Americans, it is a nonverbal norm in Italian culture and may be the only way to get to contribute to a conversation (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Vocalics

The volume at which we speak is influenced by specific contexts and is more generally influenced by our culture. In European countries like France, England, Sweden, and Germany, it is not uncommon to find restaurants that have small tables very close together. In many cases, two people dining together may be sitting at a table that is actually touching the table of another pair of diners. Most US Americans would consider this a violation of personal space, and Europeans often perceive US Americans to be rude in such contexts because they do not control the volume of their conversations more. Since personal space is usually more plentiful in the United States, Americans are used to speaking at a level that is considered too loud to others from other cultures because of lack of personal space. Americans, too often, have experienced negative reactions to our loud vocalics while traveling abroad. In any case, we can all be aware that proxemics and vocalics can combine to make for troubling, but hopefully informative, nonverbal intercultural encounters.

Proxemics

Cultural norms for personal space vary much more than some other nonverbal communication channels such as facial expressions, which have more universal similarity and recognizability. We've already learned that contact and noncontact cultures differ in their preferences for touch and interpersonal distance. Countries in South America and southern Europe exhibit characteristics of contact cultures, while countries in northern Europe and Southeast Asia exhibit noncontact cultural characteristics. Because of the different comfort levels with personal space, a Guatemalan and a Canadian might come away with differing impressions of each other because of proxemic differences. The Guatemalan may feel the Canadian is standoffish, and the Canadian may feel the Guatemalan is pushy or aggressive.

Chronemics

The United States and many northern and western European countries have a monochronic orientation to time, meaning time is seen as a commodity that can be budgeted, saved, spent, and wasted. Events are to be scheduled in advance and have set beginning and ending times. Countries like Spain and Mexico have a polychronic orientation to time. Appointments may be scheduled at overlapping times, making an "orderly" schedule impossible. People may also miss appointments or deadlines without offering an apology, which would be considered very rude by a person with a monochronic orientation to time. People from cultures with a monochronic orientation to time are frustrated when people from polychronic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations. Conversely, people from polychronic cultures feel that US Americans, for example, follow their schedules at the expense of personal relationships (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Nonverbal Communication and Gender

Gender and communication scholar Kathryn Dindia contests the notion that men and women are from different planets and instead uses another analogy. She says men are from South Dakota and women are from North Dakota. Although the states border each other and are similar in many ways, state pride and in-group identifications lead the people of South Dakota to perceive themselves to be different from the people of North Dakota and vice versa. But if we expand our perspective and take the position of someone from California or Illinois, North Dakotans and South Dakotans are pretty much alike (Andersen, 1999). This comparison is intended to point out that in our daily lives we do experience men and women to be fairly different, but when we look at the differences between men and women compared to the differences between humans and other creatures, men and women are much more similar than different. For example, in terms of nonverbal communication, men and women all over the world make similar facial expressions and can recognize those facial expressions in one another. We use similar eye contact patterns, gestures, and, within cultural groups, have similar notions of the use of time and space. As we continue to be reiterated throughout this book, it's important to understand how gender

influences communication, but it's also important to remember that in terms of communication, men and women are about 99 percent similar and 1 percent different.

Kinesics

Although men and women are mostly similar in terms of nonverbal communication, we can gain a better understanding of the role that gender plays in influencing our social realities by exploring some of the channel-specific differences (Andersen, 1999). Within the category of kinesics, we will discuss some gender differences in how men and women use gestures, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Gestures

- Women use more gestures in regular conversation than do men, but men tend to use larger gestures than women when they do use them.
- Men are, however, more likely to use physical adaptors like restless foot and hand movements, probably because girls are socialized to avoid such movements because they are not “ladylike.”

Posture

- Men are more likely to lean in during an interaction than are women.
- Women are more likely to have a face-to-face body orientation while interacting than are men.

Women's tendency to use a face-to-face body orientation influences the general conclusion that women are better at sending and receiving nonverbal messages than men. Women's more direct visual engagement during interactions allows them to take in more nonverbal cues, which allows them to better reflect on and more accurately learn from experience what particular nonverbal cues mean in what contexts.

Eye Contact

- In general, women make more eye contact than men. As we learned, women use face-to-face body orientations in conversations more often than men, which likely facilitates more sustained eye contact.
- Overall, women tend to do more looking and get looked at more than men.

Facial Expressions

- Women reveal emotion through facial expressions more frequently and more accurately than men.
- Men are more likely than women to exhibit angry facial expressions.

Men are often socialized to believe it is important to hide their emotions. This is especially evident in the case of smiling, with women smiling more than men. This also contributes to the stereotype of the more emotionally aware and nurturing woman, since people tend to like and view as warmer others who show positive emotion. Gender socialization plays a role in facial displays as girls are typically rewarded for emotional displays, especially positive ones, and boys are rewarded when they conceal emotions—for instance, when they are told to “suck it up,” “take it like a man,” or “show sportsmanship” by not gloating or celebrating openly.

Haptics

- Although it is often assumed that men touch women more than women touch men, this hasn't been a consistent research finding. In fact, differences in touch in cross-gender interactions are very small.
- Women do engage in more touching when interacting with same-gender conversational partners than do men.
- In general, men tend to read more sexual intent into touch than do women, who often underinterpret sexual intent (Andersen, 1999).

There is a touch taboo for men in the United States. In fact, research supports the claim that men's aversion to same-gender touching is higher in the United States than in other cultures, which shows that this taboo is culturally relative. For example, seeing two adult men holding hands in public in Saudi Arabia would signal that

the men are close friends and equals, but it wouldn't signal that they are sexually attracted to each other (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). The touch taboo also extends to cross-gender interactions in certain contexts. It's important to be aware of the potential interpretations of touch, especially as they relate to sexual and aggressive interpretations.

Vocalics

- Women are socialized to use more vocal variety, which adds to the stereotype that women are more expressive than men.
- In terms of pitch, women tend more than men to end their sentences with an upward inflection of pitch, which implies a lack of certainty, even when there isn't.

A biological difference between men and women involves vocal pitch, with men's voices being lower pitched and women's being higher. Varying degrees of importance and social meaning are then placed on these biological differences, which lead some men and women to consciously or unconsciously exaggerate the difference. Men may speak in a lower register than they would naturally and women may speak in more soft, breathy tones to accentuate the pitch differences. These ways of speaking often start as a conscious choice after adolescence to better fit into socially and culturally proscribed gender performances, but they can become so engrained that people spend the rest of their lives speaking in a voice that is a modified version of their natural tone.

Proxemics

- Men are implicitly socialized to take up as much space as possible, and women are explicitly socialized to take up less space.
- In terms of interpersonal distance, research shows that women interact in closer proximity to one another than do men.
- Men do not respond as well as women in situations involving crowding. High-density environments evoke more negative feelings from men, which can even lead to physical violence in very crowded settings.

Men are generally larger than women, which is a biological difference that gains social and cultural meaning when certain behaviors and norms are associated with it. For example, women are told to sit in a "ladylike" way, which usually means to cross and/or close their legs and keep their limbs close to their body. Men, on the other hand, sprawl out in casual, professional, and formal situations without their use of space being reprimanded or even noticed in many cases.

If you'll recall our earlier discussion of personal space, we identified two subzones within the personal zone that extends from 1.5 to 4 feet from our body. Men seem to be more comfortable with casual and social interactions that are in the outer subzone, which is 2.5 to 4 feet away, meaning men prefer to interact at an arm's length from another person. This also plays into the stereotypes of women as more intimate and nurturing and men as more distant and less intimate.



Men's displays of intimacy are often different from women's due to gender socialization that encourages females' expressions of intimacy and discourages males'.

Juan Jose Richards Echeverria – [Bros.](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Self-Presentation

- Men and women present themselves differently, with women, in general, accentuating their physical attractiveness more and men accentuating signs of their status and wealth more.
- Men and women may engage in self-presentation that exaggerates existing biological differences between male and female bodies.

Most people want to present themselves in ways that accentuate their attractiveness, at least in some situations where impression management is important to fulfill certain instrumental, relational, or identity needs. Gender socialization over many years has influenced how we present ourselves in terms of attractiveness. Research shows that women's physical attractiveness is more important to men than men's physical attractiveness is to women. Women do take physical attractiveness into account, but a man's social status and wealth has been shown to be more important.

Men and women also exaggerate biological and socially based sex and gender differences on their own. In terms of biology, men and women's bodies are generally different, which contributes to the nonverbal area related to personal appearance. Many men and women choose clothing that accentuates these bodily differences. For example, women may accentuate their curves with specific clothing choices and men may accentuate their size—for example, by wearing a suit with shoulder padding to enhance the appearance of broad shoulders. These choices vary in terms of the level of consciousness at which they are made. Men are also hairier than women, and although it isn't always the case and grooming varies by culture, many women shave their legs and remove body hair while men may grow beards or go to great lengths to reverse baldness to accentuate these differences. Of course, the more recent trend of “manscaping” now has some men trimming or removing body hair from their chests, arms, and/or legs.

Key Takeaways

- A central function of nonverbal communication is the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Nonverbal communication helps initiate relationships through impression management and self-disclosure and then helps maintain relationships as it aids in emotional expressions that request and give emotional support.

- Professionals indicate that nonverbal communication is an important part of their jobs. Organizational leaders can use nonverbal decoding skills to tell when employees are under stress and in need of support and can then use encoding skills to exhibit nonverbal sensitivity. Nonverbal signals can aid in impression management in professional settings, such as in encoding an appropriate amount of enthusiasm and professionalism.
- Although some of our nonverbal signals appear to be more innate and culturally universal, many others vary considerably among cultures, especially in terms of the use of space (proxemics), eye contact (oculesics), and touch (haptics). Rather than learning a list of rules for cultural variations in nonverbal cues, it is better to develop more general knowledge about how nonverbal norms vary based on cultural values and to view this knowledge as tools that can be adapted for use in many different cultural contexts.
- In terms of gender, most of the nonverbal differences between men and women are exaggerations of biological differences onto which we have imposed certain meanings and values. Men and women's nonverbal communication, as with other aspects of communication, is much more similar than different. Research has consistently found, however, that women gesture, make eye contact, touch and stand close to same-gender conversational partners, and use positive facial expressions more than men.

Exercises

1. Identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a positive interaction on a first date and on a job interview. Then identify some nonverbal behaviors that would signal a negative interaction in each of those contexts.
2. Discuss an experience where you have had some kind of miscommunication or misunderstanding because of cultural or gender differences in encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. What did you learn in this chapter that could help you in similar future interactions?

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Media Attributions

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The Importance of Practicing Delivery

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Identify the different methods of speech delivery.
2. Identify key elements in preparing to deliver a speech.
3. Understand the benefits of delivery-related behaviors.
4. Utilize specific techniques to enhance speech delivery.

The Importance of Delivery

As we stated in earlier, some surveys indicate that more people fear public speaking than they do death, but that is somewhat misleading. No one is afraid of writing their speech or conducting the research. Instead, people generally only fear the delivery aspect of the speech, which, compared to the amount of time you will put into writing the speech (days, hopefully), will be the shortest part of the speech giving process (5-8 minutes, generally, for classroom speeches). The irony, of course, is that delivery, being the thing people fear the most, is simultaneously the aspect of public speaking that will require the least amount of time.

Consider this scenario about two students, Bob and Chris. Bob spends weeks doing research and crafting a beautifully designed speech that, on the day he gets in front of the class, he messes up a little because of nerves. While he may view it as a complete failure, his audience will have gotten a lot of good information and most likely written off his mistakes due to nerves, since they would be nervous in the same situation!

Chris, on the other hand, does almost no preparation for his speech, but, being charming and comfortable in front of a crowd, smiles a lot while providing virtually nothing of substance. The audience takeaway from Chris's speech is, "I have no idea what he was talking about" and other feelings ranging from "He's good in front of an audience" to "I don't trust him." So the moral here is that a well-prepared speech that is delivered poorly is still a well-prepared speech, whereas a poorly written speech delivered superbly is still a poorly written speech.

Despite this irony, we realize that delivery is what you are probably most concerned about when it comes to giving speeches, so this chapter is designed to help you achieve the best delivery possible and eliminate some of the nervousness you might be feeling. To do that, we should first dismiss the myth that public speaking is just reading and talking at the same time. You already know how to read, and you already know how to talk, which is why you're taking a class called "public speaking" and not one called "public talking" or "public reading."

Speaking in public has more formality than talking. During a speech, you should present yourself professionally. This doesn't necessarily mean you must wear a suit or "dress up" unless your instructor asks you to. However, it does mean making yourself presentable by being well-groomed and wearing clean, appropriate clothes. It also

means being prepared to use language correctly and appropriately for the audience and the topic, to make eye contact with your audience, and to look like you know your topic very well.

While speaking has more formality than talking, it has less formality than reading. Speaking allows for flexibility, meaningful pauses, eye contact, small changes in word order, and vocal emphasis. Reading is a more or less exact replication of words on paper without the use of any nonverbal interpretation. Speaking, as you will realize if you think about excellent speakers you have seen and heard, provides a more animated message.

Methods of Speech Delivery

What follows are four methods of delivery that can help you balance between too much and too little formality when giving a speech. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, but you will most likely want to focus on the extemporaneous approach, since that is what your instructor will want from you.

Impromptu Speaking

Impromptu speaking is the presentation of a short message without advance preparation. You have probably done impromptu speaking many times in informal, conversational settings. Self-introductions in group settings are examples of impromptu speaking: “Hi, my name is Steve, and I’m a volunteer with the Homes for the Brave program.” Another example of impromptu speaking occurs when you answer a question such as, “What did you think of the movie?” Your response has not been preplanned, and you are constructing your arguments and points as you speak. Even worse, you might find yourself going into a meeting and your boss says, “I want you to talk about the last stage of the project. . .” and you have no warning.

The advantage of this kind of speaking is that it’s spontaneous and responsive in an animated group context. The disadvantage is that the speaker is given little or no time to contemplate the central theme of his or her message. As a result, the message may be disorganized and difficult for listeners to follow.

Impromptu Speaking

the presentation of a short message without advance preparation

Here is a step-by-step guide that may be useful if you are called upon to give an impromptu speech in public:

1. Take a moment to collect your thoughts and plan the main point you want to make.
2. Thank the person for inviting you to speak. Do not make comments about being unprepared, called upon at the last moment, on the spot, or uneasy. No one wants to hear that and it will embarrass others and yourself.
3. Deliver your message, making your main point as briefly as you can while still covering it adequately and at a pace your listeners can follow.
4. If you can use a structure, using numbers if possible: “Two main reasons . . .” or “Three parts of our plan. . .” or “Two side effects of this drug. . .” Past, present, and future or East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast are pre-fab structures.
5. Thank the person again for the opportunity to speak.
6. Stop talking (it is easy to “ramble on” when you don’t have something prepared). If in front of an audience, don’t keep talking as you move back to your seat.

Impromptu speeches are generally most successful when they are brief and focus on a single point.

Manuscript Speaking

Manuscript speaking is the word-for-word iteration of a written message. In a manuscript speech, the speaker maintains his or her attention on the printed page except when using visual aids. The advantage to reading from a manuscript is the exact repetition of original words. In some circumstances this can be extremely important. For example, reading a statement about your organization’s legal responsibilities to customers may require that the original words be exact. In reading one word at a time, in order, the only errors would typically be mispronunciation of a word or stumbling over complex sentence structure. A manuscript speech may also be appropriate at a more formal affair (like a funeral), when your speech must be said exactly as written in order to convey the proper emotion or decorum the situation deserves.

However, there are costs involved in manuscript speaking. First, it's typically an uninteresting way to present. Unless the speaker has rehearsed the reading as a complete performance animated with vocal expression and gestures (well-known authors often do this for book readings), the presentation tends to be dull. Keeping one's eyes glued to the script prevents eye contact with the audience. For this kind of "straight" manuscript speech to hold audience attention, the audience must be already interested in the message and speaker before the delivery begins.

Manuscript speaking
the word-for-word iteration of a written message

It is worth noting that professional speakers, actors, news reporters, and politicians often read from an autocue device, such as a TelePrompter, especially when appearing on television, where eye contact with the camera is crucial. With practice, a speaker can achieve a conversational tone and give the impression of speaking extemporaneously and maintaining eye contact while using an autocue device. However, success in this medium depends on two factors: (1) the speaker is already an accomplished public speaker who has learned to use a conversational tone while delivering a prepared script, and (2) the speech is written in a style that sounds conversational and in spoken rather than written, edited English, for example, shorter sentences and clearer transitions.

For the purposes of your public speaking class, you will not be encouraged to read your speech. Instead, you will be asked to give an extemporaneous presentation.

Extemporaneous Speaking

Extemporaneous speaking is the presentation of a carefully planned and rehearsed speech, spoken in a conversational manner using brief notes. By using notes rather than a full manuscript, the extemporaneous speaker can establish and maintain eye contact with the audience and assess how well they are understanding the speech as it progresses. And since you will be graded (to some degree) on establishing and maintaining eye contact with your audience, extemporaneous speaking can be extremely beneficial in that regard. Without all the words on the page to read, you have little choice but to look up and make eye contact with your audience. In some cases, your instructor will require you to prepare strong preparation and speaking (notes) outlines as a foundation for your speech; this topic is addressed in Chapter 6.

Speaking extemporaneously has some advantages. It promotes the likelihood that you, the speaker, will be perceived as knowledgeable and credible since you know the speech well enough that you don't need to read it. In addition, your audience is likely to pay better attention to the message because it is engaging both verbally and nonverbally. It also allows flexibility; you are working from the strong foundation of an outline, but if you need to delete, add, or rephrase something at the last minute or to adapt to your audience, you can do so. The outline also helps you be aware of main ideas vs. subordinate ones.

Extemporaneous speaking
the presentation of a carefully planned and rehearsed speech, spoken in a conversational manner using brief notes

The disadvantage of extemporaneous speaking is that it in some cases it does not allow for the verbal and the nonverbal preparation that are almost always required for a good speech. Adequate preparation cannot be achieved the day before you're scheduled to speak, so be aware that if you want to present a credibly delivered speech, you will need to practice many times. Because extemporaneous speaking is the style used in the great majority of public speaking situations, most of the information in the subsequent sections of this chapter is targeted toward this kind of speaking.

Memorized Speaking

Memorized speaking is the rote recitation of a written message that the speaker has committed to memory. Actors, of course, recite from memory whenever they perform from a script in a stage play, television program, or movie. When it comes to speeches, memorization can be useful when the message needs to be exact and the speaker doesn't want to be confined by notes.

The advantage to memorization is that it enables the speaker to maintain eye contact with the audience throughout the speech. Being free of notes means that you can move freely around the stage and use your hands to make gestures. If your speech uses visual aids, this freedom is even more of an advantage.

Memorized speaking
the rote recitation of a written message that the speaker has committed to memory

However, there are some real and potential costs. First, unless you also plan and memorize every **vocal cue** (the subtle but meaningful variations in speech delivery, which can include the use of pitch, tone, volume, and pace), gesture, and facial expression, your presentation will be flat and uninteresting, and even the most fascinating topic will suffer. You might end up speaking in a monotone or a sing-song repetitive delivery pattern. You might also present your speech in a rapid “machine-gun” style that fails to emphasize the most important points.

Second, if you lose your place and start trying to ad lib, the contrast in your style of delivery will alert your audience that something is wrong. If you go completely blank during the presentation, it will be extremely difficult to find your place and keep going. Obviously, memorizing a typical seven-minute classroom speech takes a great deal of time and effort, and if you aren’t used to memorizing, it is very difficult to pull off. Realistically, your probably will not have the time necessary to give a completely memorized speech. However, if you practice adequately, you will approach the feeling of memorized while still being extemporaneous.

Vocal cues

the subtle but meaningful variations in speech delivery, which can include the use of pitch, tone, volume, and pace

As we said earlier, for the purposes of this class you will use extemporaneous speaking. Many professional speakers who are paid to make speeches use this approach because, while they may largely know what they want to say, they usually make changes and adjustments based on the audience or event. This approach also incorporates most of the benefits of memorized speaking (knowing what you want to say; being very thoroughly rehearsed) and manuscript speaking (having some words in front of you to refer to) without the inherent pitfalls those approaches bring with them.

Preparing For Your Delivery

In the 1970s, before he was an author, playwright, and film actor, Steve Martin was an up-and-coming stand-up comedian whose popularity soared as a result of his early appearances on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* and *Saturday Night Live*. As Martin notes in his autobiography, *Born Standing Up* (2008), as the audiences for his act got bigger and bigger, he needed to adapt his delivery to accommodate:

Some promoters got on board and booked me into a theater in Dallas. Before the show I asked one of them, How many people are out there? “Two thousand,” he said. Two thousand? How could there be two thousand? That night I did my usual bit of taking people outside, but it was starting to get dangerous and difficult. First, people were standing in the streets, where they could be hit by a car. Second, only a small number of the audience could hear or see me (could Charlton Heston really have been audible when he was addressing a thousand extras?). Third, it didn’t seem as funny or direct with so many people; I reluctantly dropped it from my repertoire. (p. 168)

Martin’s audiences would grow to be around 50,000 at the height of his popularity as a stand-up comedian, again requiring him to make adjustments to his delivery (he began wearing his iconic all-white suit so that people in the nosebleed seats at his shows could still see his frenetic movements from afar). Most of us will never speak to so many people at once, but even though you don’t expect an audience of such size, you should still be prepared to adapt to the setting in which you will speak.

Your 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. Being prepared to deal with different speaking situations will help reduce anxiety you may have about giving a speech, so let’s look at factors you need to keep in mind as you prepare for your speech in this class, as well as future speeches you may need to give.

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 also 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. By the way, this piece of furniture is often mistakenly called a podium, which is a raised platform or stage.

However, for inexperienced 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 a place to rest your notes only. 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. Figures 11.1-11.3 give some examples of posture for speaking with a lectern.

Lectern

a small raised surface, usually with a slanted top, where a speaker can place notes during a speech

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, especially if far fewer people are in the space than it can hold, 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. Of course, if you can get the audience to move to the front, that is the best situation, but it tends not to happen.

Limited space is not as disconcerting for most speakers as enormous space, and it has the advantage of minimizing the tendency to pace back and forth while you speak. A small space also calls for more careful management of note cards 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. Of course, if you have any control over the location of the presentation, you should choose one that fits the size of your audience.

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 or prone to noise such as from cars, 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 insects 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 or straining your voice. In the best outdoor situation, you will access to a microphone.

Using a Microphone

Most people today are familiar with microphones that are built into video recorders, phones, 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 or blouse. 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. If you have to use a hand-held microphone, making gestures and using notes becomes very difficult.

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. Also 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.

One problem with a small audience is that some people will feel it is their right, or they have permission, to interrupt you or raise their hands to ask questions in the middle of your speech. This makes for a difficult situation, because the question may be irrelevant to your topic or cause you to go on a side track if answered. The best you can do is say you'll try to deal with that question at the end of the speech if you have time and hope they take the hint. Better, good rules should be established at the beginning that state there is limited time but discussion may be possible at the end.

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.

Practicing Your Delivery

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. But there are some techniques you can use to minimize that anxious feeling and put yourself in the best possible position to succeed on speech day.

If you've ever watched your favorite college football team practice, you may have noticed that sometimes obnoxiously loud crowd noise is blaring over the speaker system in the stadium. The coaches know that the crowd, whether home or away, will be raucous and noisy on game day. So to prepare, they practice in as realistic an environment as possible. You need to prepare for your speech in a similar way. What follows are some general tips you should keep in mind, but they all essentially derive from one very straight-forward premise:

Practice your speech beforehand, at home or elsewhere, the way you will give it in class.

Practice Your Speech Out Loud

We sometimes think that the purpose of practicing a speech is to learn the words and be prepared for what we will need to say. Certainly that is part of it, but practice also lets you know where potential problems lie. For example, if you only read your speech in your head, or whisper the words quietly so no one in the next room can hear, you're not really practicing what you will be doing in front of the class. Since you will be speaking with a normal volume for your assignment, you need to practice that way, even at home. Not only will this help you learn the speech, but it will help identify any places where you tend to mispronounce words. Also, sentences on paper do not always translate well to the spoken medium. Practicing out loud allows you to actually hear where you have trouble and fix it before getting up in front of the audience.

Practice Your Speech Standing Up

In all the time that the authors of this book have been teaching speech, not once have either of us come into a

classroom and seen a bed behind the lectern for students to speak from. This is to say that when you practice at home, lying on your bed reading your speech really only prepares you for one thing: lying on a bed reading a speech. Since you will be standing in front of your class, you need to practice that way. As we mention in more detail below, the default position for delivering a speech is with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly bent. Practicing this way will help develop muscle memory and will make it feel more natural when you are doing it for real. We also suggest you wear the same shoes you will be wearing on the day of your speech.

Practice Your Speech with a Lectern

One of the biggest challenges with practicing a speech as you're going to give it is usually the fact that most of us don't own a lectern. This is problematic, since you don't want to practice giving your speech while holding your notes in front of you because that is what will feel comfortable when you give your speech for real. So the solution is to practice your speech while standing behind something that approximates the lectern you will have in your classroom. Sometime this may be a kitchen counter or maybe even a dresser you pull away from the wall. One particularly creative idea that has been used in the past is to pull out an ironing board and stand behind that. The point is that you want to get experience standing behind something and resting your speech on it.

Of course, if you really want to practice with an actual lectern, it might be worth the time to see if your classroom is empty later in the day or find out if another classroom has the same type of lectern in it. Practicing with the "real thing" is always ideal.

Practice Your Speech with an Audience

Obviously on the day you give your speech you will have an audience of your fellow students and your professor watching you. The best way to prepare for the feeling of having someone watch you while giving a speech is to have someone watch you while you practice giving a speech. We don't mean a collection of stuffed animals arranged on your bed or locking your pets in the room with you, but actual human beings. Ask your parents, siblings, friends, or significant other to listen to you while running through what you will say. Not only will you get practice in front of an audience, but they may be able to tell you about any parts that were unclear or problems you might encounter when you give it for a grade.

Not to overcomplicate the issue, but remember that when you speak to your class, you will have an entire room full of people watching. Therefore, if you only have one person watching you practice, be sure to simulate an entire audience by looking around the room and not focusing on just that one person. When you give your speech for real, you will want to make eye contact with the people on the left side of the room as well as the right; with the people in the front as well as in the back. You also want the eye contact to be around five seconds long, not just a glance; the idea is that you are talking to individuals, not just a glob of people. During practice, it may help to pick out some strategically placed objects around the room to occasionally glance at just to get into the habit of looking around more often.

Practice Your Speech for Time

You will undoubtedly be given a time limit for each of your speeches, and points will be deducted if you go over or under that time. Therefore, you want to make sure you are well within time. As a general rule, if your speech window is 5-7 minutes, your ideal speech time is going to be 6 minutes; this gives you an extra 60 seconds at the beginning in case you talk very fast and race through it, and 60 seconds on the back end in case you get lost or want to add something at the last minute. If you practice at home and your 5-7 minute speech lasts 5:06, you are probably going to be in trouble on speech day. Most likely your nerves will cause you to speak slightly faster and put you under the 5:00 mark.

When practicing your speech at home for time, it is a good idea to time yourself at least three times. This way you can see if you are generally coming in around the same time and feel pretty good that it is an accurate reflection of how long you will speak. Conversely, if during your three rehearsals your times are 5:45, 5:12, and 6:37, then that is a clear indicator that you need to be more consistent in what you are saying and doing.

Although we are using examples of practicing for classroom speeches, the principle is even more important for non-classroom speeches. One of the authors had to give a very important presentation about the college to an accreditation board. She practiced about 15 times, to make sure the time was right, that her transitions made sense, that she was fluid, and that the presentational slides and her speech matched. Each time something improved.

Practice Your Speech by Filming Yourself

There is nothing that gets us to change what we're doing or correct a problem quicker than seeing ourselves doing something we don't like on video. Your instructor may film your speech in class and have you critique it afterwards, but it may be more helpful to do that in advance of giving your speech. By watching yourself, you will notice all the small things you do that might prove to be distracting (or cost you points) during the actual speech. Many times students aren't aware that they have low energy or a monotone/monorate voice, or that they bounce, sway, pull at their clothes, play with hair or jewelry, or make other unusual and distracting movements. At least, they don't know this until they see themselves doing it. Since we are generally our own harshest critics, you will be quick to notice any flaws in your speech and correct them.

It is important enough that it deserves reiterating:

Practice your speech beforehand, at home or elsewhere, the way you will give it in class.

Following these steps will not only prepare you better for delivering the speech, but they may also help reduce anxiety since you will feel more familiar with the situation you find yourself in when faced with a speaking engagement. Additionally, the more you speak publicly, whether for practice or in front of a live audience, the more fluid you will become for later speeches.

What to Do When Delivering Your Speech

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. One way to think of this is in terms of the Goldilocks paradigm: you don't want to overdo the delivery because you might distract your audience by looking hyper or overly animated. Conversely, someone whose delivery is too understated (meaning they don't move their hands or feet at all) looks unnatural and uncomfortable, which can also distract. Just like Goldilocks, you want a delivery that is "just right." This middle ground between too much and too little is a much more natural approach to public speaking delivery. This natural approach will be covered in more detail in the following sections where we discuss specific aspects of your delivery and what you need to think about while actually giving your speech.

Hands

Everyone who gives a speech in public gets scared or nervous. Even professionals who do this for a living feel that way, but they have learned how to combat those nerves through experience and practice. When we get scared or nervous, our bodies emit adrenaline into our systems so we can deal with whatever problem is causing us to feel that way. Unfortunately, you will need to be standing relatively still for the next 5-7 minutes, so that burst of adrenaline is going to try to work its way out of your body and manifest itself somehow. One of the main ways is through your hands.

It may sound funny, but we have seen more than one student unknowingly incorporate "jazz hands" (shaking your hands at your sides with fingers opened wide) at various points in their speech. While certainly an extreme example, this and behaviors like it can easily become distracting. At the other end of the scale, people who don't know what to do with their hands or use them "too little" sometimes hold their arms stiffly at their sides, behind their backs, or in their pockets, all of which can also look unnatural and distracting.

The key for knowing what to do with your hands is to use them naturally as you would in normal conversation. If you were standing around talking to your friends and wanted to list three reasons why you should all take a road trip this weekend, you would probably hold up your fingers as you counted off the reasons ("First, we hardly ever get this opportunity. Second, we can..."). Try to pay attention to what you do with your hands in regular conversations and incorporate that into your delivery.

However, with all that said, if you have nothing else to do with your hands, the default position for them is to be resting gently on the sides of the lectern (see Figure 11.2). You don't want to grip the lectern tightly, but resting them on the edges keeps them in position to move your notes on if you need to or use them to gesture. As stated above, you want to practice this way beforehand so you are used to speaking this way when you come to class.

Feet

Just like your hands, a lot of nervous energy is going to try to work its way out of your body through your feet. On the “too much” end, this is most common when people start “dancing” behind the lectern. Another variation is twisting feet around each other or the lower leg. On the other end are those who put their feet together, lock their knees, and never move from that position. Both of these options look unnatural, and therefore will prove to be distracting to your audience. Locking your knees can also lead to loss of oxygen in your brain, not a good state to be in, because it can cause you to faint.

The default position for your feet, then, is to have them shoulder-width apart with your knees slightly bent (see Figure 11.3). Since public speaking often results in some degree of physical exertion (see Chapter 1), you need to treat speaking as a physical activity like hitting a golf ball. Again, you want to look and feel natural, so it is fine to adjust your weight or move out from behind the lectern, but constant motion (or perpetual stillness) will do much more harm than good.

These two sections on hands and feet mention “energy.” Public speakers need to look energetic—not hyperactive, but engaged and upbeat about communicating their message. The energy is part of the muscle memory we saw in Chapter 1. Slumping, low and unvarying pitch and rate, and lack of gestures telegraph “I don’t care” to an audience.

Objects

There is a very simple rule when it comes to what you should bring with you to the lectern when you give your speech: **Only bring to the lectern what you absolutely need to give the speech.** Anything else you have with you will only serve as a distraction for both you and the audience. For the purposes of this class, the only objects you should need to give your speech are whatever materials you are speaking from, and possibly a visual aid if you are using one. Beyond that, don’t bring pens, laptops, phones, lucky charms, or notebooks with you to the lectern. Invariable these extra items are hassles, and can ultimately become a distraction themselves when they fall off the lectern or get in your way. Some students like to bring their electronic tablet, laptop computer, or cell phone with them, but there are some obvious disadvantages to these items, especially if you don’t turn the ringer on your cell phone off. Cell phones are not usually large enough to serve as presentation notes; we’ve seen students squint and hold the phone up to their faces.

Figure 11.4 - The Goldilocks Paradigm of Delivery

Figure 11.4 – The Goldilocks Paradigm of Delivery

Not only do you need to be aware of what you bring with you, but you should also be aware of what you have on your person as well. Sometimes, in the course of dressing for a speech, we can overlook simple issues that can cause problems while speaking. Some of these can include:

- Jewelry that ‘jingles’ when you move;
- Uncomfortable shoes or shoes that you are not used to (don’t make speech day the first time you try wearing high heels);
- Anything with fringe, zippers, or things hanging off it. Like a cat, these become irresistible to play with while speaking (another way nervous energy manifests);
- For those with longer hair, remember that you will be looking down at your notes and then looking back up. Don’t be forced to “fix” your hair or tuck it behind your ear every time you look up. Use a barrette, hairspray, or some other method to keep your hair totally out of your face so that the audience can see your eyes and you won’t have to adjust your hair. It can be very distracting to an audience to watch a speaker pull hair of his or her face after every sentence.

The Lectern and Posture

We have already discussed the lectern, but it is worth mentioning again briefly here. The lectern is a tool for you to use that should ultimately make your speech easier to give, and you need to use it that way. On the “too much” end, some people want to trick their audience into thinking they are not nervous by leaning on the podium in a relaxed manner, sometime going so far as to actually begin tipping the podium forward. Your lectern is not part

of your skeletal system, to prop you up, so don't do this. On the "too little" end are those who are afraid to touch it, worried that they will use it incorrectly or somehow knock it over (you won't!).

As always, you want the "Goldilocks" middle ground. As stated above, rest your notes and hands on it, but don't lean on the lectern or "hug" it. Practicing with a lectern (or something similar to a lectern) will eliminate most of your fears about using it.

The lectern use is related to posture. Most of us let gravity pull us down. One of the muscle memory tricks of public speaking is to pull, or rather roll, your shoulders back. In combination with feet apart and knees bent, rolling your shoulders back will lead to a more credible physical presence—you'll look taller and more energetic. You'll also feel better, and you'll have larger lung capacity for breathing to support your tone and volume.

Eye Contact

As we've said consistently throughout this book, your audience is the single biggest factor that influences every aspect of your speech. And since eye contact is how you establish and maintain a rapport with your audience during your speech, it is an extremely important element of your delivery. The general rule of thumb is that 80% of your total speech time should be spent making eye contact with your audience (Lucas, 2015, p. 250). Your professor may or may not hold you to that standard, but he or she will absolutely want to see you making an effort to engage your audience through looking directly at them.

What is important to note here is that you want to establish genuine eye contact with your audience, and not "fake" eye contact. There have been a lot of techniques generated for "faking" eye contact, and none of them look natural. For example, these are not good ideas:

- Three points on the back wall – You may have heard that instead of making eye contact, you can just pick three points on the back wall and look at those. What ends up happening, though, is you look like you are staring off into space and your audience will spend the majority of your speech trying to figure out what you are looking at. To avoid this, look around the entire room, including the front, back, left, and right sides of the space.
- The swimming method – This happens when someone is reading his or her speech and looks up quickly and briefly to try to make it seem like they are making eye contact, not unlike a swimmer who pops his head out of the water for a breath before going back under. Eye contact is more than just physically moving your head; it is about looking at your audience and establishing a connection. In general, your eye contact should last at least five seconds at a time and should be with individuals throughout the room.
- The stare down – Since you will, to some degree, be graded on your eye contact, some students think (either consciously or not), that the best way to ensure they get credit for establishing eye contact is to always and exclusively look directly at their professor. While we certainly appreciate the attention, we want to see that you are establishing eye contact with your entire audience, not just one person. Also, this is uncomfortable for the instructor.

Volume

Volume refers to the relative softness or loudness of your voice. Like most of the other issues we've discussed in this section, the proper volume for a given speaking engagement usually falls on the scale in Figure 11.4. If you speak too softly ("too little" volume), your audience will struggle to hear and understand you and may give up trying to listen. If you speak with "too much" volume, your audience may feel that you are yelling at them, or at least feel uncomfortable with you shouting. The volume you use should fit the size of the audience and the room. Fortunately, for the purposes of this class, your normal speaking voice will probably work just fine since you are in a relatively small space with around twenty people. However, if you know that you are naturally a soft-spoken person or naturally a very loud talker, you may want to make adjustments when giving your speech. Obviously this will all change if you are asked to speak in a larger venue or given a microphone to use.

Pitch

Pitch is the relative highness or lowness of your voice, and like everything, you can have too much or too little (with regard to variation of it). Too much pitch variation occurs when people "sing" their speeches, and their voices oscillate between very high pitched and very low pitched.

Volume
the relative softness or loudness of your voice

While uncommon, this is sometimes attributed to nerves. More common is too little variation in pitch, which is known as being **monotone**.

Delivering a speech in a monotone manner is usually caused by reading too much; generally the

Monotone

a continuing sound, especially of someone's voice, that is unchanging in pitch and without intonation

Pitch

the relative highness or lowness of your voice

speaker's focus is on saying the words correctly (because they have not practiced). They forget to speak normally to show their interest in the topic, as we would in everyday conversation. For most people, pitch isn't a major issue, but if you think it might be for you, ask the people in your practice audience what they think. Generally, if we are interested in and passionate about communicating our thoughts, we are not likely to be monotone. We are rarely monotone when talking to friends and family about matters of importance to us, so pick topics you care about.

Rate

How quickly or slowly you say the words of your speech is the **rate**. Too little rate (i.e. speaking too slowly) will make it sound like you may not fully know your speech or what you are talking about, and will ultimately cost you some credibility with your audience. It may also result in the audience being bored and lose focus on what you are saying. Rate is one reason you should try to record yourself, even if just audio on your phone, beforehand and be mindful of time when you practice.

By contrast, too much rate (i.e. speaking too fast) can be overly taxing on an audience's ability to keep up with and digest what you are saying. It sometimes helps to imagine that your speech is a jog or run that you and your friends (the audience) are taking together. You (as the speaker) are setting the pace based on how quickly you speak. If you start sprinting, it may be too difficult for your audience to keep up and they may give up halfway through. Most people who speak very quickly know they speak quickly, and if that applies to you just be sure to practice slowing down and writing yourself delivery cues in your notes (see Chapter 6) to maintain a more comfortable rate.

You especially will want to maintain a good, deliberate rate at the beginning of your speech because your audience will be getting used to your voice. We have all called a business where the person answering the phone mumbles the name of the business in a rushed way. We aren't sure if we called the right number. Since the introduction is designed to get the audience's attention and interest in your speech, you will want to focus on clear delivery there. Regulating rate is another reason why video-recording yourself can be so helpful because we often do not realize how fast we speak.

Rate

the speed at which you speak; how quickly or slowly a speaker talks

Pauses

The common misconception for public speaking students is that pausing during your speech is bad, but that isn't necessarily true. You pause in normal conversations, so you shouldn't be afraid of pausing while speaking. This is especially true if you are making a particularly important point or want for a statement to have a more powerful impact: you will want to give the audience a moment to digest what you have said.

For example, consider the following statement: "Because of issues like pollution and overpopulation, in 50 years the earth's natural resources will be so depleted that it will become difficult for most people to obtain enough food to survive." Following a statement like this, you want to give your audience just a brief moment to fully consider what you are saying. Hopefully they will think something along the lines of *What if I'm still alive then?* or *What will my children do?* and become more interested in hearing what you have to say.

Of course, there is such a thing as pausing too much, both in terms of frequency and length. Someone who pauses too often (after each sentence) may come off seeming like they don't know their speech very well. Someone who pauses too long (more than a few seconds), runs the risk of the audience feeling uncomfortable or, even worse becoming distracted or letting their attention wander. We are capable of processing words (input) more quickly than anyone can speak clearly, which is one of the reasons listening is difficult. Pauses should be controlled to maintain attention of the audience.

Vocalized pauses

At various points during your speech, you may find yourself in need of a brief moment to collect your thoughts or

prepare for the next section of your speech. At those moments, you will be pausing, but we don't always like to let people know that we're pausing. So what many of us do in an attempt to "trick" the audience is fill in those pauses with sounds so that it appears that we haven't actually paused. These are known as **vocalized pauses**, or sometimes "fillers." Another term for them is "nonfluencies."

Everyone uses vocalized pauses to some degree, but not everyone's are problematic. This obviously becomes an issue when the vocalized pauses become distracting due to their overuse. We have little doubt that you can remember a time when you were speaking to someone who said the word "like" after every three words and you became focused on it. One of your authors remembers attending a wedding and (inadvertently) began counting the number of times the best man said "like" during his toast (22 was the final count). The most common vocalized pause is "uh," but then there are others. Can you think of any?

Vocalized pauses

pauses that incorporate some sort of sound or word that is unrelated to what is being said; "uh," "um," and "like" are well-known examples

The bad news here is that there is no quick fix for getting rid of your vocalized pauses. They are so ingrained into all of our speech patterns that getting rid of them is a challenge. However, there is a two-step process you can employ to begin eliminating them. First, you need to identify what your particular vocalized pause is. Do you say "um," "well," or "now" before each sentence? Do you finish each thought with, "you know?" Do you use "like" before every adjective (as in "he was like so unhappy.")

After figuring out what your vocalized pause is, the second step is to carefully and meticulously try to catch yourself when you say it. If you hear yourself saying "uh," remind yourself, *I need to try to not say that*. Catching yourself and being aware of how often you use vocalized pauses will help you begin the process of reducing your dependence on them and hopefully get rid of them completely.

One of the authors uses a game in her class that she adopted from a couple of disc jockeys she used to hear. It is called the "uh game." The callers had to name six things in a named category (items in a refrigerator, pro-football teams, makes of cars, etc.) in twenty seconds without saying a vocalized pause word or phrase. It sounds easy, but it isn't, especially on the spot with a radio audience. It is a good way to practice focusing on the content and not saying a vocalized pause.

The ten items listed above represent the major delivery issues you will want to be aware of when giving a speech, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. There is however, one final piece of delivery advice we would like to offer. We know that no matter how hard you practice and how diligent you are in preparing for your speech, you are most likely going to mess up some aspect of your speech when you give it in class, at least a little. That's normal. Everyone does it. The key is to not make a big deal about it or let the audience know you messed up. Odds are that they will never even realize your mistake if you don't tell them there was a mistake. Saying something like "I can't believe I messed that up" or "Can I start over?" just telegraphs to the audience your mistake. In fact, you have most likely never heard a perfect speech delivered in your life. It is likely that you just didn't realize that the speaker missed a line or briefly forgot what she wanted to say.

As has been the driving maxim of this chapter, this means that you need to

Practice your speech beforehand, at home or elsewhere, the way you will give it in class.

Since you know you are likely going to make some sort of mistake in class, use your practice time at home to work on how you will deal with those mistakes. If you say a word incorrectly or start reading the wrong sentence, don't go back and begin that section anew. That's not what you would do in class, so just correct yourself and move on. If you practice dealing with your mistakes at home, you will be better prepared for the inevitable errors that will find their way into your speech in class.

A final thought on practice. We have all heard, "Practice makes perfect." That is not always true. Practice makes permanent; the actions become habitual. If you practice incorrectly, your performance will be incorrect. Be sure your practice is correct.

Conclusion

Good delivery is meant to augment your speech and help convey your information to the audience. Anything that potentially distracts your audience means that fewer people will be informed, persuaded, or entertained by what you have said. Practicing your speech in an environment that closely resembles the actual situation that you will be speaking in will better prepare you for what to do and how to deliver your speech when it really counts.

Something to Think About

Each of us struggles with a certain aspect of delivery: voice, posture, eye contact, distracting movement, vocalized pauses, etc. What is yours? Based on this chapter and what you have already experienced in class, what is your biggest takeaway about improving delivery?

Chapter 5: Listening

In our sender-oriented society, listening is often overlooked as an important part of the communication process. Yet research shows that adults spend about 45 percent of their time listening, which is more than any other communicative activity. In some contexts, we spend even more time listening than that. On average, workers spend 55 percent of their workday listening, and managers spend about 63 percent of their day listening. Owen Hargie, *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2011), 177.

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

Understanding How and Why We Listen

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Describe the stages of the listening process.
2. Discuss the four main types of listening.
3. 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. If we consider listening as a process, then it becomes a challenge to identify when listening begins and ends. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements which makes listening a difficult skill to master. 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.



The first stage of the listening process is receiving stimuli through auditory and visual channels.

Britt Reints – [LISTEN](#) – CC BY 2.0.

The chapter on perception discusses some of the ways in which incoming stimuli are filtered. These perceptual filters also play a role in listening. Some stimuli is never received, some are filtered into subconsciousness, and others are filtered into various levels of consciousness based on their salience. Recall that salience is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context and that we tend to find salient things that are visually or audibly stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Think about how it's much easier to listen to a lecture on a subject that you find very interesting versus the challenge you face when the lecture does not pique your needs, interests, or expectations.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing. **Physical** noise 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 (Hargie, 2011). Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Hargie, 2011).

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit doesn't provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. Short-term memory is a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. Long-term memory is a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing schema and in which information can be stored indefinitely (Hargie, 2011). Working memory is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind 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.



Listeners respond to speakers nonverbally during a message using back-channel cues and verbally after a message using paraphrasing and clarifying questions.

Duane Storey – [Listening](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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 (physical, instrumental, relational, and identity) that we learned about in [Chapter 1 “Introduction to Communication Studies”](#). Listening is also important in academic, professional, and personal contexts.

In terms of academics, poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person’s first year of college (Zabava & Wolvin, 1993). In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills including listening are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010).

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving (DiSalvo, 1980). Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We shouldn’t underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can help us expand our self and social awareness by learning from other people’s experiences and by helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

The main purposes of listening are (Hargie, 2011)

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people’s communication;
- to critically evaluate other people’s messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and
- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel “heard” and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic (Watson, Barker, & Weaver III, 1995).

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message (Hargie, 2011). In the absence of a hearing impairment, we have an innate and physiological ability to engage in discriminative listening. Although this is the most basic form of listening, it provides the foundation on which more intentional listening skills are built. This type of listening can be refined and honed. Think of how musicians, singers, and mechanics exercise specialized discriminative listening to isolate specific aural stimuli and how actors, detectives, and sculptors discriminate visual cues that allow them to analyze, make meaning from, or recreate nuanced behavior (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993).

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails listening 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), which you can learn more about in [Chapter 11 “Informative and Persuasive Speaking”](#). Critical listening is important during persuasive exchanges, but I recommend always employing some degree of critical listening, because you may find yourself in a persuasive interaction that you thought was informative. As is noted in [Chapter 4 “Nonverbal Communication”](#), people often disguise inferences as facts. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech in this class and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily. You can see judges employ critical listening, with varying degrees of competence, on talent competition shows like *Rupaul’s Drag Race*, *America’s Got Talent*, and *The Voice*. While the exchanges between judge and contestant on these shows 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



We support others through empathetic listening by trying to “feel with” them.

Stewart Black – [Comfort](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Empathetic listening is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening. While the word *empathy* means to “feel into” or “feel with” another person, *sympathy* means to “feel for” someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening is other oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It’s often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback isn’t actually desired.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position. An excellent example of critical and empathetic listening in action is the international Truth and Reconciliation movement. The most well-known example of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) occurred in South Africa as a way to address the various conflicts that occurred during apartheid (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2012). The first TRC in the United States occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, as a means of processing the events and aftermath of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan shot and killed five members of the Communist 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:¹

The truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering all pertinent facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for acknowledgement, appropriate public mourning, forgiveness and healing...The focus often is on giving victims, witnesses and even perpetrators a chance to publicly tell their stories without fear of prosecution.

Listening Styles

Just as there are different types of listening, there are also different styles of listening. People may be categorized

1. “About,” Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.greensborotrc.org/truth_reconciliation.php.

as one or more of the following listeners: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented listeners. Research finds that 40 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). Other research finds that people often still revert back to a single preferred style in times of emotional or cognitive stress, even if they know a different style of listening would be better (Worthington, 2003). Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated with they perceive communication to be unorganized or inconsistent, or a speaker to be “long-winded.”
- **Content-oriented listeners** are analytic and enjoy processing complex messages. They like in-depth information and like to learn about multiple sides of a topic or hear multiple perspectives on an issue. Their thoroughness can be difficult to manage if there are time constraints.
- **Time-oriented listeners** are concerned with completing tasks and achieving goals. They do not like information perceived as irrelevant and like to stick to a timeline. They may cut people off and make quick decisions (taking short cuts or cutting corners) when they think they have enough information.

People-Oriented Listeners

People-oriented listeners are concerned about the emotional states of others and listen with the purpose of offering support in interpersonal relationships. People-oriented listeners can be characterized as “supporters” who are caring and understanding. These listeners are sought out because they are known as people who will “lend an ear.” They may or may not be valued for the advice they give, but all people often want is a good listener. This type of listening may be especially valuable in interpersonal communication involving emotional exchanges, as a person-oriented listener can create a space where people can make themselves vulnerable without fear of being cut off or judged. People-oriented listeners are likely skilled empathetic listeners and may find success in supportive fields like counseling, social work, or nursing. Interestingly, such fields are typically feminized, in that people often associate the characteristics of people-oriented listeners with roles filled by women. We will learn more about how gender and listening intersect in [Section 5 “Listening and Gender”](#).

Action-Oriented Listeners

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

Content-Oriented Listeners

Content-oriented listeners like to listen to complex information and evaluate the content of a message, often from multiple perspectives, before drawing conclusions. These listeners can be thought of as “learners,” and they also

ask questions to solicit more information to fill out their understanding of an issue. Content-oriented listeners often enjoy high perceived credibility because of their thorough, balanced, and objective approach to engaging with information. Content-oriented listeners are likely skilled informational and critical listeners and may find success in academic careers in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences. Ideally, judges and politicians would also possess these characteristics.

Time-Oriented Listeners

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



Time-oriented listeners listen on a schedule, often giving people limits on their availability by saying, for example, “I only have about five minutes.”

JD Lasica – [Business call](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

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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Media Attributions

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[19]

Improving Listening Competence

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Identify strategies for improving listening competence at each stage of the listening process.
2. Summarize the characteristics of active listening.
3. Apply critical-listening skills in interpersonal, educational, and mediated contexts.
4. Practice empathetic listening skills.
5. Discuss ways to improve listening competence in relational, professional, and cultural contexts.

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. This section will help us do that. In this section, we will learn strategies for developing and improving competence at each stage of the listening process. We will also define active listening and the behaviors that go along with it. Looking back to the types of listening discussed earlier, we will learn specific strategies for sharpening our critical and empathetic listening skills. In keeping with our focus on integrative learning, we will also apply the skills we have learned in academic, professional, and relational contexts and explore how culture and gender affect listening.

Listening Competence at Each Stage of the Listening Process

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

1. To improve listening at the receiving stage,
 - prepare yourself to listen,
 - discern between intentional messages and noise,
 - concentrate on stimuli most relevant to your listening purpose(s) or goal(s),
 - be mindful of the selection and attention process as much as possible,
 - pay attention to turn-taking signals so you can follow the conversational flow, and
 - avoid interrupting someone while they are speaking in order to maintain your ability to receive stimuli and listen.
2. To improve listening at the interpreting stage,
 - identify main points and supporting points;
 - use contextual clues from the person or environment to discern additional meaning;
 - be aware of how a relational, cultural, or situational context can influence meaning;

- be aware of the different meanings of silence; and
 - note differences in tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues that influence meaning.
3. To improve listening at the recalling stage,
- use multiple sensory channels to decode messages and make more complete memories;
 - repeat, rephrase, and reorganize information to fit your cognitive preferences; and
 - use mnemonic devices as a gimmick to help with recall.
4. To improve listening at the evaluating stage,
- separate facts, inferences, and judgments;
 - be familiar with and able to identify persuasive strategies and fallacies of reasoning;
 - assess the credibility of the speaker and the message; and
 - be aware of your own biases and how your perceptual filters can create barriers to effective listening.
5. To improve listening at the responding stage,
- ask appropriate clarifying and follow-up questions and paraphrase information to check understanding,
 - give feedback that is relevant to the speaker's purpose/motivation for speaking,
 - adapt your response to the speaker and the context, and
 - do not let the preparation and rehearsal of your response diminish earlier stages of listening.

Active Listening

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

Active Listening Can Help Overcome Barriers to Effective Listening

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when. And student options are increasing, as some colleges are offering classes in the overnight hours to accommodate working students and students who are just "night owls" (Toppo, 2011). Of course, we don't always have control over our schedule, in which case we will need to utilize other effective listening strategies that we will learn more about later in this chapter.

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

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

As we learned earlier, the difference between speech and thought processing rate means listeners' level of attention

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

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

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

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

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

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

Active Listening Behaviors

From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviors as we receive and process messages.

Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener’s eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about

something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, “That’s new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it.” We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and “uh-huh” signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of “autopilot” listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

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

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



Good note-taking skills allow listeners to stay engaged with a message and aid in recall of information.

Steven Lilley – [Note taking](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

information that was already clearly conveyed. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like “Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important.”

In summary, active listening is exhibited through verbal and nonverbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; nonverbal back-channel cues such as head nods; verbal back-channel cues such as “OK,” “mmhum,” or “oh”; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting (Hargie, 2011).

“Getting Competent”

Listening in the Classroom

The following statistic illustrates the importance of listening in academic contexts: four hundred first-year students were given a listening test before they started classes. At the end of that year, 49 percent of the students with low scores were on academic probation, while only 4 percent of those who scored high were (Conaway, 1982). Listening effectively isn’t something that just happens; it takes work on the part of students and teachers. One of the most difficult challenges for teachers is eliciting good listening behaviors from their students, and the method of instruction teachers use affects how a student will listen and learn (Beall et al., 2008). Given that there are different learning styles, we know that to be effective, teachers may have to find some way to appeal to each learning style. Although teachers often make this attempt, it is also not realistic or practical to think that this practice can be used all the time. Therefore, students should also think of ways they can improve their listening competence, because listening is an active process that we can exert some control over. The following tips will help you listen more effectively in the classroom:

- Be prepared to process challenging messages. You can use the internal dialogue strategy we discussed earlier to “mentally repair” messages that you receive to make them more listenable (Rubin, 1993). For example, you might say, “It seems like we’ve moved on to a different main point now. See if you can pull out the subpoints to help stay on track.”
 - Act like a good listener. While I’m not advocating that you engage in pseudo-listening, engaging in active listening behaviors can help you listen better when you are having difficulty concentrating or finding motivation to listen. Make eye contact with the instructor and give appropriate nonverbal feedback. Students often take notes only when directed to by the instructor or when there is an explicit reason to do so (e.g., to recall information for an exam or some other purpose). Since you never know what information you may want to recall later, take notes even when it’s not required that you do so. As a caveat, however, do not try to transcribe everything your instructor says or includes on a PowerPoint, because you will likely miss information related to main ideas that is more important than minor details. Instead, listen for main ideas.
 - Figure out from where the instructor most frequently speaks and sit close to that area. Being able to make eye contact with an instructor facilitates listening, increases rapport, allows students to benefit more from immediacy behaviors, and minimizes distractions since the instructor is the primary stimulus within the student’s field of vision.
 - Figure out your preferred learning style and adopt listening strategies that complement it.
 - Let your instructor know when you don’t understand something. Instead of giving a quizzical look that says “What?” or pretending you know what’s going on, let your instructor know when you don’t understand something. Instead of asking the instructor to simply repeat something, ask her or him to rephrase it or provide an example. When you ask questions, ask specific clarifying questions that request a definition, an explanation, or an elaboration.
1. What are some listening challenges that you face in the classroom? What can you do to overcome them?
 2. Take the Learning Styles Inventory survey at the following link to determine what your primary learning style is: <http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/LSI/LSI.htm>. Do some research to identify specific listening/studying strategies that work well for your learning style.

Becoming a Better Critical Listener

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

Some critical-listening skills include distinguishing between facts and inferences, evaluating supporting evidence, discovering your own biases, and listening beyond the message. [Chapter 3 “Verbal Communication”](#) noted that part of being an ethical communicator is being accountable for what we say by distinguishing between facts and inferences (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This is an ideal that is not always met in practice, so a critical listener should also make these distinctions, since the speaker may not. Since facts are widely agreed-on conclusions, they can be verified as such through some extra research. Take care in your research to note the context from which the fact emerged, as speakers may take a statistic or quote out of context, distorting its meaning. Inferences are not as easy to evaluate, because they are based on unverifiable thoughts of a speaker or on speculation. Inferences are usually based at least partially on something that is known, so it is possible to evaluate whether an inference was made carefully or not. In this sense, you may evaluate an inference based on several known facts as more credible than an inference based on one fact and more speculation. Asking a question like “What led you to think this?” is a good way to get information needed to evaluate the strength of an inference.

Distinguishing among facts and inferences and evaluating the credibility of supporting material are critical-listening skills that also require good informational-listening skills. In more formal speaking situations, speakers may cite published or publicly available sources to support their messages. When speakers verbally cite their sources, you can use the credibility of the source to help evaluate the credibility of the speaker’s message. For example, a national newspaper would likely be more credible on a major national event than a tabloid magazine or an anonymous blog. In regular interactions, people also have sources for their information but are not as likely to note them within their message. Asking questions like “Where’d you hear that?” or “How do you know that?” can help get information needed to make critical evaluations. You can look to [Chapter 11 “Informative and Persuasive Speaking”](#) to learn much more about persuasive strategies and how to evaluate the strength of arguments.

Discovering your own biases can help you recognize when they interfere with your ability to fully process a message. Unfortunately, most people aren’t asked to critically reflect on their identities and their perspectives unless they are in college, and even people who were once critically reflective in college or elsewhere may no longer be so. Biases are also difficult to discover, because we don’t see them as biases; we see them as normal or “the way things are.” Asking yourself “What led you to think this?” and “How do you know that?” can be a good start toward acknowledging your biases. We will also learn more about self-reflection and critical thinking in [Chapter 8 “Culture and Communication”](#).

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

Other Tips to Help You Become a Better Critical Listener

- Ask questions to help get more information and increase your critical awareness when you get answers like “Because that’s the way things are,” “It’s always been like that,” “I don’t know; I just don’t like it,” “Everyone believes that,” or “It’s just natural/normal.” These are not really answers that are useful in your critical evaluation and may be an indication that speakers don’t really know why they reached the conclusion they did or that they reached it without much critical thinking on their part.
- Be especially critical of speakers who set up “either/or” options, because they artificially limit an issue or situation to two options when there are always more. Also be aware of people who overgeneralize, especially when those generalizations are based on stereotypical or prejudiced views. For example, the world is not just Republican or Democrat, male or female, pro-life or pro-choice, or Christian or atheist.
- Evaluate the speaker’s message instead of his or her appearance, personality, or other characteristics. Unless someone’s appearance, personality, or behavior is relevant to an interaction, direct your criticism

to the message.

- Be aware that critical evaluation isn't always quick or easy. Sometimes you may have to withhold judgment because your evaluation will take more time. Also keep in mind your evaluation may not be final, and you should be open to critical reflection and possible revision later.
- Avoid mind reading, which is assuming you know what the other person is going to say or that you know why they reached the conclusion they did. This leads to jumping to conclusions, which shortcuts the critical evaluation process.

"Getting Critical"

Critical Listening and Political Spin

In just the past twenty years, the rise of political fact checking occurred as a result of the increasingly sophisticated rhetoric of politicians and their representatives (Dobbs, 2012). As political campaigns began to adopt communication strategies employed by advertising agencies and public relations firms, their messages became more ambiguous, unclear, and sometimes outright misleading. While there are numerous political fact-checking sources now to which citizens can turn for an analysis of political messages, it is important that we are able to use our own critical-listening skills to see through some of the political spin that now characterizes politics in the United States.

Since we get most of our political messages through the media rather than directly from a politician, the media is a logical place to turn for guidance on fact checking. Unfortunately, the media is often manipulated by political communication strategies as well (Dobbs, 2012). Sometimes media outlets transmit messages even though a critical evaluation of the message shows that it lacks credibility, completeness, or worth. Journalists who engage in political fact checking have been criticized for putting their subjective viewpoints into what is supposed to be objective news coverage. These journalists have fought back against what they call the norm of "false equivalence." One view of journalism sees the reporter as an objective conveyer of political messages. This could be described as the "We report; you decide" brand of journalism. Other reporters see themselves as "truth seekers." In this sense, the journalists engage in some critical listening and evaluation on the part of the citizen, who may not have the time or ability to do so.

Michael Dobbs, who started the political fact-checking program at the *Washington Post*, says, "Fairness is preserved not by treating all sides of an argument equally, but through an independent, open-minded approach to the evidence" (Dobbs, 2012). He also notes that outright lies are much less common in politics than are exaggeration, spin, and insinuation. This fact puts much of political discourse into an ethical gray area that can be especially difficult for even professional fact checkers to evaluate. Instead of simple "true/false" categories, fact checkers like the *Washington Post* issue evaluations such as "Half true, mostly true, half-flip, or full-flop" to political statements. Although we all don't have the time and resources to fact check all the political statements we hear, it may be worth employing some of the strategies used by these professional fact checkers on issues that are very important to us or have major implications for others. Some fact-checking resources include <http://www.PolitiFact.com>, <http://www.factcheck.org>, and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker>. The caution here for any critical listener is to be aware of our tendency to gravitate toward messages with which we agree and avoid or automatically reject messages with which we disagree. In short, it's often easier for us to critically evaluate the messages of politicians with whom we disagree and uncritically accept messages from those with whom we agree. Exploring the fact-check websites above can help expose ourselves to critical evaluation that we might not otherwise encounter.

1. One school of thought in journalism says it's up to the reporters to convey information as it is presented and then up to the viewer/reader to evaluate the message. The other school of thought says that the reporter should investigate and evaluate claims made by those on all sides of an issue equally and share their findings with viewers/readers. Which approach do you think is better and why?
2. In the lead-up to the war in Iraq, journalists and news outlets did not critically evaluate claims from the Bush administration that there was clear evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Many now cite this as an instance of failed fact checking that had global repercussions. Visit one of the fact-checking resources mentioned previously to find other examples of fact checking that exposed manipulated messages. To enhance your critical thinking, find one example that critiques a viewpoint, politician, or political party that you typically agree with and one that you disagree with. Discuss what you learned from the examples you found.

Becoming a Better Empathetic Listener

A prominent scholar of empathetic listening describes it this way: "Empathetic listening is to be respectful of the dignity of others. Empathetic listening is a caring, a love of the wisdom to be found in others whoever they may be" (Bruneau, 1993). This quote conveys that empathetic listening is more philosophical than the other types

of listening. It requires that we are open to subjectivity and that we engage in it because we genuinely see it as worthwhile.

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



Empathetic listeners should not steal the spotlight from the speaker. Offer support without offering your own story or advice.

Blondinrikard Froberg – [Spotlight](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

Empathetic listening can be worthwhile, but it also brings challenges. In terms of costs, empathetic listening can use up time and effort. Since this type of listening can’t be contained within a proscribed time frame, it may be especially difficult for time-oriented listeners (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening can also be a test of our endurance, as its orientation toward and focus on supporting the other requires the processing and integration of much verbal and nonverbal information. Because of this potential strain, it’s important to know your limits as an empathetic listener. While listening can be therapeutic, it is not appropriate for people without training and preparation to try to serve as a therapist. Some people have chronic issues that necessitate professional listening for the purposes of evaluation, diagnosis, and therapy. Lending an ear is different from diagnosing and treating.

If you have a friend who is exhibiting signs of a more serious issue that needs attention, listen to the extent that you feel comfortable and then be prepared to provide referrals to other resources that have training to help. To face these challenges, good empathetic listeners typically have a generally positive self-concept and self-esteem, are nonverbally sensitive and expressive, and are comfortable with embracing another person's subjectivity and refraining from too much analytic thought.

Becoming a Better Contextual Listener

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

Listening in Professional Contexts

Listening and organizational-communication scholars note that listening is one of the most neglected aspects of organizational-communication research (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Aside from a lack of research, a study also found that business schools lack curriculum that includes instruction and/or training in communication skills like listening in their master of business administration (MBA) programs (Alsop, 2002). This lack of a focus on listening persists, even though we know that more effective listening skills have been shown to enhance sales performance and that managers who exhibit good listening skills help create open communication climates that can lead to increased feelings of supportiveness, motivation, and productivity (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Specifically, empathetic listening and active listening can play key roles in organizational communication. Managers are wise to enhance their empathetic listening skills, as being able to empathize with employees contributes to a positive communication climate. Active listening among organizational members also promotes involvement and increases motivation, which leads to more cohesion and enhances the communication climate.

Organizational scholars have examined various communication climates specific to listening. Listening environment refers to characteristics and norms of an organization and its members that contribute to expectations for and perceptions about listening (Brownell, 1993). Positive listening environments are perceived to be more employee centered, which can improve job satisfaction and cohesion. But how do we create such environments?

Positive listening environments are facilitated by the breaking down of barriers to concentration, the reduction of noise, the creation of a shared reality (through shared language, such as similar jargon or a shared vision statement), intentional spaces that promote listening, official opportunities that promote listening, training in listening for all employees, and leaders who model good listening practices and praise others who are successful listeners (Brownell, 1993). Policies and practices that support listening must go hand in hand. After all, what does an "open-door" policy mean if it is not coupled with actions that demonstrate the sincerity of the policy?

"Getting Real"

Becoming a "Listening Leader"

Dr. Rick Bommelje has popularized the concept of the "listening leader" (Listen-Coach.com, 2012). As a listening coach, he offers training and resources to help people in various career paths increase their listening competence. For people who are very committed to increasing their listening skills, the International Listening Association has now endorsed a program to become a Certified Listening Professional (CLP), which entails advanced independent study, close work with a listening mentor, and the completion of a written exam.¹ There are also training programs to help with empathetic listening that are offered through the Compassionate Listening Project.² These programs evidence the growing focus on the importance of listening in all professional contexts.

Scholarly research has consistently shown that listening ability is a key part of leadership in professional contexts and competence

1. "CLP Training Program," *International Listening Association*, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.listen.org/CLPFAQs>.
2. "Training," *The Compassionate Listening Project*, accessed July 13, 2012, <http://www.compassionatelisting.org/trainings>.

in listening aids in decision making. A survey sent to hundreds of companies in the United States found that poor listening skills create problems at all levels of an organizational hierarchy, ranging from entry-level positions to CEOs (Hargie, 2011). Leaders such as managers, team coaches, department heads, and executives must be versatile in terms of listening type and style in order to adapt to the diverse listening needs of employees, clients/customers, colleagues, and other stakeholders.

Even if we don't have the time or money to invest in one of these professional-listening training programs, we can draw inspiration from the goal of becoming a listening leader. By reading this book, you are already taking an important step toward improving a variety of communication competencies, including listening, and you can always take it upon yourself to further your study and increase your skills in a particular area to better prepare yourself to create positive communication climates and listening environments. You can also use these skills to make yourself a more desirable employee.

1. Make a list of the behaviors that you think a listening leader would exhibit. Which of these do you think you do well? Which do you need to work on?
2. What do you think has contributed to the perceived shortage of listening skills in professional contexts?
3. Given your personal career goals, what listening skills do you think you will need to possess and employ in order to be successful?

Listening in Relational Contexts

Listening plays a central role in establishing and maintaining our relationships (Nelson-Jones, 2006). Without some listening competence, we wouldn't be able to engage in the self-disclosure process, which is essential for the establishment of relationships. Newly acquainted people get to know each other through increasingly personal and reciprocal disclosures of personal information. In order to reciprocate a conversational partner's disclosure, we must process it through listening. Once relationships are formed, listening to others provides a psychological reward, through the simple act of recognition, that helps maintain our relationships. Listening to our relational partners and being listened to in return is part of the give-and-take of any interpersonal relationship. Our thoughts and experiences "back up" inside of us, and getting them out helps us maintain a positive balance (Nelson, Jones, 2006). So something as routine and seemingly pointless as listening to our romantic partner debrief the events of his or her day or our roommate recount his or her weekend back home shows that we are taking an interest in their lives and are willing to put our own needs and concerns aside for a moment to attend to their needs. Listening also closely ties to conflict, as a lack of listening often plays a large role in creating conflict, while effective listening helps us resolve it.

Listening has relational implications throughout our lives, too. Parents who engage in competent listening behaviors with their children from a very young age make their children feel worthwhile and appreciated, which affects their development in terms of personality and character (Nichols, 1995).



Parents who exhibit competent listening behaviors toward their children provide them with a sense of recognition and security that affects their future development.

Madhavi Kuram – [Listen to your kids](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A lack of listening leads to feelings of loneliness, which results in lower self-esteem and higher degrees of anxiety. In fact, by the age of four or five years old, the empathy and recognition shown by the presence or lack of listening has molded children's personalities in noticeable ways (Nichols, 1995). Children who have been listened to grow up expecting that others will be available and receptive to them. These children are therefore more likely to interact confidently with teachers, parents, and peers in ways that help develop communication competence that will be built on throughout their lives. Children who have not been listened to may come to expect that others will not want to listen to them, which leads to a lack of opportunities to practice, develop, and hone foundational communication skills. Fortunately for the more-listened-to children and unfortunately for the less-listened-to children, these early experiences become predispositions that don't change much as the children get older and may actually reinforce themselves and become stronger.

Listening and Culture

Some cultures place more importance on listening than other cultures. In general, collectivistic cultures tend to value listening more than individualistic cultures that are more speaker oriented. The value placed on verbal and nonverbal meaning also varies by culture and influences how we communicate and listen. A low-context communication style is one in which much of the meaning generated within an interaction comes from the verbal communication used rather than nonverbal or contextual cues. Conversely, much of the meaning generated by a high-context communication style comes from nonverbal and contextual cues (Lustig & Koester, 2006). For example, US Americans of European descent generally use a low-context communication style, while people in East Asian and Latin American cultures use a high-context communication style.

Contextual communication styles affect listening in many ways. Cultures with a high-context orientation

generally use less verbal communication and value silence as a form of communication, which requires listeners to pay close attention to nonverbal signals and consider contextual influences on a message. Cultures with a low-context orientation must use more verbal communication and provide explicit details, since listeners aren't expected to derive meaning from the context. Note that people from low-context cultures may feel frustrated by the ambiguity of speakers from high-context cultures, while speakers from high-context cultures may feel overwhelmed or even insulted by the level of detail used by low-context communicators. Cultures with a low-context communication style also tend to have a monochronic orientation toward time, while high-context cultures have a polychronic time orientation, which also affects listening.

As [Chapter 8 “Culture and Communication”](#) discusses, cultures that favor a structured and commodified orientation toward time are said to be monochronic, while cultures that favor a more flexible orientation are polychronic. Monochronic cultures like the United States value time and action-oriented listening styles, especially in professional contexts, because time is seen as a commodity that is scarce and must be managed (McCornack, 2007). This is evidenced by leaders in businesses and organizations who often request “executive summaries” that only focus on the most relevant information and who use statements like “Get to the point.” Polychronic cultures value people and content-oriented listening styles, which makes sense when we consider that polychronic cultures also tend to be more collectivistic and use a high-context communication style. In collectivistic cultures, indirect communication is preferred in cases where direct communication would be considered a threat to the other person's face (desired public image). For example, flatly turning down a business offer would be too direct, so a person might reply with a “maybe” instead of a “no.” The person making the proposal, however, would be able to draw on contextual clues that they implicitly learned through socialization to interpret the “maybe” as a “no.”

Listening and Gender

Research on gender and listening has produced mixed results. As we've already learned, much of the research on gender differences and communication has been influenced by gender stereotypes and falsely connected to biological differences. More recent research has found that people communicate in ways that conform to gender stereotypes in some situations and not in others, which shows that our communication is more influenced by societal expectations than by innate or gendered “hard-wiring.” For example, through socialization, men are generally discouraged from expressing emotions in public. A woman sharing an emotional experience with a man may perceive the man's lack of emotional reaction as a sign of inattentiveness, especially if he typically shows more emotion during private interactions. The man, however, may be listening but withholding nonverbal expressiveness because of social norms. He may not realize that withholding those expressions could be seen as a lack of empathetic or active listening. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters (Dindia, 1987). So men may interrupt each other more in same-gender interactions as a conscious or subconscious attempt to establish dominance because such behaviors are expected, as men are generally socialized to be more competitive than women. However, this type of competitive interrupting isn't as present in cross-gender interactions because the contexts have shifted.

Key Takeaways

- You can improve listening competence at the receiving stage by preparing yourself to listen and distinguishing between intentional messages and noise; at the interpreting stage by identifying main points and supporting points and taking multiple contexts into consideration; at the recalling stage by creating memories using multiple senses and repeating, rephrasing, and reorganizing messages to fit cognitive preferences; at the evaluating stage by separating facts from inferences and assessing the credibility of the speaker's message; and at the responding stage by asking appropriate questions, offering paraphrased messages, and adapting your response to the speaker and the situation.
- Active listening is the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices and is characterized by mentally preparing yourself to listen, working to maintain focus on concentration, using appropriate verbal and nonverbal back-channel cues to signal attentiveness, and engaging in strategies like note taking and mentally reorganizing information to help with recall.
- In order to apply critical-listening skills in multiple contexts, we must be able to distinguish between facts and inferences, evaluate a speaker's supporting evidence, discover our own biases, and think beyond the message.

- In order to practice empathetic listening skills, we must be able to support others' subjective experience; temporarily set aside our own needs to focus on the other person; encourage elaboration through active listening and questioning; avoid the temptation to tell our own stories and/or give advice; effectively mirror the nonverbal communication of others; and acknowledge our limits as empathetic listeners.
- **Getting integrated: Different listening strategies may need to be applied in different listening contexts.**
 - In professional contexts, listening is considered a necessary skill, but most people do not receive explicit instruction in listening. Members of an organization should consciously create a listening environment that promotes and rewards competent listening behaviors.
 - In relational contexts, listening plays a central role in initiating relationships, as listening is required for mutual self-disclosure, and in maintaining relationships, as listening to our relational partners provides a psychological reward in the form of recognition. When people aren't or don't feel listened to, they may experience feelings of isolation or loneliness that can have negative effects throughout their lives.
 - In cultural contexts, high- or low-context communication styles, monochronic or polychronic orientations toward time, and individualistic or collectivistic cultural values affect listening preferences and behaviors.
 - Research regarding listening preferences and behaviors of men and women has been contradictory. While some differences in listening exist, many of them are based more on societal expectations for how men and women should listen rather than biological differences.

Exercises

1. Keep a "listening log" for part of your day. Note times when you feel like you exhibited competent listening behaviors and note times when listening became challenging. Analyze the log based on what you have learned in this section. Which positive listening skills helped you listen? What strategies could you apply to your listening challenges to improve your listening competence?
2. Apply the strategies for effective critical listening to a political message (a search for "political speech" or "partisan speech" on YouTube should provide you with many options). As you analyze the speech, make sure to distinguish between facts and inferences, evaluate a speaker's supporting evidence, discuss how your own biases may influence your evaluation, and think beyond the message.
3. Discuss and analyze the listening environment of a place you have worked or an organization with which you were involved. Overall, was it positive or negative? What were the norms and expectations for effective listening that contributed to the listening environment? Who helped set the tone for the listening environment?

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Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. List strategies for creating listenable messages.
2. Evaluate messages produced by others using competent feedback.
3. Discuss strategies for self-evaluation of communication.

We should not forget that sending messages is an important part of the listening process. Although we often think of listening as the act of receiving messages, that passive view of listening overlooks the importance of message construction and feedback. In the following section, we will learn how speakers can facilitate listening by creating listenable messages and how listeners help continue the listening process through feedback for others and themselves.

Creating Listenable Messages

Some of the listening challenges we all face would be diminished if speakers created listenable messages. Listenable messages are orally delivered messages that are tailored to be comprehended by a listener (Rubin, 1993). While most of our communication is in an “oral style,” meaning spoken and intended to be heard, we sometimes create messages that are unnecessarily complex in ways that impede comprehension. Listenable messages can be contrasted with most written messages, which are meant to be read.

The way we visually process written communication is different from the way we process orally delivered and aurally received language. Aside from processing written and spoken messages differently, we also speak and write differently. This becomes a problem for listening when conventions of written language get transferred into oral messages. You may have witnessed or experienced this difficulty if you have ever tried or watched someone else try to orally deliver a message that was written to be read, not spoken. For example, when students in my classes try to deliver a direct quote from one of their research sources or speak verbatim a dictionary definition of a word, they inevitably have fluency hiccups in the form of unintended pauses or verbal trip-ups that interfere with their ability to deliver the content. These hiccups consequently make the message difficult for the audience to receive and comprehend.

This isn’t typically a problem in everyday conversations, because when we speak impromptu we automatically speak in an oral style. We have a tendency, however, to stray from our natural oral style when delivering messages that we have prepared in advance—like speeches. This is because we receive much more training in creating messages to be read than we do in creating messages to be spoken. We are usually just expected to pick up the oral style of communicating through observation and trial and error. Being able to compose and deliver messages in an oral style, as opposed to a written style, is a crucial skill to develop in order to be a successful public speaker. Since most people lack specific instruction in creating messages in an oral rather than written style, you should be prepared to process messages that aren’t as listenable as you would like them to be. The strategies for becoming an

active listener discussed earlier in this chapter will also help you mentally repair or restructure a message to make it more listenable. As a speaker, in order to adapt your message to a listening audience and to help facilitate the listening process, you can use the following strategies to create more listenable messages:

- Use shorter, actively worded sentences.
- Use personal pronouns (“I want to show you...”).
- Use lists or other organizational constructions like problem-solution, pro-con, or compare-contrast.
- Use transitions and other markers that help a listener navigate your message (time markers like “today”; order indicators like “first, second, third”; previews like “I have two things I’d like to say about that”; and reviews like “So, basically I feel like we should vacation at the lake instead of the beach because...”).
- Use examples relevant to you and your listener’s actual experiences.

Giving Formal Feedback to Others

The ability to give effective feedback benefits oneself and others. Whether in professional or personal contexts, positive verbal and nonverbal feedback can boost others’ confidence, and negative feedback, when delivered constructively, can provide important perception checking and lead to improvements. Of course, negative feedback that is not delivered competently can lead to communication difficulties that can affect a person’s self-esteem and self-efficacy. Although we rarely give formal feedback to others in interpersonal contexts, it is important to know how to give this type of feedback, as performance evaluations are common in a variety of professional, academic, and civic contexts.



The ability to give verbal feedback helps personal and professional relationships grow.

[Wikimedia Commons](#) – CC BY-SA 3.0.

It is likely that you will be asked at some point to give feedback to another person in an academic, professional, or civic context. As companies and organizations have moved toward more team-based work environments over the past twenty years, peer evaluations are now commonly used to help assess job performance. I, for example, am evaluated every year by two tenured colleagues, my department chair, and my dean. I also evaluate my graduate teaching assistants and peers as requested. Since it’s important for us to know how to give competent and relevant feedback, and since the feedback can be useful for the self-improvement of the receiver, many students are asked to complete peer evaluations verbally and/or in writing for classmates after they deliver a speech. The key to good

feedback is to offer constructive criticism, which consists of comments that are specific and descriptive enough for the receiver to apply them for the purpose of self-improvement. The following are guidelines I provide my students for giving feedback, and they are also adaptable to other contexts.

When Giving Feedback to Others

1. **Be specific.** I often see a lack of specific comments when it comes to feedback on speech delivery. Students write things like “Eye contact” on a peer comment sheet, but neither the student nor I know what to do with the comment. While a comment like “Good eye contact” or “Not enough eye contact” is more specific, it’s not descriptive enough to make it useful.
2. **Be descriptive.** I’d be hard pressed to think of a descriptive comment that isn’t also specific, because the act of adding detail to something usually makes the point clearer as well. The previous “Not enough eye contact” comment would be more helpful and descriptive like this: “You looked at your notes more than you looked at the audience during the first thirty seconds of your speech.”
3. **Be positive.** If you are delivering your feedback in writing, pretend that you are speaking directly to the person and write it the same way. Comments like “Stop fidgeting” or “Get more sources” wouldn’t likely come out during verbal feedback, because we know they sound too harsh. The same tone, however, can be communicated through written feedback. Instead, make comments that are framed in such a way as to avoid defensiveness or hurt feelings.
4. **Be constructive.** Although we want to be positive in our feedback, comments like “Good job” aren’t constructive, because a communicator can’t actually take that comment and do something with it. A comment like “You were able to explain our company’s new marketing strategy in a way that even I, as an engineer, could make sense of. The part about our new crisis communication plan wasn’t as clear. Perhaps you could break it down the same way you did the marketing strategy to make it clearer for people like me who are outside the public relations department.” This statement is positively framed, specific, and constructive because the speaker can continue to build on the positively reviewed skill by applying it to another part of the speech that was identified as a place for improvement.
5. **Be realistic.** Comments like “Don’t be nervous” aren’t constructive or realistic. Instead, you could say, “I know the first speech is tough, but remember that we’re all in the same situation and we’re all here to learn. I tried the breathing exercises discussed in the book and they helped calm my nerves. Maybe they’ll work for you, too?” I’ve also had students make comments like “Your accent made it difficult for me to understand you,” which could be true but may signal a need for more listening effort since we all technically have accents, and changing them, if possible at all, would take considerable time and effort.
6. **Be relevant.** Feedback should be relevant to the assignment, task, and/or context. I’ve had students give feedback like “Rad nail polish” and “Nice smile,” which although meant as compliments are not relevant in formal feedback unless you’re a fashion consultant or a dentist.

Giving Formal Feedback to Yourself

An effective way to improve our communication competence is to give ourselves feedback on specific communication skills. Self-evaluation can be difficult, because people may think their performance was effective and therefore doesn’t need critique, or they may become their own worst critic, which can negatively affect self-efficacy. The key to effective self-evaluation is to identify strengths and weaknesses, to evaluate yourself within the context of the task, and to set concrete goals for future performance. What follows are guidelines that I give my students for self-evaluation of their speeches.

When Giving Feedback to Yourself

1. **Identify strengths and weaknesses.** We have a tendency to be our own worst critics, so steer away from nit-picking or overfocusing on one aspect of your communication that really annoys you and sticks out to you. It is likely that the focus of your criticism wasn’t nearly as noticeable or even noticed at all by others. For example, I once had a student write a self-critique of which about 90 percent focused on how his face looked red. Although that was really salient for him when he watched his video, I don’t think it was a big deal for the audience members.

2. **Evaluate yourself within the context of the task or assignment guidelines.** If you are asked to speak about your personal life in a creative way, don't spend the majority of your self-evaluation critiquing your use of gestures. People have a tendency to overanalyze aspects of their delivery, which usually only accounts for a portion of the overall effectiveness of a message, and underanalyze their presentation of key ideas and content. If the expectation was to present complex technical information in a concrete way, you could focus on your use of examples and attempts to make the concepts relevant to the listeners.
3. **Set goals for next time.** Goal setting is important because most of us need a concrete benchmark against which to evaluate our progress. Once goals are achieved, they can be "checked off" and added to our ongoing skill set, which can enhance confidence and lead to the achievement of more advanced goals.
4. **Revisit goals and assess progress at regular intervals.** We will not always achieve the goals we set, so it is important to revisit the goals periodically to assess our progress. If you did not meet a goal, figure out why and create an action plan to try again. If you did achieve a goal, try to build on that confidence to meet future goals.

Key Takeaways

- To create listenable messages, which are orally delivered messages tailored to be comprehended by a listener, avoid long, complex sentences; use personal pronouns; use lists or other organizational constructions; use transitions and other markers to help your listener navigate your message; and use relevant examples.
- Getting integrated: Although we rarely give formal feedback in interpersonal contexts, we give informal feedback regularly to our relational partners that can enhance or detract from their self-esteem and affect our relationships. While we also give informal feedback in academic, professional, and civic contexts, it is common practice to give formal feedback in the form of performance evaluations or general comments on an idea, product, or presentation.
- When giving feedback to others, be specific, descriptive, positive, constructive, realistic, and relevant.
- When giving feedback to yourself, identify strengths and weaknesses, evaluate yourself within the contexts of the task or assignment, set goals for next time, and revisit goals to assess progress.

Exercises

1. Apply the strategies for creating listenable messages to a speech you recently gave or a speech you are currently working on. Which strategies did/will you employ? Why?
2. Recall an instance in which someone gave you feedback that didn't meet the guidelines that are listed in this section. In what ways did the person's feedback fall short of the guidelines, and what could the person have done to improve the feedback?
3. Using the guidelines for self-evaluation (feedback to self), assess one of your recent speeches. If you haven't given a speech recently, assess another communication skill using the same guidelines, such as your listening abilities or your skill at providing constructive criticism.

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Listening in Public Speaking Settings

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define audience-centered, audience analysis, and demographic characteristics.
2. List and explain the various demographic characteristics used to analyze an audience.
3. Define the meanings of attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs.
4. Diagram Maslow's hierarchy of needs and explain its usefulness to public speaking.
5. Describe contextual factors that should be considered when preparing a speech.
6. Describe typical barriers to listening in public speaking situations.
7. Explain ways an individual can improve his/her listening when in an audience.
8. Apply what he/she knows about listening to improve personal preparation of a speech.

Listening in Public Speaking Settings

To this point in the text, and for most of the rest of it, we focus on the “sending” part of the communication process. However, public speaking only works if there are listeners. Studying public speaking should make you a better listener because you see the value of the listener to the communication process and because you are more aware of what you do in a speech.

Listening is not the same thing as hearing. **Hearing** is a physical process in which sound waves hit your ear drums and send a message to your brain. You may hear cars honking or dogs barking when you are walking down the street because your brain is process the sounds, but that doesn't mean that you are listening to them. **Listening** implies an active process where you are specifically making an effort to understand, process, and retain information.

Also, although both reading and listening are methods of taking in information, they are very different processes. You

Listening

an active process where you are specifically making an effort to understand, process, and retain information

Hearing

the physical process in which sound waves hit the ear drums and send a message to the brain

You may have taken a learning styles inventory at some point and learned that you were either a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner, or maybe a combination. Many of us have a strength in one of these areas, or at least a preference. Having a particular learning preference should never be used as an excuse; we learn in all three modes, depending on the context and subject matter, even if one is stronger. As one of the appendices will note, real research of these three learning styles is actually limited.

Also, when you read, you can go back and read a passage over and over until you understand it. This is more difficult in listening. If the message is recorded, you can play it over, but if the situation is a speech, once may be all you get. Many studies have been conducted to find out how long we remember oral messages, and often the level of memory from oral communication is not very high (Bostrom & Bryant, 1980).

In this section, we will focus on **comprehensive listening**, which is listening focused on understanding and remembering important information from a public speaking message. There are other “types” of listening, based on the context and purpose. The first is **empathetic listening**, for understanding the feelings and motivations of another person, usually with a goal to helping the person deal with a personal problem. For example, if a friend says she is thinking about dropping out of college at the end of the semester, you would want to listen for the reasons and feelings behind her choice, recognizing that you might need to ask sensitive questions and not just start telling her what to do or talk about your own feelings.

Comprehensive Listening

listening focused on understanding and remembering important information from a public speaking message

The second type of listening is **appreciative**, which takes place while listening to music, poetry, or literature or watching a play or movie. For example, knowing that the melodies of classical musical have a certain A-B pattern informs us how to listen to Mozart. To be good at this kind of listening, it helps to study the art form to learn the patterns and devices.

Appreciative listening

type of informed listening needed to listen to and interpret music, theatre, or literature

Empathetic Listening

listening for understanding the feelings and motivations of another person, usually with the goal of helping the person deal with a personal problem

The third type is **critical listening**, which we will address in Chapter 14 in discussing critical thinking and logic. In critical listening the audience member is evaluating the validity of the arguments and information and deciding whether the speaker is persuasive and whether the message should be accepted.

Your Audience and Listening

With this understanding of how listening differs from other forms of message reception, we can think of public speaking as “linear in time.”

It does not allow you to loop back, as in reading. For that reason, a speaker must make listening easier for the audience. The main way speakers achieve this is through **planned redundancy**. Planned redundancy refers to purposeful ways of repeating and restating parts of the speech to help the audience listen and retain the content.

Critical listening *listening to evaluate the validity of the arguments and information and deciding whether the speaker is persuasive and whether the message should be accepted*

The speaker uses a relevant introduction to emphasize the interest and importance of the subject, uses a preview of the main points to forecast the plan of the speech, uses connective statements between points to remind the audience of the plan and re-emphasize the content, and then uses an overall summary in the conclusion to help the audience remember or do something with the information. As mentioned before, you might not be able to “cover” or dump a great deal of information in a speech, but you can make the information meaningful through the planned redundancy as well as through examples, stories, support, and appeals.

Planned Redundancy

the use of a clear central idea statement, preview of the main points, connective statements, and overall summary in the conclusion to reinforce the main ideas or points of a speech; the deliberate repeating of structural aspects of speech

A speaker can also help the audience’s listening abilities by using visual aids (discussed in Chapter 9), stories and examples (discussed in Chapter 7), audience interaction or movement at key points in the speech (if appropriate and if your instructor approves it), and specific attention-getting techniques (also discussed in Chapter 7).

In short, listening is hard work, but you can meet your audience half way by using certain strategies and material to make listening easier for them. At the same time, an audience member has a responsibility to pay attention and listen well. In the next section, we will look at how you can improve your listening ability in public speaking situations. We will not look at listening in private, group, or interpersonal communication settings. Those often require other skills such as empathy and paraphrasing in order to understand your communication partner fully and to meet his or her emotional needs. If a friend comes to you with a problem, he or she may be more interested in your concern than that you can recall back the content of what was shared or that you can give him or her advice.

Barriers to Listening

Since hearing is a physiological response to auditory stimuli, you hear things whether you want to or not. Just ask anyone who has tried to go to sleep with the neighbor's dog barking all night. However, listening, really listening, is intentional and hard work. Several hundred years ago we lived in an aural world—by that is meant most people took in information through hearing. That is why you will often hear stories of great speakers who orated for two or three hours, and that was considered acceptable. It does not mean everyone stayed awake all the time, but it does mean that the majority did not find it unusual or impossible to listen for that long.

A famous historical example is that of the Gettysburg Address, that wonderful, concise speech by Abraham Lincoln given in November of 1863 to commemorate the battlefield of Gettysburg. It is a speech we still read and sometimes memorize as an example of powerful rhetoric. The speaker before Lincoln was Edward Everett, a renowned statesman of the time from Massachusetts, who spoke for over two hours. Today we prefer the Lincoln's example of conciseness to Everett's version. In other words, we just do not have the listening power we used to. Perhaps we do not need it, or due to neuroplasticity ("Definition of neuroplasticity," 2015) our brains have adapted to other means of efficiently taking in information.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, some people are not strong aural learners. In that case, listening may not be a personal strength in addition to being a skill that has deteriorated in society over time. But that does not make it unimportant or something we should not try to improve upon. Therefore, the first barrier to listening is our lack of capacity for it, whether from societal expectation or personal psychological preferences.

Another barrier to listening is the noisiness and constant distractions of our lives, something that you might not even be aware of if you have always lived in the world of Internet, cell phones, iPods, tablets, and 24/7 news channels. We are dependent on and constantly wired to the Internet. Focus is difficult. Not only do electronic distractions hurt our listening, but life concerns can distract us as well. An ill family member, a huge exam next period, your car in the shop, deciding on next semester's classes—the list is endless. Hunger and fatigue hurt listening ability as well.

A third barrier to listening not often considered is that our minds can usually process much faster than a speaker can speak clearly. We may be able to listen, when really trying, at 200 words per minute, but few speakers can articulate that many words clearly; an average rate for normal speech is around 100-120 (Foulke, 1968). That leaves a great deal of time when the mind needs to pull itself back into focus. During those gaps, we might find it more enjoyable to think of lunch, the new person we are dating, or our vacation at the beach.

Another barrier is distraction from the people around you. Perhaps the scent of their soap or shampoo is unpleasant to you. Perhaps they cannot put their cell phones down or perhaps they are whispering to each other and impeding your ability to hear the speaker clearly. Finally, the physical environment may make listening to a public speaker difficult. This is not to even mention that the skill of the speaker influences your listening ability. We end up seeing Mr. Goethe's point from Chapter 1. Communicating can be so difficult that we wonder how we can overcome all these obstacles.

Additionally, **confirmation bias** is a barrier to listening. This term means "a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions" (Nickerson, 1998). Although the concept has been around a long time, we are more aware of confirmation bias today. It leads us to listen to news outlets and Internet sources that confirm what we believe already rather than being challenged to new ways of thinking by reading or listening to other sources of information. It can cause us to discount, reject, or re-interpret information to fit our preconceptions.

These are all the possible obstacles to listening, but there might also be reasons that are particular to you, the listener. Often we go into listening situations with no purpose; we are just there physically but have no plans for listening. We go in unprepared. We are tired and mentally and physically unready to listen well. We do not sit in a comfortable position to listen. We do not bring proper tools to listen, specifically to take notes. There is actually research to indicate that we listen better and learn/retain more when we take notes with a pen and paper than when we type them on a computer or tablet (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). Add to this the research that shows how distracting open laptops are to other students. This research has led some professors to bar laptops from their classrooms.

Confirmation bias

a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions

What Can Be Done to Improve Listening?

The previous section explains barriers to good listening behavior and in a sense gives us the solutions. The key is to personalize this information and decide which of it relates to you. Your own barrier might be not coming prepared, being quick to prejudge, or allowing gadgets to distract you. Obviously, recognizing the cause of your poor listening is the first step to becoming a better listener. Here are some steps, in summary:

- Believe that good listening in specific situations and improving your own listening behavior are important. You would not want to be called upon in a meeting at work when you were daydreaming or being distracted by a cell phone. Consider listening in class and to your classmates' speeches in the same way.
- Since it is so easy to react to a speaker's ideas with confirmation bias, go into listening knowing that you might disagree and that the automatic "turn off" tendency is a possibility. In other words, tell yourself to keep an open mind.
- Be prepared to listen. This means putting away mobile devices, having a pen and paper, and situating yourself physically to listen (not slouching or slumping). Have a purpose in listening. In your speech class, one of your purposes should be mutual support of your classmates; you are all in this together. Your instructor might also require you to write responses to your classmates' speeches.
- When taking notes, keep yourself mentally engaged by writing questions that arise, especially if your instructor does not take questions until a break, and you might forget. This behavior will fill in the gaps when your mind could wander and create more of an interaction with the speaker. However, taking notes does not mean "transcribing" the speech or lecture. Whether in class or in a different listening situation, do not (try to) write everything the speaker says down. One, it's not possible unless you know Gregg Shorthand or type really fast, and two, you will disengage your critical thinking and get too involved in typing rather than thinking. Instead, start with looking for overall purpose and structure, then for pertinent examples of each main point. Repetition by a speaker usually indicates you should write something down.
- For your own sake and that of your co-listeners, avoid temptations to talk to those sitting next to you. It is far more distracting to both the speaker and your co-listeners than you might think. Write down the questions for asking later. Our use of cellular devices in an audience can also be more of a distraction to others than we realize. There is a good reason the movie theaters play those announcements about turning your phone off before the feature!

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the psychological and physical processes going on inside the audience during a speech. Being audience-centered and adapting to your audience involves knowing as much as is reasonably possible about them. Addressing a diverse audience is a challenge, and audiences are, in general, becoming more diverse and more aware of their diversity in the U.S. While diversity is a challenge, it is also an opportunity.

image

Something to Think About

Can you think of some ways that knowing the psychographic characteristics of your audience can influence your speech preparation? What values, needs, beliefs, and attitudes of your classmates should you consider?

Example topics: You want to give a persuasive speech to your classroom audience to encourage them to take a study abroad trip.

You want you audience to consider buying a Mac Book Pro rather than a PC as their next laptop.

You want to persuade them that sponsoring a child in a poor country is a way to bring the child out of poverty.

You want them to volunteer in the next Special Olympics in your community.

Chapter 6: Culture and Communication

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

Foundations of Culture and Identity

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define culture.
2. Define personal, social, and cultural identities.
3. Summarize nondominant and dominant identity development.
4. Explain why difference matters in the study of culture and identity.

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.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Ask yourself the question "Who am I?" Recall from our earlier discussion of self-concept that 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 8.1 "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.



Pledging a fraternity or sorority is an example of a social identity.

[Adaenn](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

Table 8.1 Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Personal	Social	Cultural
Antique Collector	Member of Historical Society	Irish American
Dog Lover	Member of Humane Society	Male/Female
Cyclist	Fraternity/Sorority Member	Greek American
Singer	High School Music Teacher	Multiracial
Shy	Book Club Member	Heterosexual
Athletic		Gay/Lesbian

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 nondominant groups (Allen, 2011). Dominant identities historically had and currently have more resources and influence, while nondominant 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 nondominant obtaining more resources and power than a person in a dominant group. However, the overall trend is that difference based on cultural groups has been institutionalized, and exceptions do not change this fact. Because of this uneven distribution of resources and power, members of dominant groups are granted privileges while nondominant groups are at a disadvantage. The main nondominant groups must face various forms of institutionalized discrimination, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ableism. As we will discuss later, privilege and disadvantage, like similarity and difference, are not "all or nothing." No two people are completely different or completely similar, and no one person is completely privileged or completely disadvantaged.

Identity Development

There are multiple models for examining identity development. Given our focus on how difference matters, we will examine similarities and differences in nondominant 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.

Nondominant 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).



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.



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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Media Attributions

- i forgot about frats. this is what happens when there's a home game.
- 8.1.2N

[23]

Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define the social constructionist view of culture and identity.
2. Trace the historical development and construction of the four cultural identities discussed.
3. Discuss how each of the four cultural identities discussed affects and/or relates to communication.

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 99.9 percent 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.



There is actually no biological basis for racial classification among humans, as we share 99.9 percent of our DNA.

Evelyn – [friends](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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."

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 US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn't always been the case (see [Table 8.2 "Racial Classifications in the US Census"](#)). 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.

Table 8.2 Racial Classifications in the US Census

Year(s)	Development
1790	No category for race
1800s	Race was defined by the percentage of African “blood.” <i>Mulatto</i> was one black and one white parent, <i>quadroon</i> was one-quarter African blood, and <i>octroon</i> was one-eighth.
1830–1940	The term <i>color</i> was used instead of <i>race</i> .
1900	Racial categories included white, black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers were required to check one of these boxes based on visual cues. Individuals did not get to select a racial classification on their own until 1970.
1950	The term <i>color</i> was dropped and replaced by <i>race</i> .
1960, 1970	Both <i>race</i> and <i>color</i> were used on census forms.
1980–2010	<i>Race</i> again became the only term.
2000	Individuals were allowed to choose more than one racial category for the first time in census history.
2010	The census included fifteen racial categories and an option to write in races not listed on the form.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 71–72.

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

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an *N* for Negro. Later she referred to herself as *colored* because that’s what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term *black* had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word *black*, and the slogan “black is beautiful” was commonly used. 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.

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” instead of just “Latinos,” which would be more gender inclusive. While *Hispanic* is used by the US Census, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which doesn’t account for the diversity of background of many Latinos/as. The term *Hispanic* also highlights the colonizer’s influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to

many. Additionally, 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" 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.

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 “English only” movement of recent years is largely a backlash targeted at immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries.

[Wikimedia Commons](#) – public domain.

Courtesy of www.CGPGrey.com.

The US Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman, 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, 2011). 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. You can watch actress Alfre Woodard deliver an interpretation of the speech in Video Clip 8.1.

Video Clip 8.1

Alfre Woodard Interprets Sojourner Truth's Speech "Ain't I a Woman?"

[" data-url="http://youtube.com/watch?v=4vr_vKsk_h8">\(click to see video\)](http://youtube.com/watch?v=4vr_vKsk_h8)

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. She shares comments from a student that capture this disconnect: (Wood, 2005)

I would never call myself a feminist, because that word has so many negative connotations. I don't hate men or anything, and I'm not interested in protesting. I don't want to go around with hacked-off hair and no makeup and sit around bashing men. I do think women should have the same kinds of rights, including equal pay for equal work. But I wouldn't call myself a feminist.

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 or you can use the pronoun that matches with how they are presenting. 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 75 percent of the educational workforce, only 22 percent of superintendents and 8 percent of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 26 percent 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 2010, women earned about seventy-seven cents to every dollar earned by men (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011). To put this into perspective, the National Committee on Pay Equity started an event called Equal Pay Day. In 2011, Equal Pay Day was on April 11. This signifies that for a woman to earn the same amount of money a man earned in a year, she would have to work more than three months extra, until April 11, to make up for the difference (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2011).

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*, and *bisexual*. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term *sexual preference* has been used previously, *sexual orientation* is more appropriate, since *preference* implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term *homosexual* can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. 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 gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) communities. While these communities are often grouped together within one acronym (GLBTQ), 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. [Table 8.3 "Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication"](#) traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

Table 8.3 Developments Related to Sexuality, Identity, and Communication

Year(s)	Development
1400 BCE–565 BCE	During the Greek and Roman era, there was no conception of sexual orientation as an identity. However, sexual relationships between men were accepted for some members of society. Also at this time, Greek poet Sappho wrote about love between women.
533	Byzantine Emperor Justinian makes adultery and same-sex sexual acts punishable by death.
1533	Civil law in England indicates the death penalty can be given for same-sex sexual acts between men.
1810	Napoleonic Code in France removes all penalties for any sexual activity between consenting adults.
1861	England removes death penalty for same-sex sexual acts.
1892	The term <i>heterosexuality</i> is coined to refer a form of “sexual perversion” in which people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than reproduction.
1897	Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld founds the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. It is the first gay rights organization.
1900–1930	Doctors “treat” homosexuality with castration, electro-shock therapy, and incarceration in mental hospitals.
1924	The first gay rights organization in the United States, the Chicago Society for Human Rights, is founded.
1933–44	Tens of thousands of gay men are sent to concentration camps under Nazi rule. The prisoners are forced to wear pink triangles on their uniforms. The pink triangle was later reclaimed as a symbol of gay rights.
1934	The terms <i>heterosexuality</i> and <i>homosexuality</i> appear in Webster’s dictionary with generally the same meaning the terms hold today.
1948	American sexologist Alfred Kinsey’s research reveals that more people than thought have engaged in same-sex sexual activity. His research highlights the existence of bisexuality.
1969	On June 27, patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back as police raid the bar (a common practice used by police at the time to harass gay people). “The Stonewall Riot,” as it came to be called, was led by gay, lesbian, and transgender patrons of the bar, many of whom were working class and/or people of color.
1974	The American Psychiatric Association removes its reference to homosexuality as a mental illness.
1999	The Vermont Supreme Court rules that the state must provide legal rights to same-sex couples. In 2000, Vermont becomes the first state to offer same-sex couples civil unions.
2003	The US Supreme Court rules that Texas’s sodomy law is unconstitutional, which effectively decriminalizes consensual same-sex relations.
2011	The US military policy “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” is repealed, allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly.

Source: Adapted from Brenda J. Allen, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2011), 117–25; and University of Denver Queer and Ally Commission, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer History,” *Queer Ally Training Manual*, 2008.

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity, because we follow a medical model of disability that places disability as an individual and medical rather than social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as “a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment” (Allen, 2011). An impairment is defined as “any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological” (Allen, 2011). This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people’s life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there 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.

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.

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 20 percent of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number 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.



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

[Wounded Warrior Regiment](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

As disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to “political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm.” They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the “scientific” category of “feeble-mindedness,” 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 8.4 “Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication”](#) for a timeline of developments related to ability, identity, and communication. These thoughts led to a dark time in US history, as the eugenics movement sought to limit reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

Table 8.4 Developments Related to Ability, Identity, and Communication

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

Source: Maggie Shreve, “The Movement for Independent Living: A Brief History,” *Independent Living Research Utilization*, accessed October 14, 2011, http://ilru.org/html/publications/infopaks/IL_paradigm.doc.

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, 2011). A sterilization law written in 1914 “proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate,” which included the “feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent” (Lombardo, 2011). 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.

Interability communication is communication between people with differing ability levels; for example, a hearing person communicating with someone who is hearing impaired or a person who doesn’t use a wheelchair communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair. Since many people are unsure of how to communicate with a person with disabilities, following are the “Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities” to help you in communicating with persons with disabilities:¹

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.

1. “Effective Interaction: Communication with and about People with Disabilities in the Workplace,” accessed November 5, 2012, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/effectiveinteraction.htm#UJgp8RjqJJ8>.

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.

Key Takeaways

- The social constructionist view of culture and identity states that the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relation to social, cultural, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed cultural identities that developed over time in relation to historical, social, and political contexts.
- Race, gender, sexuality, and ability are cultural identities that affect our communication and our relationships.

Exercises

1. Do you ever have difficulty discussing different cultural identities due to terminology? If so, what are your uncertainties? What did you learn in this chapter that can help you overcome them?
2. What comes to mind when you hear the word *feminist*? How did you come to have the ideas you have about feminism?
3. How do you see sexuality connect to identity in the media? Why do you think the media portrays sexuality and identity the way it does?
4. Think of an instance in which you had an interaction with someone with a disability. Would knowing the "Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities" have influenced how you communicated in this instance? Why or why not?

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Intercultural Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define intercultural communication.
2. List and summarize the six dialectics of intercultural communication.
3. Discuss how intercultural communication affects interpersonal relationships.

It is through intercultural communication that we come to create, understand, and transform culture and identity. Intercultural communication is communication between people with differing cultural identities. One reason we should study intercultural communication is to foster greater self-awareness (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Our thought process regarding culture is often “other focused,” meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage “know thyself” is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Intercultural communication can allow us to step outside of our comfortable, usual frame of reference and see our culture through a different lens. Additionally, as we become more self-aware, we may also become more ethical communicators as we challenge our ethnocentrism, or our tendency to view our own culture as superior to other cultures.

As was noted earlier, difference matters, and studying intercultural communication can help us better negotiate our changing world. Changing economies and technologies intersect with culture in meaningful ways (Martin & Nakayama). As was noted earlier, technology has created for some a global village where vast distances are now much shorter due to new technology that make travel and communication more accessible and convenient (McLuhan, 1967). However, as the following “Getting Plugged In” box indicates, there is also a digital divide, which refers to the unequal access to technology and related skills that exists in much of the world. People in most fields will be more successful if they are prepared to work in a globalized world. Obviously, the global market sets up the need to have intercultural competence for employees who travel between locations of a multinational corporation. Perhaps less obvious may be the need for teachers to work with students who do not speak English as their first language and for police officers, lawyers, managers, and medical personnel to be able to work with people who have various cultural identities.

“Getting Plugged In”

The Digital Divide

Many people who are now college age struggle to imagine a time without cell phones and the Internet. As “digital natives” it is probably also surprising to realize the number of people who do not have access to certain technologies. The *digital divide* was a term that initially referred to gaps in access to computers. The term expanded to include access to the Internet since it exploded onto the technology scene and is now connected to virtually all computing (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2010). Approximately two billion people around the world now access the Internet regularly, and those who don't face several disadvantages (Smith, 2011). Discussions of

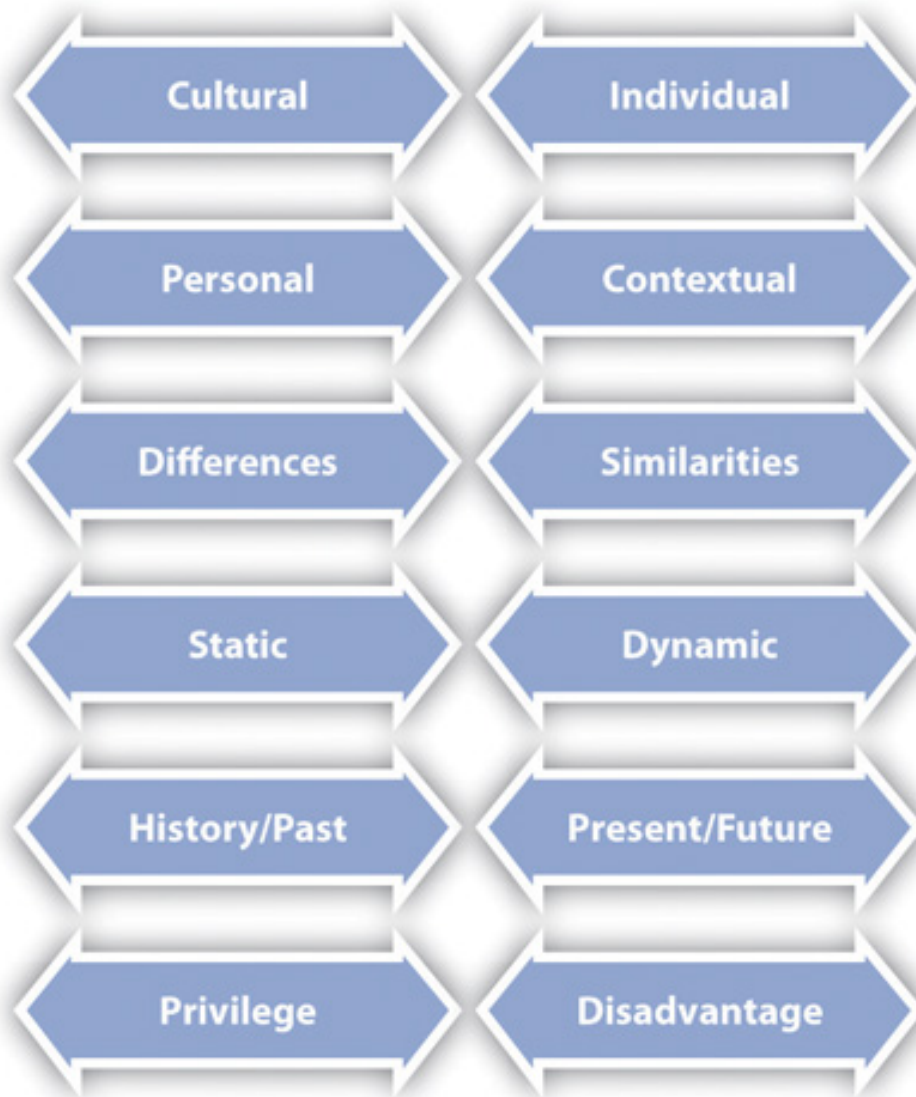
the digital divide are now turning more specifically to high-speed Internet access, and the discussion is moving beyond the physical access divide to include the skills divide, the economic opportunity divide, and the democratic divide. This divide doesn't just exist in developing countries; it has become an increasing concern in the United States. This is relevant to cultural identities because there are already inequalities in terms of access to technology based on age, race, and class (Sylvester & McGlynn, 2010). Scholars argue that these continued gaps will only serve to exacerbate existing cultural and social inequalities. From an international perspective, the United States is falling behind other countries in terms of access to high-speed Internet. South Korea, Japan, Sweden, and Germany now all have faster average connection speeds than the United States (Smith, 2011). And Finland in 2010 became the first country in the world to declare that all its citizens have a legal right to broadband Internet access (ben-Aaron, 2010). People in rural areas in the United States are especially disconnected from broadband service, with about 11 million rural Americans unable to get the service at home. As so much of our daily lives go online, it puts those who aren't connected at a disadvantage. From paying bills online, to interacting with government services, to applying for jobs, to taking online college classes, to researching and participating in political and social causes, the Internet connects to education, money, and politics.

1. What do you think of Finland's inclusion of broadband access as a legal right? Is this something that should be done in other countries? Why or why not?
2. How does the digital divide affect the notion of the global village?
3. How might limited access to technology negatively affect various nondominant groups?

Intercultural Communication: A Dialectical Approach

Intercultural communication is complicated, messy, and at times contradictory. Therefore it is not always easy to conceptualize or study. Taking a dialectical approach allows us to capture the dynamism of intercultural communication. A dialectic is a relationship between two opposing concepts that constantly push and pull one another (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). To put it another way, thinking dialectically helps us realize that our experiences often occur in between two different phenomena. This perspective is especially useful for interpersonal and intercultural communication, because when we think dialectically, we think relationally. This means we look at the relationship between aspects of intercultural communication rather than viewing them in isolation. Intercultural communication occurs as a dynamic in-betweenness that, while connected to the individuals in an encounter, goes beyond the individuals, creating something unique. Holding a dialectical perspective may be challenging for some Westerners, as it asks us to hold two contradictory ideas simultaneously, which goes against much of what we are taught in our formal education. Thinking dialectically helps us see the complexity in culture and identity because it doesn't allow for dichotomies. Dichotomies are dualistic ways of thinking that highlight opposites, reducing the ability to see gradations that exist in between concepts. Dichotomies such as good/evil, wrong/right, objective/subjective, male/female, in-group/out-group, black/white, and so on form the basis of much of our thoughts on ethics, culture, and general philosophy, but this isn't the only way of thinking (Marin & Nakayama, 1999). Many Eastern cultures acknowledge that the world isn't dualistic. Rather, they accept as part of their reality that things that seem opposite are actually interdependent and complement each other. I argue that a dialectical approach is useful in studying intercultural communication because it gets us out of our comfortable and familiar ways of thinking. Since so much of understanding culture and identity is understanding ourselves, having an unfamiliar lens through which to view culture can offer us insights that our familiar lenses will not. Specifically, we can better understand intercultural communication by examining six dialectics (see [Figure 8.1 "Dialectics of Intercultural Communication"](#)) (Martin & Nakayama, 1999).

Figure 8.1 Dialectics of Intercultural Communication



Source: Adapted from Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, "Thinking Dialectically about Culture and Communication," *Communication Theory* 9, no. 1 (1999): 1–25.

The cultural-individual dialectic captures the interplay between patterned behaviors learned from a cultural group and individual behaviors that may be variations on or counter to those of the larger culture. This dialectic is useful because it helps us account for exceptions to cultural norms. For example, earlier we learned that the United States is said to be a low-context culture, which means that we value verbal communication as our primary, meaning-rich form of communication. Conversely, Japan is said to be a high-context culture, which means they often look for nonverbal clues like tone, silence, or what is not said for meaning. However, you can find people in the United States who intentionally put much meaning into *how* they say things, perhaps because they are not as comfortable speaking directly what's on their mind. We often do this in situations where we may hurt someone's feelings or damage a relationship. Does that mean we come from a high-context culture? Does the Japanese man who speaks more than is socially acceptable come from a low-context culture? The answer to both questions is no. Neither the behaviors of a small percentage of individuals nor occasional situational choices constitute a cultural pattern.

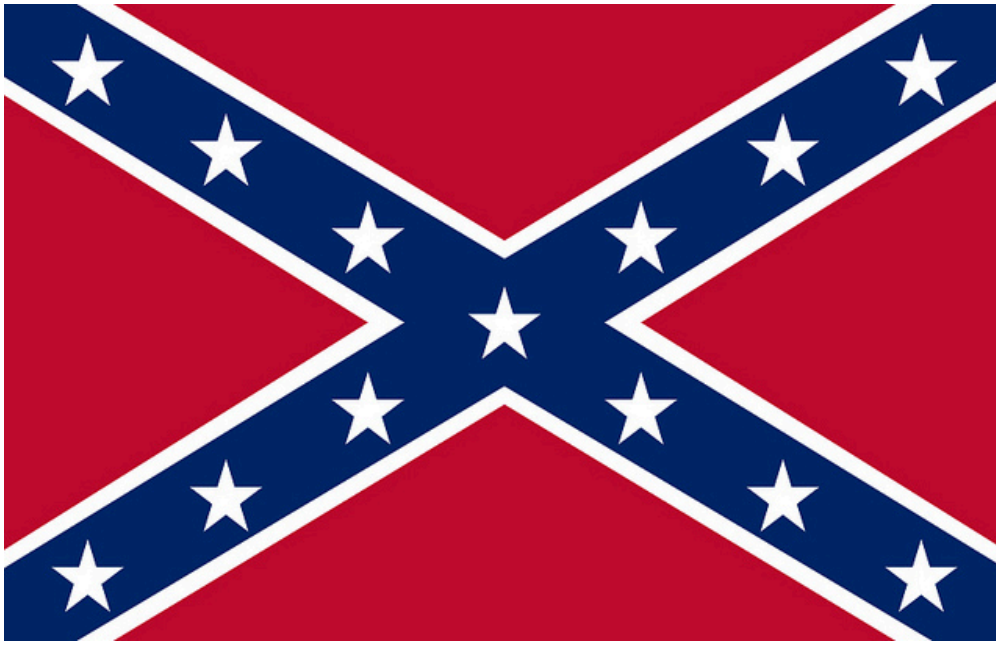
The personal-contextual dialectic highlights the connection between our personal patterns of and preferences for communicating and how various contexts influence the personal. In some cases, our communication patterns and preferences will stay the same across many contexts. In other cases, a context shift may lead us to alter

our communication and adapt. For example, an American businesswoman may prefer to communicate with her employees in an informal and laid-back manner. When she is promoted to manage a department in her company's office in Malaysia, she may again prefer to communicate with her new Malaysian employees the same way she did with those in the United States. In the United States, we know that there are some accepted norms that communication in work contexts is more formal than in personal contexts. However, we also know that individual managers often adapt these expectations to suit their own personal tastes. This type of managerial discretion would likely not go over as well in Malaysia where there is a greater emphasis put on power distance (Hofstede, 1991). So while the American manager may not know to adapt to the new context unless she has a high degree of intercultural communication competence, Malaysian managers would realize that this is an instance where the context likely influences communication more than personal preferences.

The differences-similarities dialectic allows us to examine how we are simultaneously similar to and different from others. As was noted earlier, it's easy to fall into a view of intercultural communication as "other oriented" and set up dichotomies between "us" and "them." When we overfocus on differences, we can end up polarizing groups that actually have things in common. When we overfocus on similarities, we essentialize, or reduce/overlook important variations within a group. This tendency is evident in most of the popular, and some of the academic, conversations regarding "gender differences." The book *Men Are from Mars and Women Are from Venus* makes it seem like men and women aren't even species that hail from the same planet. The media is quick to include a blurb from a research study indicating again how men and women are "wired" to communicate differently. However, the overwhelming majority of current research on gender and communication finds that while there are differences between how men and women communicate, there are far more similarities (Allen, 2011). Even the language we use to describe the genders sets up dichotomies. That's why I suggest that my students use the term *other gender* instead of the commonly used *opposite sex*. I have a mom, a sister, and plenty of female friends, and I don't feel like any of them are the opposite of me. Perhaps a better title for a book would be *Women and Men Are Both from Earth*.

The static-dynamic dialectic suggests that culture and communication change over time yet often appear to be and are experienced as stable. Although it is true that our cultural beliefs and practices are rooted in the past, we have already discussed how cultural categories that most of us assume to be stable, like race and gender, have changed dramatically in just the past fifty years. Some cultural values remain relatively consistent over time, which allows us to make some generalizations about a culture. For example, cultures have different orientations to time. The Chinese have a longer-term orientation to time than do Europeans (Lustig & Koester, 2006). This is evidenced in something that dates back as far as astrology. The Chinese zodiac is done annually (The Year of the Monkey, etc.), while European astrology was organized by month (Taurus, etc.). While this cultural orientation to time has been around for generations, as China becomes more Westernized in terms of technology, business, and commerce, it could also adopt some views on time that are more short term.

The history/past-present/future dialectic reminds us to understand that while current cultural conditions are important and that our actions now will inevitably affect our future, those conditions are not without a history. We always view history through the lens of the present. Perhaps no example is more entrenched in our past and avoided in our present as the history of slavery in the United States. Where I grew up in the Southern United States, race was something that came up frequently. The high school I attended was 30 percent minorities (mostly African American) and also had a noticeable number of white teens (mostly male) who proudly displayed Confederate flags on their clothing or vehicles.



There has been controversy over whether the Confederate flag is a symbol of hatred or a historical symbol that acknowledges the time of the Civil War.

Jim Surkamp – [Confederate Rebel Flag](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

I remember an instance in a history class where we were discussing slavery and the subject of repatriation, or compensation for descendants of slaves, came up. A white male student in the class proclaimed, “I’ve never owned slaves. Why should I have to care about this now?” While his statement about not owning slaves is valid, it doesn’t acknowledge that effects of slavery still linger today and that the repercussions of such a long and unjust period of our history don’t disappear over the course of a few generations.

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

As these dialectics reiterate, culture and communication are complex systems that intersect with and diverge from many contexts. A better understanding of all these dialectics helps us be more critical thinkers and competent communicators in a changing world.

“Getting Critical”

Immigration, Laws, and Religion

France, like the United States, has a constitutional separation between church and state. As many countries in Europe, including France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, have experienced influxes of immigrants, many of them Muslim, there have been growing tensions among immigration, laws, and religion. In 2011, France passed a law banning the wearing of a *niqab* (pronounced *knee-cobb*), which is an Islamic facial covering worn by some women that only exposes the eyes. This law was aimed at

“assimilating its Muslim population” of more than five million people and “defending French values and women’s rights” (De La Baume & Goodman, 2011). Women found wearing the veil can now be cited and fined \$150 euros. Although the law went into effect in April of 2011, the first fines were issued in late September of 2011. Hind Ahmas, a woman who was fined, says she welcomes the punishment because she wants to challenge the law in the European Court of Human Rights. She also stated that she respects French laws but cannot abide by this one. Her choice to wear the veil has been met with more than a fine. She recounts how she has been denied access to banks and other public buildings and was verbally harassed by a woman on the street and then punched in the face by the woman’s husband. Another Muslim woman named Kenza Drider, who can be seen in Video Clip 8.2, announced that she will run for the presidency of France in order to challenge the law. The bill that contained the law was broadly supported by politicians and the public in France, and similar laws are already in place in Belgium and are being proposed in Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (Fraser, 2011).

1. Some people who support the law argue that part of integrating into Western society is showing your face. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Part of the argument for the law is to aid in the assimilation of Muslim immigrants into French society. What are some positives and negatives of this type of assimilation?
3. Identify which of the previously discussed dialectics can be seen in this case. How do these dialectics capture the tensions involved?

Video Clip 8.2

Veiled Woman Eyes French Presidency

[" data-url="http://youtube.com/watch?v=DXh5csMHSPY">\(click to see video\)](http://youtube.com/watch?v=DXh5csMHSPY)

Intercultural Communication and Relationships

Intercultural relationships are formed between people with different cultural identities and include friends, romantic partners, family, and coworkers. Intercultural relationships have benefits and drawbacks. Some of the benefits include increasing cultural knowledge, challenging previously held stereotypes, and learning new skills (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). For example, I learned about the Vietnamese New Year celebration Tet from a friend I made in graduate school. This same friend also taught me how to make some delicious Vietnamese foods that I continue to cook today. I likely would not have gained this cultural knowledge or skill without the benefits of my intercultural friendship. Intercultural relationships also present challenges, however.

The dialectics discussed earlier affect our intercultural relationships. The similarities-differences dialectic in particular may present challenges to relationship formation (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). While differences between people’s cultural identities may be obvious, it takes some effort to uncover commonalities that can form the basis of a relationship. Perceived differences in general also create anxiety and uncertainty that is not as present in intracultural relationships. Once some similarities are found, the tension within the dialectic begins to balance out and uncertainty and anxiety lessen. Negative stereotypes may also hinder progress toward relational development, especially if the individuals are not open to adjusting their preexisting beliefs. Intercultural relationships may also take more work to nurture and maintain. The benefit of increased cultural awareness is often achieved, because the relational partners explain their cultures to each other. This type of explaining requires time, effort, and patience and may be an extra burden that some are not willing to carry. Last, engaging in intercultural relationships can lead to questioning or even backlash from one’s own group. I experienced this type of backlash from my white classmates in middle school who teased me for hanging out with the African American kids on my bus. While these challenges range from mild inconveniences to more serious repercussions, they are important to be aware of. As noted earlier, intercultural relationships can take many forms. The focus of this section is on friendships and romantic relationships, but much of the following discussion can be extended to other relationship types.

Intercultural Friendships

Even within the United States, views of friendship vary based on cultural identities. Research on friendship has shown that Latinos/as value relational support and positive feedback, Asian Americans emphasize exchanges of ideas like offering feedback or asking for guidance, African Americans value respect and mutual acceptance, and European Americans value recognition of each other as individuals (Coller, 1996). Despite the differences in

emphasis, research also shows that the overall definition of a close friend is similar across cultures. A close friend is thought of as someone who is helpful and nonjudgmental, who you enjoy spending time with but can also be independent, and who shares similar interests and personality traits (Lee, 2006).

Intercultural friendship formation may face challenges that other friendships do not. Prior intercultural experience and overcoming language barriers increase the likelihood of intercultural friendship formation (Sias et al., 2008). In some cases, previous intercultural experience, like studying abroad in college or living in a diverse place, may motivate someone to pursue intercultural friendships once they are no longer in that context. When friendships cross nationality, it may be necessary to invest more time in common understanding, due to language barriers. With sufficient motivation and language skills, communication exchanges through self-disclosure can then further relational formation. Research has shown that individuals from different countries in intercultural friendships differ in terms of the topics and depth of self-disclosure, but that as the friendship progresses, self-disclosure increases in depth and breadth (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009). Further, as people overcome initial challenges to initiating an intercultural friendship and move toward mutual self-disclosure, the relationship becomes more intimate, which helps friends work through and move beyond their cultural differences to focus on maintaining their relationship. In this sense, intercultural friendships can be just as strong and enduring as other friendships (Lee, 2006).

The potential for broadening one's perspective and learning more about cultural identities is not always balanced, however. In some instances, members of a dominant culture may be more interested in sharing their culture with their intercultural friend than they are in learning about their friend's culture, which illustrates how context and power influence friendships (Lee, 2006). A research study found a similar power dynamic, as European Americans in intercultural friendships stated they were open to exploring everyone's culture but also communicated that culture wasn't a big part of their intercultural friendships, as they just saw their friends as people. As the researcher states, "These types of responses may demonstrate that it is easiest for the group with the most socioeconomic and socio-cultural power to ignore the rules, assume they have the power as individuals to change the rules, or assume that no rules exist, since others are adapting to them rather than vice versa" (Collier, 1996). Again, intercultural friendships illustrate the complexity of culture and the importance of remaining mindful of your communication and the contexts in which it occurs.

Culture and Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships are influenced by society and culture, and still today some people face discrimination based on who they love. Specifically, sexual orientation and race affect societal views of romantic relationships. Although the United States, as a whole, is becoming more accepting of gay and lesbian relationships, there is still a climate of prejudice and discrimination that individuals in same-gender romantic relationships must face. Despite some physical and virtual meeting places for gay and lesbian people, there are challenges for meeting and starting romantic relationships that are not experienced for most heterosexual people (Peplau & Spalding, 2000).

As we've already discussed, romantic relationships are likely to begin due to merely being exposed to another person at work, through a friend, and so on. But some gay and lesbian people may feel pressured into or just feel more comfortable not disclosing or displaying their sexual orientation at work or perhaps even to some family and friends, which closes off important social networks through which most romantic relationships begin. This pressure to refrain from disclosing one's gay or lesbian sexual orientation in the workplace is not unfounded, as it is still legal in twenty-nine states (as of November 2012) to fire someone for being gay or lesbian (Human Rights Campaign, 2012). There are also some challenges faced by gay and lesbian partners regarding relationship termination. Gay and lesbian couples do not have the same legal and societal resources to manage their relationships as heterosexual couples; for example, gay and lesbian relationships are not legally recognized in most states, it is more difficult for a gay or lesbian couple to jointly own property or share custody of children than heterosexual couples, and there is little public funding for relationship counseling or couples therapy for gay and lesbian couples.

While this lack of barriers may make it easier for gay and lesbian partners to break out of an unhappy or unhealthy relationship, it could also lead couples to termination who may have been helped by the sociolegal support systems available to heterosexuals (Peplau & Spalding, 2000).

Despite these challenges, relationships between gay and lesbian people are similar in other ways to those between heterosexuals. Gay, lesbian, and heterosexual people seek similar qualities in a potential mate, and

once relationships are established, all these groups experience similar degrees of relational satisfaction (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Despite the myth that one person plays the man and one plays the woman in a relationship, gay and lesbian partners do not have set preferences in terms of gender role. In fact, research shows that while women in heterosexual relationships tend to do more of the housework, gay and lesbian couples were more likely to divide tasks so that each person has an equal share of responsibility (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). A gay or lesbian couple doesn't necessarily constitute an intercultural relationship, but as we have already discussed, sexuality is an important part of an individual's identity and connects to larger social and cultural systems. Keeping in mind that identity and culture are complex, we can see that gay and lesbian relationships can also be intercultural if the partners are of different racial or ethnic backgrounds.

While interracial relationships have occurred throughout history, there have been more historical taboos in the United States regarding relationships between African Americans and white people than other racial groups. Antimiscegenation laws were common in states and made it illegal for people of different racial/ethnic groups to marry. It wasn't until 1967 that the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Loving versus Virginia*, declaring these laws to be unconstitutional (Pratt, 1995). It wasn't until 1998 and 2000, however, that South Carolina and Alabama removed such language from their state constitutions (Lovingday.org, 2011). The organization and website lovingday.org commemorates the landmark case and works to end racial prejudice through education.

Even after these changes, there were more Asian-white and Latino/a-white relationships than there were African American-white relationships (Gaines Jr. & Brennan, 2011). Having already discussed the importance of similarity in attraction to mates, it's important to note that partners in an interracial relationship, although culturally different, tend to be similar in occupation and income. This can likely be explained by the situational influences on our relationship formation we discussed earlier—namely, that work tends to be a starting ground for many of our relationships, and we usually work with people who have similar backgrounds to us.

There has been much research on interracial couples that counters the popular notion that partners may be less satisfied in their relationships due to cultural differences. In fact, relational satisfaction isn't significantly different for interracial partners, although the challenges they may face in finding acceptance from other people could lead to stressors that are not as strong for intracultural partners (Gaines Jr. & Brennan, 2011). Although partners in interracial relationships certainly face challenges, there are positives. For example, some mention that they've experienced personal growth by learning about their partner's cultural background, which helps them gain alternative perspectives. Specifically, white people in interracial relationships have cited an awareness of and empathy for racism that still exists, which they may not have been aware of before (Gaines Jr. & Liu, 2000).



The Supreme Court ruled in the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* case that states could not enforce laws banning interracial marriages.

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Key Takeaways

- Studying intercultural communication, communication between people with differing cultural identities, can help us gain more self-awareness and be better able to communicate in a world with changing demographics and technologies.
- A dialectical approach to studying intercultural communication is useful because it allows us to think about culture and identity in complex ways, avoiding dichotomies and acknowledging the tensions that must be negotiated.
- Intercultural relationships face some challenges in negotiating the dialectic between similarities and differences but can also produce rewards in terms of fostering self- and other awareness.

Exercises

1. Why is the phrase “Know thyself” relevant to the study of intercultural communication?
2. Apply at least one of the six dialectics to a recent intercultural interaction that you had. How does this dialectic help you understand or analyze the situation?
3. Do some research on your state’s laws by answering the following questions: Did your state have antimiscegenation laws? If so, when were they repealed? Does your state legally recognize gay and lesbian relationships? If so, how?

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Intercultural Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define intercultural communication competence.
2. Explain how motivation, self- and other-knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty relate to intercultural communication competence.
3. Summarize the three ways to cultivate intercultural communication competence that are discussed.
4. Apply the concept of “thinking under the influence” as a reflective skill for building intercultural communication competence.

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

Components of Intercultural Communication Competence

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

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). As you’ll recall from [Chapter 2 “Communication and Perception”](#), on perception, 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 US 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 US Americans and take longer to form close friendships. The comparatively extroverted nature of the Americans led some of the Swedes to overestimate the depth of their relationship, which ultimately hurt them when the Americans didn’t stay in touch. This made 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.

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.

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 US 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 Jr., 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 gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) 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?

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. ICC also has the potential to benefit you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- A person with appropriate intrinsic or extrinsic motivation to engage in intercultural communication can develop self- and other-knowledge that will contribute to their ability to be mindful of their own communication and tolerate uncertain situations.
- We can cultivate ICC by fostering attitudes that motivate us, discovering knowledge that informs us, and developing skills that enable us.

Exercises

1. Identify an intercultural encounter in which you did not communicate as competently as you would have liked. What concept(s) from the chapter would have helped you in this situation and how?
2. Which of the following components of ICC—motivation, mindfulness, cognitive flexibility, and tolerance for uncertainty—do you think you are most competent at, and which one needs the most work? Identify how you became so competent at the first one and some ways that you can improve the second one.
3. Choose one of the three ways discussed to cultivate ICC and make a list of five steps you can take to enhance this part of your competence.

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[PART VII]

Chapter 7: Interpersonal Communication Processes

Taking an interpersonal communication course as an undergraduate is what made me change my major from music to communication studies. I was struck by the clear practicality of key interpersonal communication concepts in my everyday life and in my relationships. I found myself thinking, “Oh, that’s what it’s called!” or “My mom does that to me all the time!” I hope that you will have similar reactions as we learn more about how we communicate with the people in our daily lives.

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Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define interpersonal communication.
2. Discuss the functional aspects of interpersonal communication.
3. Discuss the cultural aspects of interpersonal communication.

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

Why Study Interpersonal Communication?

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



Solitary confinement is common in supermax prisons, where prisoners spend 22.5 to 24 hours a day in their cells.

Jmiller291 – [Solitary Confinement, Old Geelong Gaol 7](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

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

Functional Aspects of Interpersonal Communication

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

What motivates you to communicate with someone? We frequently engage in communication designed to achieve instrumental goals such as gaining compliance (getting someone to do something for us), getting information we need, or asking for support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). In short, instrumental talk helps us “get things done” in our relationships. Our instrumental goals can be long term or day to day. The following are examples of communicating for instrumental goals:

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

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

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



Gathering to celebrate a colleague's birthday is a good way for coworkers to achieve relational goals in the workplace.

Twingly – [Happy b-day](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

We also pursue self-presentation goals by adapting our communication in order to be perceived in particular ways. Just as many companies, celebrities, and politicians create a public image, we desire to present different faces in different contexts. The well-known scholar Erving Goffman compared self-presentation to a performance and suggested we all perform different roles in different contexts (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, competent communicators can successfully manage how others perceive them by adapting to situations and contexts. A parent may perform the role of stern head of household, supportive shoulder to cry on, or hip and culturally aware friend to his or her child. A newly hired employee may initially perform the role of serious and agreeable coworker. Sometimes people engage in communication that doesn’t necessarily present them in a positive way. For example, Haley, the oldest daughter in the television show *Modern Family*, often presents herself as incapable in order to get her parents to do her work. In one episode she pretended she didn’t know how to crack open an egg so her mom Claire would make the brownies for her school bake sale. Here are some other examples of communicating to meet self-presentation goals:

- As your boss complains about struggling to format the company newsletter, you tell her about your experience with Microsoft Word and editing and offer to look over the newsletter once she’s done to fix the formatting (presenting yourself as competent).
- You and your new college roommate stand in your dorm room full of boxes. You let him choose which side of the room he wants and then invite him to eat lunch with you (presenting yourself as friendly).

- You say, “I don’t know,” in response to a professor’s question even though you have an idea of the answer (presenting yourself as aloof, or “too cool for school”).

“Getting Real”

Image Consultants

The Association of Image Consultants International (AICI) states that appearance, behavior, and communication are the “ABC’s of image.” Many professional image consultants are licensed by this organization and provide a variety of services to politicians, actors, corporate trainers, public speakers, organizations, corporations, and television personalities such as news anchors.¹ Visit the AICI’s website (http://www.aici.org/About_Image_Consulting/Image_Consulting.htm) and read about image consulting, including the “How to Choose,” “How to Become,” and “FAQs” sections. Then consider the following questions:

1. If you were to hire an image consultant for yourself, what would you have them “work on” for you? Why?
2. What communication skills that you’ve learned about in the book so far would be most important for an image consultant to possess?
3. Many politicians use image consultants to help them connect to voters and win elections. Do you think this is ethical? Why or why not?

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

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

Cultural Aspects of Interpersonal Communication

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

Some additional communicative acts that create our relational cultures include relational storytelling, personal idioms, routines and rituals, and rules and norms. Storytelling is an important part of how we create culture

1. “About Image Consulting,” Association of Image Consultants International webpage, accessed June 3, 2011, http://www.aici.org/About_Image_Consulting/Image_Consulting.htm.

in larger contexts and how we create a uniting and meaningful storyline for our relationships. In fact, an anthropologist coined the term *homo narrans* to describe the unique storytelling capability of modern humans (Fisher, 1985). We often rely on relationship storytelling to create a sense of stability in the face of change, test the compatibility of potential new relational partners, or create or maintain solidarity in established relationships. Think of how you use storytelling among your friends, family, coworkers, and other relational partners. If you recently moved to a new place for college, you probably experienced some big changes. One of the first things you started to do was reestablish a social network—remember, human beings are fundamentally social creatures. As you began to encounter new people in your classes, at your new job, or in your new housing, you most likely told some stories of your life before—about your friends, job, or teachers back home. One of the functions of this type of storytelling, early in forming interpersonal bonds, is a test to see if the people you are meeting have similar stories or can relate to your previous relationship cultures. In short, you are testing the compatibility of your schemata with the new people you encounter. Although storytelling will continue to play a part in your relational development with these new people, you may be surprised at how quickly you start telling stories with your new friends about things that have happened since you met. You may recount stories about your first trip to the dance club together, the weird geology professor you had together, or the time you all got sick from eating the cafeteria food. In short, your old stories will start to give way to new stories that you’ve created. Storytelling within relationships helps create solidarity, or a sense of belonging and closeness. This type of storytelling can be especially meaningful for relationships that don’t fall into the dominant culture. For example, research on a gay male friendship circle found that the gay men retold certain dramatic stories frequently to create a sense of belonging and to also bring in new members to the group (Jones Jr., 2007).

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

Routines and rituals help form relational cultures through their natural development in repeated or habitual interaction (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). While “routine” may connote boring in some situations, relationship routines are communicative acts that create a sense of predictability in a relationship that is comforting. Some communicative routines may develop around occasions or conversational topics.

For example, it is common for long-distance friends or relatives to schedule a recurring phone conversation or for couples to review the day’s events over dinner. When I studied abroad in Sweden, my parents and I talked on the phone at the same time every Sunday, which established a comfortable routine for us. Other routines develop around entire conversational episodes. For example, two best friends recounting their favorite spring-break story may seamlessly switch from one speaker to the other, finish each other’s sentences, speak in unison, or gesture simultaneously because they have told the story so many times. Relationship rituals take on more symbolic meaning than do relationship routines and may be variations on widely recognized events—such as birthdays, anniversaries, Passover, Christmas, or Thanksgiving—or highly individualized and original. Relational partners may personalize their traditions by eating mussels and playing Yahtzee on Christmas Eve or going hiking

on their anniversary. Other rituals may be more unique to the relationship, such as celebrating a dog's birthday or going to opening day at the amusement park. The following highly idiosyncratic ritual was reported by a participant in a research study:

I would check my husband's belly button for fuzz on a daily basis at bedtime. It originated when I noticed some blanket fuzz in his belly button one day and thought it was funny...We both found it funny and teased often about the fuzz. If there wasn't any fuzz for a few days my husband would put some in his belly button for me to find. It's been happening for about 10 years now (Bruess & Pearson, 1997).



A couple may share a relationship routine of making dinner together every Saturday night.

Free Stock Photos – [Cooking](#) – public domain.

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

Relationship rules and norms help with the daily function of the relationship. They help create structure and provide boundaries for interacting in the relationship and for interacting with larger social networks (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). Relationship rules are explicitly communicated guidelines for what should and should not be done in certain contexts. A couple could create a rule to always confer with each other before letting their child spend the night somewhere else. If a mother lets her son sleep over at a friend's house without consulting her partner, a more serious conflict could result. Relationship norms are similar to routines and rituals in that they develop naturally in a relationship and generally conform to or are adapted from what is expected and acceptable in the larger culture or society. For example, it may be a norm that you and your coworkers do not "talk shop" at your Friday happy-hour gathering. So when someone brings up work at the gathering, his coworkers

may remind him that there's no shop talk, and the consequences may not be that serious. In regards to topic of conversation, norms often guide expectations of what subjects are appropriate within various relationships. Do you talk to your boss about your personal finances? Do you talk to your father about your sexual activity? Do you tell your classmates about your medical history? In general, there are no rules that say you can't discuss any of these topics with anyone you choose, but relational norms usually lead people to answer "no" to the questions above. Violating relationship norms and rules can negatively affect a relationship, but in general, rule violations can lead to more direct conflict, while norm violations can lead to awkward social interactions. Developing your interpersonal communication competence will help you assess your communication in relation to the many rules and norms you will encounter.

Key Takeaways

- Getting integrated: Interpersonal communication occurs between two or more people whose lives are interdependent and mutually influence one another. These relationships occur in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts, and improving our interpersonal communication competence can also improve our physical and psychological health, enhance our relationships, and make us more successful in our careers.
- **There are functional aspects of interpersonal communication.**
 - We "get things done" in our relationships by communicating for instrumental goals such as getting someone to do something for us, requesting or presenting information, and asking for or giving support.
 - We maintain our relationships by communicating for relational goals such as putting your relational partner's needs before your own, celebrating accomplishments, spending time together, and checking in.
 - We strategically project ourselves to be perceived in particular ways by communicating for self-presentation goals such as appearing competent or friendly.
- **There are cultural aspects of interpersonal communication.**
 - We create relationship cultures based on the relationship schemata we develop through our interactions with our larger society and culture.
 - We engage in relationship storytelling to create a sense of stability in the face of change, to test our compatibility with potential relational partners, and to create a sense of solidarity and belonging in established relationships.
 - We create personal idioms such as nicknames that are unique to our particular relationship and are unfamiliar to outsiders to create cohesiveness and solidarity.
 - We establish relationship routines and rituals to help establish our relational culture and bring a sense of comfort and predictability to our relationships.

Exercises

1. Getting integrated: In what ways might interpersonal communication competence vary among academic, professional, and civic contexts? What competence skills might be more or less important in one context than in another?
2. Recount a time when you had a DTR talk. At what stage in the relationship was the talk? What motivated you or the other person to initiate the talk? What was the result of the talk?
3. Pick an important relationship and describe its relationship culture. When the relationship started, what relationship schemata guided your expectations? Describe a relationship story that you tell with this person or about this person. What personal idioms do you use? What routines and rituals do you observe? What norms and rules do you follow?

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Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

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



Interpersonal conflict is distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse.

Bobafred – [Fist Fight](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

Improving your competence in dealing with conflict can yield positive effects in the real world. Since conflict is present in our personal and professional lives, the ability to manage conflict and negotiate desirable outcomes can help us be more successful at both. Whether you and your partner are trying to decide what brand of flat-screen television to buy or discussing the upcoming political election with your mother, the potential for conflict is present. In professional settings, the ability to engage in conflict management, sometimes called conflict resolution, is a necessary and valued skill. However, many professionals do not receive training in conflict management even though they are expected to do it as part of their job (Gates, 2006). A lack of training and a lack of competence could be a recipe for disaster, which is illustrated in an episode of *The Office* titled "Conflict Resolution." In the episode, Toby, the human-resources officer, encourages office employees to submit anonymous complaints about their coworkers. Although Toby doesn't attempt to resolve the conflicts, the employees feel like they are being heard. When Michael, the manager, finds out there is unresolved conflict, he makes the anonymous complaints public in an attempt to encourage resolution, which backfires, creating more conflict within the office. As usual, Michael doesn't demonstrate communication competence; however, there are career paths for people who do have an interest in or talent for conflict management. In fact, being a mediator was named one of the best careers for 2011 by *U.S. News and World Report*.¹ Many colleges and universities now offer undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or certificates in conflict resolution, such as this one at the University of North Carolina Greensboro: <http://conflictstudies.uncg.edu/site>. Being able to manage conflict situations can make life more

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

pleasant rather than letting a situation stagnate or escalate. The negative effects of poorly handled conflict could range from an awkward last few weeks of the semester with a college roommate to violence or divorce. However, there is no absolute right or wrong way to handle a conflict. Remember that being a competent communicator doesn't mean that you follow a set of absolute rules. Rather, a competent communicator assesses multiple contexts and applies or adapts communication tools and skills to fit the dynamic situation.

Conflict Management Styles

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

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

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

Figure 6.1 Five Styles of Interpersonal Conflict Management



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

Competing

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

Competing has been linked to aggression, although the two are not always paired. If assertiveness does not work, there is a chance it could escalate to hostility. There is a pattern of verbal escalation: requests, demands, complaints, angry statements, threats, harassment, and verbal abuse (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). Aggressive communication can become patterned, which can create a volatile and hostile environment. The reality television show *The Bad Girls Club* is a prime example of a chronically hostile and aggressive environment. If you do a Google video search for clips from the show, you will see yelling, screaming, verbal threats, and some examples of physical violence. The producers of the show choose houseguests who have histories of aggression, and when the “bad girls” are placed in a house together, they fall into typical patterns, which creates dramatic television moments. Obviously, living in this type of volatile environment would create stressors in any relationship, so it's important to monitor the use of competing as a conflict resolution strategy to ensure that it does not lapse into aggression.

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

Avoiding

The avoiding style of conflict management often indicates a low concern for self and a low concern for other, and no direct communication about the conflict takes place. However, as we will discuss later, in some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, and even in some situations in the United States, avoiding a conflict can indicate a high level of concern for the other. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. Remember, *you cannot not communicate*. Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may intentionally or unintentionally give our feelings away through our verbal and nonverbal communication. Rosa's sarcastic tone as she tells D'Shaun that he's “Soooo good with money!” and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect,

meaning there is little information exchange, which may make this strategy less effective than others. We may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the conflict, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, therefore resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake to lose.

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

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

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

Accommodating

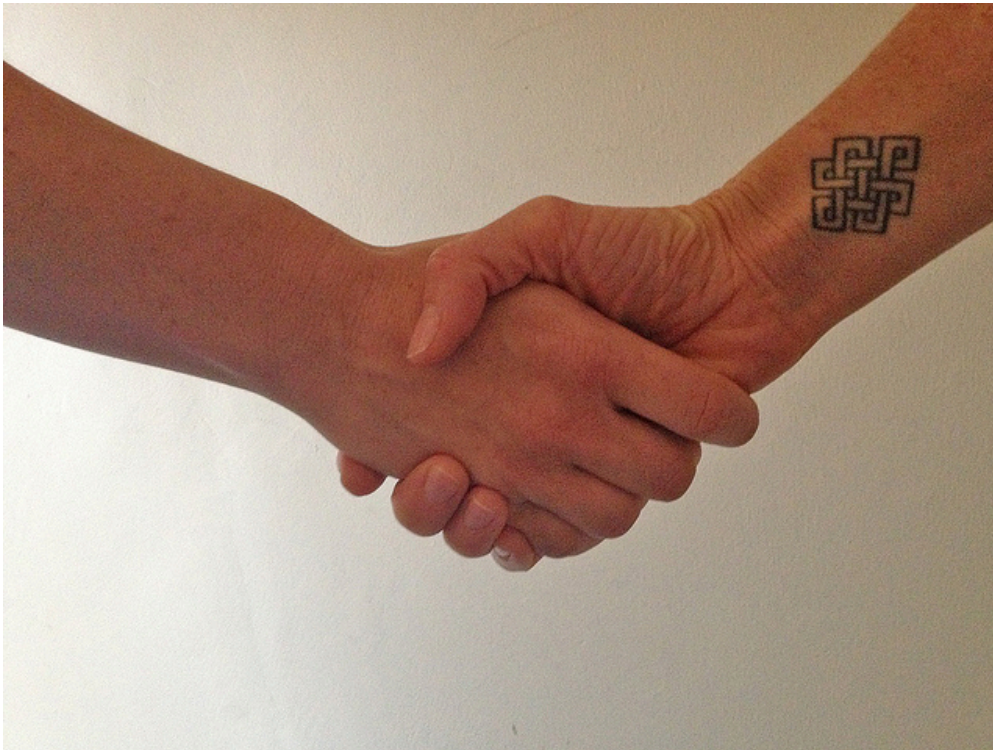
The accommodating conflict management style indicates a low concern for self and a high concern for other and is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input. The context for and motivation behind accommodating play an important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

of the month. At that point, Rosa and D'Shaun's conflict may escalate as they question each other's motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at Casey and blame it on her irresponsibility.

Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak (Cai & Fink, 2002). If you're standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, "Let's just have it your way," so you don't miss the beginning. If you're a new manager at an electronics store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees. As with avoiding, there are certain cultural influences we will discuss later that make accommodating a more effective strategy.

Compromising

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



Compromising may help conflicting parties come to a resolution, but neither may be completely satisfied if they each had to give something up.

Broad Bean Media – [handshake](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

Collaborating

The collaborating style involves a high degree of concern for self and other and usually indicates investment in the conflict situation and the relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win/win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall relationship. For example, Rosa and D'Shaun may agree that Casey's allowance needs to be increased and may decide to give her twenty more dollars a week in exchange for her babysitting her little brother one night a week. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate.

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

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

"Getting Competent"

Handling Roommate Conflicts

Whether you have a roommate by choice, by necessity, or through the random selection process of your school's housing office, it's important to be able to get along with the person who shares your living space. While having a roommate offers many benefits such as making a new friend, having someone to experience a new situation like college life with, and having someone to split the cost on your own with, there are also challenges. Some common roommate conflicts involve neatness, noise, having guests, sharing possessions, value conflicts, money conflicts, and personality conflicts (Ball State University, 2001). Read the following scenarios and answer the following questions for each one:

1. Which conflict management style, from the five discussed, would you use in this situation?
2. What are the potential strengths of using this style?
3. What are the potential weaknesses of using this style?

Scenario 1: Neatness. Your college dorm has bunk beds, and your roommate takes a lot of time making his bed (the bottom bunk) each morning. He has told you that he doesn't want anyone sitting on or sleeping in his bed when he is not in the room. While he is away for the weekend, your friend comes to visit and sits on the bottom bunk bed. You tell him what your roommate said, and you try to fix the bed back before he returns to the dorm. When he returns, he notices that his bed has been disturbed and he confronts you about it.

Scenario 2: Noise and having guests. Your roommate has a job waiting tables and gets home around midnight on Thursday nights. She often brings a couple friends from work home with her. They watch television, listen to music, or play video games and talk and laugh. You have an 8 a.m. class on Friday mornings and are usually asleep when she returns. Last Friday, you talked to her and asked her to keep it down in the future. Tonight, their noise has woken you up and you can't get back to sleep.

Scenario 3: Sharing possessions. When you go out to eat, you often bring back leftovers to have for lunch the next day during your short break between classes. You didn't have time to eat breakfast, and you're really excited about having your leftover pizza for lunch until you get home and see your roommate sitting on the couch eating the last slice.

Scenario 4: Money conflicts. Your roommate got mono and missed two weeks of work last month. Since he has a steady job and you have some savings, you cover his portion of the rent and agree that he will pay your portion next month. The next month comes around and he informs you that he only has enough to pay his half.

Scenario 5: Value and personality conflicts. You like to go out to clubs and parties and have friends over, but your roommate is much more of an introvert. You've tried to get her to come out with you or join the party at your place, but she'd rather study. One day she tells you that she wants to break the lease so she can move out early to live with one of her friends. You both signed the lease, so you have to agree or she can't do it. If you break the lease, you automatically lose your portion of the security deposit.

Culture and Conflict

Culture is an important context to consider when studying conflict, and recent research has called into question some of the assumptions of the five conflict management styles discussed so far, which were formulated with a Western bias (Oetzel, Garcia, & Ting-Toomey, 2008). For example, while the avoiding style of conflict has been cast as negative, with a low concern for self and other or as a lose/lose outcome, this research found that participants in the United States, Germany, China, and Japan all viewed avoiding strategies as demonstrating a concern for the other. While there are some generalizations we can make about culture and conflict, it is better to look at more specific patterns of how interpersonal communication and conflict management are related. We can better understand some of the cultural differences in conflict management by further examining the concept of *face*.

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

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

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

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

Research done on college students in Germany, Japan, China, and the United States found that those with independent self-construal were more likely to engage in competing, and those with interdependent self-construal were more likely to engage in avoiding or collaborating (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). And in general, this research found that members of collectivistic cultures were more likely to use the *avoiding* style of conflict

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

Handling Conflict Better

Conflict is inevitable and it is not inherently negative. A key part of developing interpersonal communication competence involves being able to effectively manage the conflict you will encounter in all your relationships. One key part of handling conflict better is to notice patterns of conflict in specific relationships and to generally have an idea of what causes you to react negatively and what your reactions usually are.

Identifying Conflict Patterns

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

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

Cumulative annoyance is a building of frustration or anger that occurs over time, eventually resulting in a conflict interaction. For example, your friend shows up late to drive you to class three times in a row. You didn't say anything the previous times, but on the third time you say, "You're late again! If you can't get here on time, I'll find another way to get to class." Cumulative annoyance can build up like a pressure cooker, and as it builds up, the intensity of the conflict also builds. Criticism and demands can also play into cumulative annoyance. We have all probably let critical or demanding comments slide, but if they continue, it becomes difficult to hold back, and most of us have a breaking point. The problem here is that all the other incidents come back to your mind as

you confront the other person, which usually intensifies the conflict. You've likely been surprised when someone has blown up at you due to cumulative annoyance or surprised when someone you have blown up at didn't know there was a problem building. A good strategy for managing cumulative annoyance is to monitor your level of annoyance and occasionally let some steam out of the pressure cooker by processing through your frustration with a third party or directly addressing what is bothering you with the source.

No one likes the feeling of rejection. Rejection can lead to conflict when one person's comments or behaviors are perceived as ignoring or invalidating the other person. Vulnerability is a component of any close relationship. When we care about someone, we verbally or nonverbally communicate. We may tell our best friend that we miss them, or plan a home-cooked meal for our partner who is working late. The vulnerability that underlies these actions comes from the possibility that our relational partner will not notice or appreciate them. When someone feels exposed or rejected, they often respond with anger to mask their hurt, which ignites a conflict. Managing feelings of rejection is difficult because it is so personal, but controlling the impulse to assume that your relational partner is rejecting you, and engaging in communication rather than reflexive reaction, can help put things in perspective. If your partner doesn't get excited about the meal you planned and cooked, it could be because he or she is physically or mentally tired after a long day. Concepts discussed in [Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception"](#) can be useful here, as perception checking, taking inventory of your attributions, and engaging in information exchange to help determine how each person is punctuating the conflict are useful ways of managing all four of the triggers discussed.

Interpersonal conflict may take the form of serial arguing, which is a repeated pattern of disagreement over an issue. Serial arguments do not necessarily indicate negative or troubled relationships, but any kind of patterned conflict is worth paying attention to. There are three patterns that occur with serial arguing: repeating, mutual hostility, and arguing with assurances (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). The first pattern is repeating, which means reminding the other person of your complaint (what you want them to start/stop doing). The pattern may continue if the other person repeats their response to your reminder. For example, if Marita reminds Kate that she doesn't appreciate her sarcastic tone, and Kate responds, "I'm soooo sorry, I forgot how perfect you are," then the reminder has failed to effect the desired change. A predictable pattern of complaint like this leads participants to view the conflict as irresolvable. The second pattern within serial arguments is mutual hostility, which occurs when the frustration of repeated conflict leads to negative emotions and increases the likelihood of verbal aggression. Again, a predictable pattern of hostility makes the conflict seem irresolvable and may lead to relationship deterioration. Whereas the first two patterns entail an increase in pressure on the participants in the conflict, the third pattern offers some relief. If people in an interpersonal conflict offer verbal assurances of their commitment to the relationship, then the problems associated with the other two patterns of serial arguing may be ameliorated. Even though the conflict may not be solved in the interaction, the verbal assurances of commitment imply that there is a willingness to work on solving the conflict in the future, which provides a sense of stability that can benefit the relationship. Although serial arguing is not inherently bad within a relationship, if the pattern becomes more of a vicious cycle, it can lead to alienation, polarization, and an overall toxic climate, and the problem may seem so irresolvable that people feel trapped and terminate the relationship (Christensen & Jacobson, 2000). There are some negative, but common, conflict reactions we can monitor and try to avoid, which may also help prevent serial arguing.

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



Mindreading leads to patterned conflict, because we wrongly presume to know what another person is thinking.

Slipperroom – [Mysterion the Mind Reader](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

As with all the aspects of communication competence we have discussed so far, you cannot expect that everyone you interact with will have the same knowledge of communication that you have after reading this book. But it often only takes one person with conflict management skills to make an interaction more effective. Remember that it's not the quantity of conflict that determines a relationship's success; it's how the conflict is managed, and one person's competent response can deescalate a conflict. Now we turn to a discussion of negotiation steps and skills as a more structured way to manage conflict.

Negotiation Steps and Skills

We negotiate daily. We may negotiate with a professor to make up a missed assignment or with our friends to plan activities for the weekend. Negotiation in interpersonal conflict refers to the process of attempting to change or influence conditions within a relationship. The negotiation skills discussed next can be adapted to all types of

relational contexts, from romantic partners to coworkers. The stages of negotiating are prenegotiation, opening, exploration, bargaining, and settlement (Hargie, 2011).

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

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

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

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

In the settlement stage, you want to decide on one of the proposals and then summarize the chosen proposal and any related concessions. It is possible that each party can have a different view of the agreed solution. If your

roommate thinks you are cleaning the bathroom every other day and you plan to clean it on Wednesdays, then there could be future conflict. You could summarize and ask for confirmation by saying, “So, it looks like I’ll be in charge of the trash and recycling, and you’ll load and unload the dishwasher. Then I’ll do a general cleaning on Wednesdays and you’ll do the same on Sundays. Is that right?” Last, you’ll need to follow up on the solution to make sure it’s working for both parties. If your roommate goes home again next Sunday and doesn’t get around to cleaning, you may need to go back to the exploration or bargaining stage.

Key Takeaways

- Interpersonal conflict is an inevitable part of relationships that, although not always negative, can take an emotional toll on relational partners unless they develop skills and strategies for managing conflict.
- Although there is no absolute right or wrong way to handle a conflict, there are five predominant styles of conflict management, which are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating.
- Perception plays an important role in conflict management because we are often biased in determining the cause of our own and others’ behaviors in a conflict situation, which necessitates engaging in communication to gain information and perspective.
- Culture influences how we engage in conflict based on our cultural norms regarding individualism or collectivism and concern for self-face or other-face.
- We can handle conflict better by identifying patterns and triggers such as demands, cumulative annoyance, and rejection and by learning to respond mindfully rather than reflexively.

Exercises

1. Of the five conflict management strategies, is there one that you use more often than others? Why or why not? Do you think people are predisposed to one style over the others based on their personality or other characteristics? If so, what personality traits do you think would lead a person to each style?
2. Review the example of D'Shaun and Rosa. If you were in their situation, what do you think the best style to use would be and why?
3. Of the conflict triggers discussed (demands, cumulative annoyance, rejection, one-upping, and mindreading) which one do you find most often triggers a negative reaction from you? What strategies can you use to better manage the trigger and more effectively manage conflict?

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Media Attributions

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Emotions and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

Have you ever been at a movie and let out a bellowing laugh and snort only to realize no one else is laughing? Have you ever gotten uncomfortable when someone cries in class or in a public place? Emotions are clearly personal, as they often project what we're feeling on the inside to those around us whether we want it to show or not. Emotions are also interpersonal in that another person's show of emotion usually triggers a reaction from us—perhaps support if the person is a close friend or awkwardness if the person is a stranger. Emotions are central to any interpersonal relationship, and it's important to know what causes and influences emotions so we can better understand our own emotions and better respond to others when they display emotions.

Emotions are physiological, behavioral, and/or communicative reactions to stimuli that are cognitively processed and experienced as emotional (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). This definition includes several important dimensions of emotions. First, emotions are often internally experienced through physiological changes such as increased heart rate, a tense stomach, or a cold chill. These physiological reactions may not be noticeable by others and are therefore intrapersonal unless we exhibit some change in behavior that clues others into our internal state or we verbally or nonverbally communicate our internal state. Sometimes our behavior is voluntary—we ignore someone, which may indicate we are angry with them—or involuntary—we fidget or avoid eye contact while talking because we are nervous. When we communicate our emotions, we call attention to ourselves and provide information to others that may inform how they should react. For example, when someone we care about displays behaviors associated with sadness, we are likely to know that we need to provide support (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). We learn, through socialization, how to read and display emotions, although some people are undoubtedly better at reading emotions than others. However, as with most aspects of communication, we can all learn to become more competent with increased knowledge and effort.

Primary emotions are innate emotions that are experienced for short periods of time and appear rapidly, usually as a reaction to an outside stimulus, and are experienced similarly across cultures. The primary emotions are joy, distress, anger, fear, surprise, and disgust. Members of a remote tribe in New Guinea, who had never been exposed to Westerners, were able to identify these basic emotions when shown photographs of US Americans making corresponding facial expressions (Evans, 2001).

Secondary emotions are not as innate as primary emotions, and they do not have a corresponding facial expression that makes them universally recognizable. Secondary emotions are processed by a different part of the brain that requires higher order thinking; therefore, they are not reflexive. Secondary emotions are love, guilt, shame, embarrassment, pride, envy, and jealousy (Evans, 2001). These emotions develop over time, take longer to

fade away, and are interpersonal because they are most often experienced in relation to real or imagined others. You can be fearful of the dark but feel guilty about an unkind comment made to your mother or embarrassed at the thought of doing poorly on a presentation in front of an audience. Since these emotions require more processing, they are more easily influenced by thoughts and can be managed, which means we can become more competent communicators by becoming more aware of how we experience and express secondary emotions. Although there is more cultural variation in the meaning and expression of secondary emotions, they are still universal in that they are experienced by all cultures. It's hard to imagine what our lives would be like without emotions, and in fact many scientists believe we wouldn't be here without them.

Perspectives on Emotion

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

Evolution and Emotions

Human beings grouping together and creating interpersonal bonds was a key element in the continuation and success of our species, and the ability to express emotions played a role in this success (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). For example, unlike other species, most of us are able to control our anger, and we have the capacity for empathy. Emotional regulation can help manage conflict, and empathy allows us to share the emotional state of someone else, which increases an interpersonal bond. These capacities were important as early human society grew increasingly complex and people needed to deal with living with more people.



A dependable and nurturing caregiver helps establish a secure attachment style that will influence emotions and views of relationships in later life.

Justhiggy – [Mom and baby](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Attachment theory ties into the evolutionary perspective, because researchers claim that it is in our nature, as newborns, to create social bonds with our primary caretaker (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). This drive for attachment became innate through the process of evolution as early humans who were more successful at attachment were more likely to survive and reproduce—repeating the cycle. Attachment theory proposes that people develop one of the following three attachment styles as a result of interactions with early caretakers: secure, avoidant, or anxious attachment (Feeney, Noller, & Rovers, 2000). It is worth noting that much of the research on attachment theory has been based on some societal norms that are shifting. For example, although women for much of human history have played the primary caregiver role, men are increasingly taking on more caregiver

responsibilities. Additionally, although the following examples presume that a newborn's primary caregivers are his or her parents, extended family, foster parents, or others may also play that role.

Individuals with a secure attachment style report that their relationship with their parents is warm and that their parents also have a positive and caring relationship with each other. People with this attachment style are generally comfortable with intimacy, feel like they can depend on others when needed, and have few self-doubts. As a result, they are generally more effective at managing their emotions, and they are less likely to experience intense negative emotions in response to a negative stimulus like breaking up with a romantic partner.

People with the avoidant attachment style report discomfort with closeness and a reluctance to depend on others. They quickly develop feelings of love for others, but those feelings lose intensity just as fast. As a result, people with this attachment style do not view love as long lasting or enduring and have a general fear of intimacy because of this. This attachment style might develop due to a lack of bonding with a primary caregiver.

People with the anxious attachment style report a desire for closeness but anxieties about being abandoned. They regularly experience self-doubts and may blame their lack of love on others' unwillingness to commit rather than their own anxiety about being left. They are emotionally volatile and more likely to experience intense negative emotions such as anxiety and anger. This attachment style might develop because primary caregivers were not dependable or were inconsistent—alternating between caring or nurturing and neglecting or harming.

This process of attachment leads us to experience some of our first intense emotions, such as love, trust, joy, anxiety, or anger, and we learn to associate those emotions with closely bonded relationships (Planlap, Fitness, & Fehr, 2006). For example, the child who develops a secure attachment style and associates feelings of love and trust with forming interpersonal bonds will likely experience similar emotions as an adult entering into a romantic partnership. Conversely, a child who develops an anxious attachment style and associates feelings of anxiety and mistrust with forming interpersonal bonds will likely experience similar emotions in romantic relationships later in life. In short, whether we form loving and secure bonds or unpredictable and insecure bonds influences our emotional tendencies throughout our lives, which inevitably affects our relationships. Of course, later in life, we have more control over and conscious thoughts about this process. Although it seems obvious that developing a secure attachment style is the ideal scenario, it is also inevitable that not every child will have the same opportunity to do so. But while we do not have control over the style we develop as babies, we can exercise more control over our emotions and relationships as adults if we take the time to develop self-awareness and communication competence—both things this book will help you do if you put what you learn into practice.

Culture and Emotions

While our shared evolutionary past dictates some universal similarities in emotions, triggers for emotions and norms for displaying emotions vary widely. Certain emotional scripts that we follow are socially, culturally, and historically situated. Take the example of “falling in love.” Westerners may be tempted to critique the practice of arranged marriages in other cultures and question a relationship that isn't based on falling in love. However, arranged marriages have been a part of Western history, and the emotional narrative of falling in love has only recently become a part of our culture. Even though we know that compatible values and shared social networks are more likely to predict the success of a long-term romantic relationship than “passion,” Western norms privilege the emotional role of falling in love in our courtship narratives and practices (Crozier, 2006). While this example shows how emotions tie into larger social and cultural narratives, rules and norms for displaying emotions affect our day-to-day interactions.

Display rules are sociocultural norms that influence emotional expression. Display rules influence who can express emotions, which emotions can be expressed, and how intense the expressions can be. In individualistic cultures, where personal experience and self-determination are values built into cultural practices and communication, expressing emotions is viewed as a personal right. In fact, the outward expression of our inner states may be exaggerated, since getting attention from those around you is accepted and even expected in individualistic cultures like the United States (Safdar et al., 2009). In collectivistic cultures, emotions are viewed as more interactional and less individual, which ties them into social context rather than into an individual right to free expression. An expression of emotion reflects on the family and cultural group rather than only on the individual. Therefore, emotional displays are more controlled, because maintaining group harmony and relationships is a primary cultural value, which is very different from the more individualistic notion of having the right to get something off your chest.

There are also cultural norms regarding which types of emotions can be expressed. In individualistic cultures, especially in the United States, there is a cultural expectation that people will exhibit positive emotions. Recent research has documented the culture of cheerfulness in the United States (Kotchamidova, 2010). People seek out happy situations and communicate positive emotions even when they do not necessarily feel positive emotions. Being positive implicitly communicates that you have achieved your personal goals, have a comfortable life, and have a healthy inner self (Mesquita & Albert, 2007). In a culture of cheerfulness, failure to express positive emotions could lead others to view you as a failure or to recommend psychological help or therapy. The cultural predisposition to express positive emotions is not universal. The people who live on the Pacific islands of Ifaluk do not encourage the expression of happiness, because they believe it will lead people to neglect their duties (Mesquita & Albert, 2007). Similarly, collectivistic cultures may view expressions of positive emotion negatively because someone is bringing undue attention to himself or herself, which could upset group harmony and potentially elicit jealous reactions from others.

Emotional expressions of grief also vary among cultures and are often tied to religious or social expectations (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006). Thai and Filipino funeral services often include wailing, a more intense and loud form of crying, which shows respect for the deceased. The intensity of the wailing varies based on the importance of the individual who died and the closeness of the relationship between the mourner and the deceased. Therefore, close relatives like spouses, children, or parents would be expected to wail louder than distant relatives or friends. In Filipino culture, wailers may even be hired by the family to symbolize the importance of the person who died. In some Latino cultures, influenced by the concept of machismo or manliness, men are not expected or allowed to cry. Even in the United States, there are gendered expectations regarding grieving behaviors that lead some men to withhold emotional displays such as crying even at funerals. On the other hand, as you can see in Video Clip 6.1, the 2011 death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il brought out public mourners who some suspected were told and/or paid to wail in front of television cameras.

Video Clip 6.1

North Koreans Mourn Kim Jong-Il's Death

[" data-url="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9shSgKbdON8">\(click to see video\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9shSgKbdON8)

Expressing Emotions

Emotion sharing involves communicating the circumstances, thoughts, and feelings surrounding an emotional event. Emotion sharing usually starts immediately following an emotional episode. The intensity of the emotional event corresponds with the frequency and length of the sharing, with high-intensity events being told more often and over a longer period of time. Research shows that people communicate with others after almost any emotional event, positive or negative, and that emotion sharing offers intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits, as individuals feel inner satisfaction and relief after sharing, and social bonds are strengthened through the interaction (Rime, 2007).

Our social bonds are enhanced through emotion sharing because the support we receive from our relational partners increases our sense of closeness and interdependence. We should also be aware that our expressions of emotion are infectious due to emotional contagion, or the spreading of emotion from one person to another (Hargie, 2011). Think about a time when someone around you got the giggles and you couldn't help but laugh along with them, even if you didn't know what was funny. While those experiences can be uplifting, the other side of emotional contagion can be unpleasant. One of my favorite skits from *Saturday Night Live*, called "Debbie Downer," clearly illustrates the positive and negative aspects of emotional contagion. In the skit, a group of friends and family have taken a trip to an amusement park. One of the people in the group, Debbie, interjects depressing comments into the happy dialogue of the rest of the group. Within the first two minutes of the skit, Debbie mentions mad cow disease after someone orders steak and eggs for breakfast, a Las Vegas entertainer being mauled by his tiger after someone gets excited about seeing Tigger, and a train explosion in North Korea after someone mentions going to the Epcot center. We've probably all worked with someone or had that family member who can't seem to say anything positive, and Debbie's friends react, as we would, by getting increasingly frustrated with her. The skit also illustrates the sometimes uncontrollable aspects of emotional contagion. As you know, the show is broadcast live and the characters occasionally "break character" after getting caught up in the comedy. After the comment about North Korea, Rachel Dratch, who plays Debbie, and Jimmy Fallon,

another actor in the scene, briefly break character and laugh a little bit. Their character slip leads other actors to break character and over the next few minutes the laughter spreads (which was not scripted and not supposed to happen) until all the actors in the skit are laughing, some of them uncontrollably, and the audience is also roaring with laughter. This multilayered example captures the positive, negative, and interpersonal aspects of emotional contagion.

In order to verbally express our emotions, it is important that we develop an emotional vocabulary. The more specific we can be when we are verbally communicating our emotions, the less ambiguous they will be for the person decoding our message. As we expand our emotional vocabulary, we are able to convey the intensity of the emotion we're feeling whether it is mild, moderate, or intense. For example, *happy* is mild, *delighted* is moderate, and *ecstatic* is intense, and *ignored* is mild, *rejected* is moderate, and *abandoned* is intense (Hargie, 2011). Aside from conveying the intensity of your emotions, you can also verbally frame your emotions in a way that allows you to have more control over them.

We can communicate ownership of our emotions through the use of "I" language. This may allow us to feel more in control, but it may also facilitate emotion sharing by not making our conversational partner feel at fault or defensive. For example, instead of saying "You're making me crazy!" you could say, "I'm starting to feel really anxious because we can't make a decision." However, there may be times when face-to-face communication isn't possible or desired, which can complicate how we express emotions.

In a time when so much of our communication is electronically mediated, it is likely that we will communicate emotions through the written word in an e-mail, text, or instant message. We may also still resort to pen and paper when sending someone a thank-you note, a birthday card, or a sympathy card. Communicating emotions through the written (or typed) word can have advantages such as time to compose your thoughts and convey the details of what you're feeling. There are also disadvantages, in that important context and nonverbal communication can't be included. Things like facial expressions and tone of voice offer much insight into emotions that may not be expressed verbally. There is also a lack of immediate feedback. Sometimes people respond immediately to a text or e-mail, but think about how frustrating it is when you text someone and they don't get back to you right away. If you're in need of emotional support or want validation of an emotional message you just sent, waiting for a response could end up negatively affecting your emotional state and your relationship.

"Getting Critical"

Politicians, Apologies, and Emotions

Politicians publicly apologizing for wrongdoings have been features in the news for years. In June of 2011, Representative Anthony Weiner, a member of the US Congress, apologized to his family, constituents, and friends for posting an explicit photo on Twitter that was intended to go to a woman with whom he had been chatting and then lying about it. He resigned from Congress a little over a week later. Emotions like guilt and shame are often the driving forces behind an apology, and research shows that apologies that communicate these emotions are viewed as more sincere (Hareli & Eisikovits, 2006). However, admitting and expressing guilt doesn't automatically lead to forgiveness, as such admissions may expose character flaws of an individual. Rep. Weiner communicated these emotions during his speech, which you can view in Video Clip 6.2. He said he was "deeply sorry," expressed "regret" for the pain he caused, and said, "I am deeply ashamed of my terrible judgment and actions" (CNN, 2001).

1. After viewing Rep. Weiner's apology, do you feel like he was sincere? Why or why not?
2. Do you think politicians have a higher ethical responsibility to apologize for wrongdoing than others? Why or why not?

Video Clip 6.2

Rep. Anthony Weiner Apologizes for Twitter Scandal, Racy Photo

[" data-bbox="104 800 685 817" style="color: blue; text-decoration: underline;">_data-url="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bmE8Afe_Lw">\(click to see video\)](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bmE8Afe_Lw)

Managing and Responding to Emotions

The notion of emotional intelligence emerged in the early 1990s and has received much attention in academic scholarship, business and education, and the popular press. **Emotional intelligence** "involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (Salovey, Woolery, & Mayer, 2001). As was noted earlier, improving our emotional

vocabulary and considering how and when to verbally express our emotions can help us better distinguish between and monitor our emotions. However, as the definition of emotional intelligence states, we must then use the results of that cognitive process to guide our thoughts and actions.

Just as we are likely to engage in emotion sharing following an emotional event, we are likely to be on the receiving end of that sharing. Another part of emotional intelligence is being able to appraise others' expressions of emotions and communicatively adapt. A key aspect in this process is empathy, which is the ability to comprehend the emotions of others and to elicit those feelings in ourselves. Being empathetic has important social and physical implications. By expressing empathy, we will be more likely to attract and maintain supportive social networks, which has positive physiological effects like lower stress and less anxiety and psychological effects such as overall life satisfaction and optimism (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000).

When people share emotions, they may expect a variety of results such as support, validation, or advice. If someone is venting, they may just want your attention. When people share positive emotions, they may want recognition or shared celebration. Remember too that you are likely to coexperience some of the emotion with the person sharing it and that the intensity of their share may dictate your verbal and nonverbal reaction (Rime, 2007). Research has shown that responses to low-intensity episodes are mostly verbal. For example, if someone describes a situation where they were frustrated with their car shopping experience, you may validate their emotion by saying, "Car shopping can be really annoying. What happened?" Conversely, more intense episodes involve nonverbal reactions such as touching, body contact (scooting close together), or embracing. These reactions may or may not accompany verbal communication. You may have been in a situation where someone shared an intense emotion, such as learning of the death of a close family member, and the only thing you could think to do was hug them. Although being on the receiving end of emotional sharing can be challenging, your efforts will likely result in positive gains in your interpersonal communication competence and increased relational bonds.

Key Takeaways

- Emotions result from outside stimuli or physiological changes that influence our behaviors and communication.
- Emotions developed in modern humans to help us manage complex social life including interpersonal relations.
- The expression of emotions is influenced by sociocultural norms and display rules.
- Emotion sharing includes verbal expression, which is made more effective with an enhanced emotional vocabulary, and nonverbal expression, which may or may not be voluntary.
- Emotional intelligence helps us manage our own emotions and effectively respond to the emotions of others.

Exercises

1. In what situations would you be more likely to communicate emotions through electronic means rather than in person? Why?
2. Can you think of a display rule for emotions that is not mentioned in the chapter? What is it and why do you think this norm developed?
3. When you are trying to determine someone's emotional state, what nonverbal communication do you look for and why?
4. Think of someone in your life who you believe has a high degree of emotional intelligence. What have they done that brought you to this conclusion?

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Media Attributions

- 6-3-On

Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

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

Theories of Self-Disclosure

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



Social penetration theory compares the process of self-disclosure to peeling back the layers of an onion.

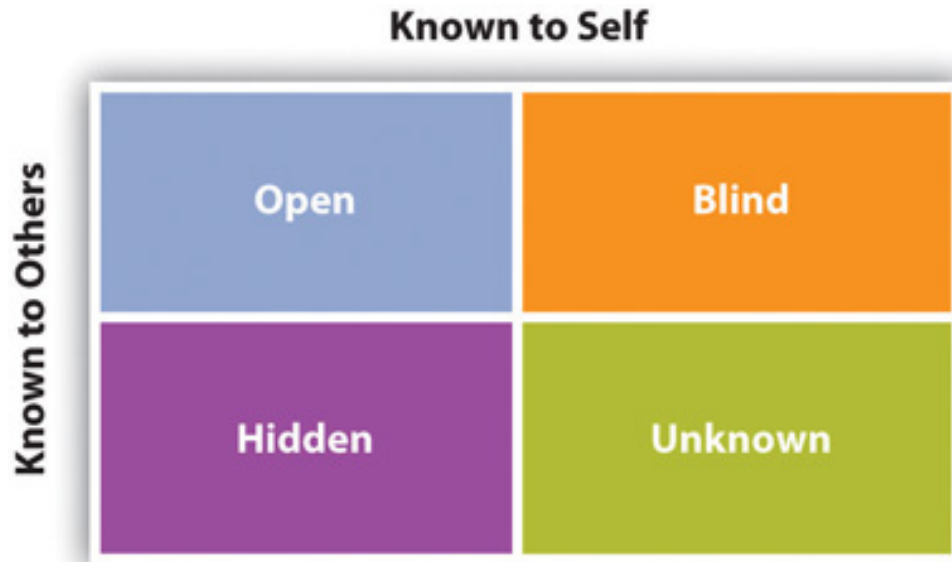
Helena Jacoba – [Red Onion close up](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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.

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

Figure 6.2 Johari Window



Source: Joseph Luft, *Of Human Interaction* (Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 1969).

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

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

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

“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?

The Process of Self-Disclosure

There are many decisions that go into the process of self-disclosure. We have many types of information we can disclose, but we have to determine whether or not we will proceed with disclosure by considering the situation and the potential risks. Then we must decide when, where, and how to disclose. Since all these decisions will affect our relationships, we will examine each one in turn.

Four main categories for disclosure include observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (Hargie, 2011). Observations include what we have done and experienced. For example, I could tell you that I live in a farmhouse in Illinois. If I told you that I think my move from the city to the country was a good decision, I would be sharing my thoughts, because I included a judgment about my experiences. Sharing feelings includes expressing an emotion—for example, “I’m happy to wake up every morning and look out at the corn fields. I feel lucky.” Last, we may communicate needs or wants by saying something like “My best friend is looking for a job, and I really want him to move here, too.” We usually begin disclosure with observations and thoughts and then move onto feelings and needs as the relationship progresses. There are some exceptions to this. For example, we are more likely to disclose deeply in crisis situations, and we may also disclose more than usual with a stranger if we do not think we’ll meet the person again or do not share social networks. Although we don’t often find ourselves in crisis situations, you may recall scenes from movies or television shows where people who are trapped in an elevator or stranded after a plane crash reveal their deepest feelings and desires. I imagine that we have all been in a situation where we said more about ourselves to a stranger than we normally would. To better understand why, let’s discuss some of the factors that influence our decision to disclose.

Generally speaking, some people are naturally more transparent and willing to self-disclose, while others are more opaque and hesitant to reveal personal information (Jourard, 1964). Interestingly, recent research suggests that the pervasiveness of reality television, much of which includes participants who are very willing to disclose personal information, has led to a general trend among reality television viewers to engage in self-disclosure through other mediated means such as blogging and video sharing (Stefanone & Lakaff, 2009). Whether it is online or face-to-face, there are other reasons for disclosing or not, including self-focused, other-focused, interpersonal, and situational reasons (Green, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006).

Self-focused reasons for disclosure include having a sense of relief or catharsis, clarifying or correcting information, or seeking support. Self-focused reasons for not disclosing include fear of rejection and loss of privacy. In other words, we may disclose to get something off our chest in hopes of finding relief, or we may not disclose out of fear that the other person may react negatively to our revelation. Other-focused reasons for disclosure include a sense of responsibility to inform or educate. Other-focused reasons for not disclosing include feeling like the other person will not protect the information. If someone mentions that their car wouldn’t start this morning and you disclose that you are good at working on cars, you’ve disclosed to help out the other person. On the other side, you may hold back disclosure about your new relationship from your coworker because he or she’s known to be loose-lipped with other people’s information. Interpersonal reasons for disclosure involve desires to maintain a trusting and intimate relationship. Interpersonal reasons for not disclosing include fear of losing the relationship or deeming the information irrelevant to the particular relationship. Your decision to disclose an affair in order to be open with your partner and hopefully work through the aftermath together or withhold that information out of fear he or she will leave you is based on interpersonal reasons. Finally, situational reasons may be the other person being available, directly asking a question, or being directly involved in or affected by the information being disclosed. Situational reasons for not disclosing include the person being unavailable, a lack of time to fully discuss the information, or the lack of a suitable (i.e., quiet, private) place to talk. For example,

finding yourself in a quiet environment where neither person is busy could lead to disclosure, while a house full of company may not.

Deciding when to disclose something in a conversation may not seem as important as deciding whether or not to disclose at all. But deciding to disclose and then doing it at an awkward time in a conversation could lead to negative results. As far as timing goes, you should consider whether to disclose the information early, in the middle, or late in a conversation (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). If you get something off your chest early in a conversation, you may ensure that there's plenty of time to discuss the issue and that you don't end up losing your nerve. If you wait until the middle of the conversation, you have some time to feel out the other person's mood and set up the tone for your disclosure. For example, if you meet up with your roommate to tell her that you're planning on moving out and she starts by saying, "I've had the most terrible day!" the tone of the conversation has now shifted, and you may not end up making your disclosure. If you start by asking her how she's doing, and things seem to be going well, you may be more likely to follow through with the disclosure. You may choose to disclose late in a conversation if you're worried about the person's reaction. If you know they have an appointment or you have to go to class at a certain time, disclosing just before that time could limit your immediate exposure to any negative reaction. However, if the person doesn't have a negative reaction, they could still become upset because they don't have time to discuss the disclosure with you.

Sometimes self-disclosure is unplanned. Someone may ask you a direct question or disclose personal information, which leads you to reciprocate disclosure. In these instances you may not manage your privacy well because you haven't had time to think through any potential risks. In the case of a direct question, you may feel comfortable answering, you may give an indirect or general answer, or you may feel enough pressure or uncertainty to give a dishonest answer. If someone unexpectedly discloses, you may feel the need to reciprocate by also disclosing something personal. If you're uncomfortable doing this, you can still provide support for the other person by listening and giving advice or feedback.

Once you've decided when and where to disclose information to another person, you need to figure out the best channel to use. Face-to-face disclosures may feel more genuine or intimate given the shared physical presence and ability to receive verbal and nonverbal communication. There is also an opportunity for immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback, such as asking follow-up questions or demonstrating support or encouragement through a hug. The immediacy of a face-to-face encounter also means you have to deal with the uncertainty of the reaction you'll get. If the person reacts negatively, you may feel uncomfortable, pressured to stay, or even fearful. If you choose a mediated channel such as an e-mail or a letter, text, note, or phone call, you may seem less genuine or personal, but you have more control over the situation in that you can take time to carefully choose your words, and you do not have to immediately face the reaction of the other person. This can be beneficial if you fear a negative or potentially violent reaction. Another disadvantage of choosing a mediated channel, however, is the loss of nonverbal communication that can add much context to a conversation. Although our discussion of the choices involved in self-disclosure so far have focused primarily on the discloser, self-disclosure is an interpersonal process that has much to do with the receiver of the disclosure.

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).

Key Takeaways

- Through the process of self-disclosure, we disclose personal information and learn about others.
- The social penetration theory argues that self-disclosure increases in breadth and depth as a relationship progresses, like peeling back the layers of an onion.
- We engage in social comparison through self-disclosure, which may determine whether or not we pursue a relationship.
- Getting integrated: The process of self-disclosure involves many decisions, including what, when, where, and how to disclose. All these decisions may vary by context, as we follow different patterns of self-disclosure in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.
- The receiver's reaction to and interpretation of self-disclosure are important factors in how the disclosure will affect the relationship.

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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Media Attributions

- 6-4-On

Chapter 8: Communication in Relationships

More than 2,300 years ago, Aristotle wrote about the importance of friendships to society, and other Greek philosophers wrote about emotions and their effects on relationships. Although research on relationships has increased dramatically over the past few decades, the fact that these revered ancient philosophers included them in their writings illustrates the important place interpersonal relationships have in human life. Daniel Perlman and Steve Duck, “The Seven Seas of the Study of Personal Relationships: From ‘The Thousand Islands’ to Interconnected Waterways,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 13. But how do we come to form relationships with friends, family, romantic partners, and coworkers? Why are some of these relationships more exciting, stressful, enduring, or short-lived than others? Are we guided by fate, astrology, luck, personality, or other forces to the people we like and love? We’ll begin to answer those questions in this chapter.

[30]

Foundations of Relationships

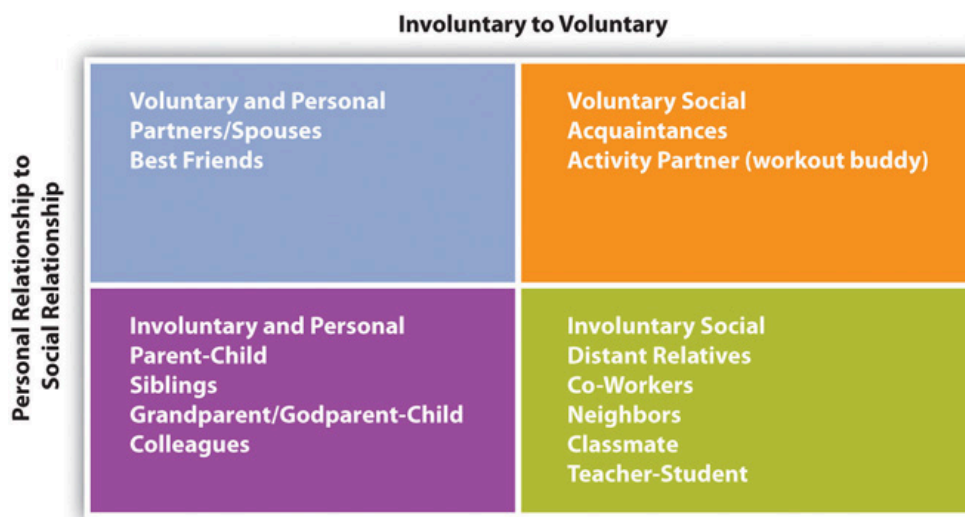
Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Distinguish between personal and social relationships.
2. Describe stages of relational interaction.
3. Discuss social exchange theory.

We can begin to classify key relationships we have by distinguishing between our personal and our social relationships (VanLear, Koerner, & Allen, 2006). Personal relationships meet emotional, relational, and instrumental needs, as they are intimate, close, and interdependent relationships such as those we have with best friends, partners, or immediate family. Social relationships are relationships that occasionally meet our needs and lack the closeness and interdependence of personal relationships. Examples of social relationships include coworkers, distant relatives, and acquaintances. Another distinction useful for categorizing relationships is whether or not they are voluntary. For example, some personal relationships are voluntary, like those with romantic partners, and some are involuntary, like those with close siblings. Likewise, some social relationships are voluntary, like those with acquaintances, and some are involuntary, like those with neighbors or distant relatives. You can see how various relationships fall into each of these dimensions in [Figure 7.1 “Types of Relationships”](#). Now that we have a better understanding of how we define relationships, we’ll examine the stages that most of our relationships go through as they move from formation to termination.

Figure 7.1 Types of Relationships



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

Stages of Relational Interaction

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

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

Table 7.1 Relationship Stages

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

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

Initiating

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

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

Experimenting

The scholars who developed these relational stages have likened the experimenting stage, where people exchange information and often move from strangers to acquaintances, to the “sniffing ritual” of animals (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). A basic exchange of information is typical as the experimenting stage begins. For example, on the first day of class, you may chat with the person sitting beside you and take turns sharing your year in school, hometown, residence hall, and major. Then you may branch out and see if there are any common interests that emerge. Finding out you’re both St. Louis Cardinals fans could then lead to more conversation about baseball and other hobbies or interests; however, sometimes the experiment may fail. If your attempts at information exchange with another person during the experimenting stage are met with silence or hesitation, you may interpret their lack of communication as a sign that you shouldn’t pursue future interaction.

Experimenting continues in established relationships. Small talk, a hallmark of the experimenting stage, is common among young adults catching up with their parents when they return home for a visit or committed couples when they recount their day while preparing dinner. Small talk can be annoying sometimes, especially if you feel like you have to do it out of politeness. I have found, for example, that strangers sometimes feel the need to talk to me at the gym (even when I have ear buds in). Although I’d rather skip the small talk and just work out, I follow social norms of cheerfulness and politeness and engage in small talk. Small talk serves important functions, such as creating a communicative entry point that can lead people to uncover topics of conversation that go beyond the surface level, helping us audition someone to see if we’d like to talk to them further, and generally creating a sense of ease and community with others. And even though small talk isn’t viewed as very substantive, the authors of this model of relationships indicate that most of our relationships do not progress far beyond this point (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009).

Intensifying

As we enter the intensifying stage, we indicate that we would like or are open to more intimacy, and then we wait for a signal of acceptance before we attempt more intimacy. This incremental intensification of intimacy can occur over a period of weeks, months, or years and may involve inviting a new friend to join you at a party, then to your place for dinner, then to go on vacation with you. It would be seen as odd, even if the experimenting stage went well, to invite a person who you’re still getting to know on vacation with you without engaging in some less intimate interaction beforehand. In order to save face and avoid making ourselves overly vulnerable, steady progression is key in this stage. Aside from sharing more intense personal time, requests for and granting favors may also play into intensification of a relationship. For example, one friend helping the other prepare for a big party on their birthday can increase closeness. However, if one person asks for too many favors or fails to

reciprocate favors granted, then the relationship can become unbalanced, which could result in a transition to another stage, such as differentiating.

Other signs of the intensifying stage include creation of nicknames, inside jokes, and personal idioms; increased use of *we* and *our*; increased communication about each other's identities (e.g., "My friends all think you are really laid back and easy to get along with"); and a loosening of typical restrictions on possessions and personal space (e.g., you have a key to your best friend's apartment and can hang out there if your roommate is getting on your nerves). Navigating the changing boundaries between individuals in this stage can be tricky, which can lead to conflict or uncertainty about the relationship's future as new expectations for relationships develop. Successfully managing this increasing closeness can lead to relational integration.

Integrating

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

Bonding

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



The bonding stage eventually leads to the terminating stage for many relationships, as about 50 percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce (Perman, 2011).

[Pixabay](#) – public domain.

Differentiating

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

Circumscribing

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

Stagnating

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

Avoiding

Moving to the avoiding stage may be a way to end the awkwardness that comes with stagnation, as people signal that they want to close down the lines of communication. Communication in the avoiding stage can be very direct—“I don’t want to talk to you anymore”—or more indirect—“I have to meet someone in a little while, so I can’t talk long.” While physical avoidance such as leaving a room or requesting a schedule change at work may help clearly communicate the desire to terminate the relationship, we don’t always have that option. In a parent-child relationship, where the child is still dependent on the parent, or in a roommate situation, where a lease agreement

prevents leaving, people may engage in cognitive dissociation, which means they mentally shut down and ignore the other person even though they are still physically copresent.

Terminating

The terminating stage of a relationship can occur shortly after initiation or after a ten- or twenty-year relational history has been established. Termination can result from outside circumstances such as geographic separation or internal factors such as changing values or personalities that lead to a weakening of the bond. Termination exchanges involve some typical communicative elements and may begin with a summary message that recaps the relationship and provides a reason for the termination (e.g., “We’ve had some ups and downs over our three years together, but I’m getting ready to go to college, and I either want to be with someone who is willing to support me, or I want to be free to explore who I am.”). The summary message may be followed by a distance message that further communicates the relational drift that has occurred (e.g., “We’ve really grown apart over the past year”), which may be followed by a disassociation message that prepares people to be apart by projecting what happens after the relationship ends (e.g., “I know you’ll do fine without me. You can use this time to explore your options and figure out if you want to go to college too or not.”). Finally, there is often a message regarding the possibility for future communication in the relationship (e.g., “I think it would be best if we don’t see each other for the first few months, but text me if you want to.”) (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). These ten stages of relational development provide insight into the complicated processes that affect relational formation and deterioration. We also make decisions about our relationships by weighing costs and rewards.

Social Exchange Theory

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

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

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

Key Takeaways

- Relationships can be easily distinguished into personal or social and voluntary or involuntary.
 - Personal relationships are close, intimate, and interdependent, meeting many of our interpersonal needs.
 - Social relationships meet some interpersonal needs but lack the closeness of personal relationships.
- There are stages of relational interaction in which relationships come together (initiating, experimenting, intensifying,

integrating, and bonding) and come apart (differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating).

- The weighing of costs and rewards in a relationship affects commitment and overall relational satisfaction.

Exercises

1. Review the types of relationships in [Figure 7.1 "Types of Relationships"](#). Name at least one person from your relationships that fits into each quadrant. How does your communication differ between each of these people?
2. Pick a relationship important to you and determine what stage of relational interaction you are currently in with that person. What communicative signals support your determination? What other stages from the ten listed have you experienced with this person?
3. How do you weigh the costs and rewards in your relationships? What are some rewards you are currently receiving from your closest relationships? What are some costs?

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Communication and Friends

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

Do you consider all the people you are “friends” with on Facebook to be friends? What’s the difference, if any, between a “Facebook friend” and a real-world friend? Friendships, like other relationship forms, can be divided into categories. What’s the difference between a best friend, a good friend, and an old friend? What about work friends, school friends, and friends of the family? It’s likely that each of you reading this book has a different way of perceiving and categorizing your friendships. In this section, we will learn about the various ways we classify friends, the life cycle of friendships, and how gender affects friendships.

Defining and Classifying Friends

Friendships are voluntary interpersonal relationships between two people who are usually equals and who mutually influence one another.¹ Friendships are distinct from romantic relationships, family relationships, and acquaintances and are often described as more vulnerable relationships than others due to their voluntary nature, the availability of other friends, and the fact that they lack the social and institutional support of other relationships. The lack of official support for friendships is not universal, though. In rural parts of Thailand, for example, special friendships are recognized by a ceremony in which both parties swear devotion and loyalty to each other (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Even though we do not have a formal ritual to recognize friendship in the United States, in general, research shows that people have three main expectations for close friendships. A friend is someone you can talk to, someone you can depend on for help and emotional support, and someone you can participate in activities and have fun with (Rawlins, 1992).

Although friendships vary across the life span, three types of friendships are common in adulthood: reciprocal, associative, and receptive.² Reciprocal friendships are solid interpersonal relationships between people who are equals with a shared sense of loyalty and commitment. These friendships are likely to develop over time and can withstand external changes such as geographic separation or fluctuations in other commitments such as work and childcare. Reciprocal friendships are what most people would consider the ideal for best friends. Associative

1. William K. Rawlins, *Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1992), 11–12.
2. Adapted from C. Arthur VanLear, Ascan Koerner, and Donna M. Allen, “Relationship Typologies,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 103.

friendships are mutually pleasurable relationships between acquaintances or associates that, although positive, lack the commitment of reciprocal friendships. These friendships are likely to be maintained out of convenience or to meet instrumental goals.



Friendships that are maintained because they are convenient and meet an instrumental need, like having a workout partner, are likely to terminate if they become inconvenient or the need changes.

Marion Doss – [Friends](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

For example, a friendship may develop between two people who work out at the same gym. They may spend time with each other in this setting a few days a week for months or years, but their friendship might end if the gym closes or one person's schedule changes. Receptive friendships include a status differential that makes the relationship asymmetrical. Unlike the other friendship types that are between peers, this relationship is more like that of a supervisor-subordinate or clergy-parishioner. In some cases, like a mentoring relationship, both parties can benefit from the relationship. In other cases, the relationship could quickly sour if the person with more authority begins to abuse it.

A relatively new type of friendship, at least in label, is the “friends with benefits” relationship. Friends with benefits (FWB) relationships have the closeness of a friendship and the sexual activity of a romantic partnership without the expectations of romantic commitment or labels (Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011). FWB relationships are hybrids that combine characteristics of romantic and friend pairings, which produces some unique dynamics. In my conversations with students over the years, we have talked through some of the differences between friends, FWB, and hook-up partners, or what we termed “just benefits.” Hook-up or “just benefits” relationships do not carry the emotional connection typical in a friendship, may occur as one-night-stands or be regular things, and exist solely for the gratification and/or convenience of sexual activity. So why might people choose to have or avoid FWB relationships?

Various research studies have shown that half of the college students who participated have engaged in heterosexual FWB relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2009). Many who engage in FWB relationships have particular views on love and sex—namely, that sex can occur independently of love. Conversely, those who report no FWB relationships often cite religious, moral, or personal reasons for not doing so. Some who have reported FWB relationships note that they value the sexual activity with their friend, and many feel that it actually brings the relationship closer. Despite valuing the sexual activity, they also report fears that it will lead to hurt feelings or the

dissolution of a friendship (Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011). We must also consider gender differences and communication challenges in FWB relationships.

Gender biases must be considered when discussing heterosexual FWB relationships, given that women in most societies are judged more harshly than men for engaging in casual sex. But aside from dealing with the double standard that women face regarding their sexual activity, there aren't many gender differences in how men and women engage in and perceive FWB relationships. So what communicative patterns are unique to the FWB relationship? Those who engage in FWB relationships have some unique communication challenges. For example, they may have difficulty with labels as they figure out whether they are friends, close friends, a little more than friends, and so on. Research participants currently involved in such a relationship reported that they have more commitment to the friendship than the sexual relationship. But does that mean they would give up the sexual aspect of the relationship to save the friendship? The answer is "no" according to the research study. Most participants reported that they would like the relationship to stay the same, followed closely by the hope that it would turn into a full romantic relationship (Lehmiller, VanderDrift, & Kelly, 2011). Just from this study, we can see that there is often a tension between action and labels. In addition, those in a FWB relationship often have to engage in privacy management as they decide who to tell and who not to tell about their relationship, given that some mutual friends are likely to find out and some may be critical of the relationship. Last, they may have to establish ground rules or guidelines for the relationship. Since many FWB relationships are not exclusive, meaning partners are open to having sex with other people, ground rules or guidelines may include discussions of safer-sex practices, disclosure of sexual partners, or periodic testing for sexually transmitted infections.

The Life Span of Friendships

Friendships, like most relationships, have a life span ranging from formation to maintenance to deterioration/dissolution. Friendships have various turning points that affect their trajectory. While there are developmental stages in friendships, they may not be experienced linearly, as friends can cycle through formation, maintenance, and deterioration/dissolution together or separately and may experience stages multiple times. Friendships are also diverse, in that not all friendships develop the same level of closeness, and the level of closeness can fluctuate over the course of a friendship. Changes in closeness can be an expected and accepted part of the cycle of friendships, and less closeness doesn't necessarily lead to less satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2003).

The formation process of friendship development involves two people moving from strangers toward acquaintances and potentially friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Several factors influence the formation of friendships, including environmental, situational, individual, and interactional factors (Fehr, 2000). Environmental factors lead us to have more day-to-day contact with some people over others. For example, residential proximity and sharing a workplace are catalysts for friendship formation. Thinking back to your childhood, you may have had early friendships with people on your block because they were close by and you could spend time together easily without needing transportation. A similar situation may have occurred later if you moved away from home for college and lived in a residence hall.



Many new college students form bonds with people in their residence halls that last through college and beyond.

Mtnbikrrrr – [dorm friends – 1984](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

You may have formed early relationships, perhaps even before classes started, with hall-mates or dorm-mates. I've noticed that many students will continue to associate and maybe even attempt to live close to friends they made in their first residence hall throughout their college years, even as they move residence halls or off campus. We also find friends through the social networks of existing friends and family. Although these people may not live close to us, they are brought into proximity through people we know, which facilitates our ability to spend time with them. Encountering someone due to environmental factors may lead to a friendship if the situational factors are favorable.

The main situational factor that may facilitate or impede friendship formation is availability. Initially, we are more likely to be interested in a friendship if we anticipate that we'll be able to interact with the other person again in the future without expending more effort than our schedule and other obligations will allow. In order for a friendship to take off, both parties need resources such as time and energy to put into it. Hectic work schedules, family obligations, or personal stresses such as financial problems or family or relational conflict may impair someone's ability to nurture a friendship.

The number of friends we have at any given point is a situational factor that also affects whether or not we are actually looking to add new friends. I have experienced this fluctuation. Since I stayed in the same city for my bachelor's and master's degrees, I had forged many important friendships over those seven years. In the last year of my master's program, I was immersed in my own classes and jobs as a residence hall director and teaching assistant. I was also preparing to move within the year to pursue my doctorate. I recall telling a friend of many years that I was no longer "accepting applications" for new friends. Although I was half-joking, this example illustrates the importance of environmental and situational factors. Not only was I busier than I had ever been; I was planning on moving and therefore knew it wouldn't be easy to continue investing in any friendships I made in my final year. Instead, I focused on the friendships I already had and attended to my other personal obligations. Of course, when I moved to a new city a few months later, I was once again "accepting applications," because I had lost the important physical proximity to all my previous friends. Environmental and situational factors that relate to friendship formation point to the fact that convenience plays a large role in determining whether a relationship will progress or not.

While contact and availability may initiate communication with a potential friend, individual and interactional factors are also important. We are more likely to develop friendships with individuals we deem physically

attractive, socially competent, and responsive to our needs (Fehr, 2000). Specifically, we are more attracted to people we deem similar to or slightly above us in terms of attractiveness and competence. Although physical attractiveness is more important in romantic relationships, research shows that we evaluate attractive people more positively, which may influence our willingness to invest more in a friendship. Friendships also tend to form between people with similar demographic characteristics such as race, gender, age, and class, and similar personal characteristics like interests and values. Being socially competent and responsive in terms of empathy, emotion management, conflict management, and self-disclosure also contribute to the likelihood of friendship development.

If a friendship is established in the formation phase, then the new friends will need to maintain their relationship. The maintenance phase includes the most variation in terms of the processes that take place, the commitment to maintenance from each party, and the length of time of the phase (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). In short, some friendships require more maintenance in terms of shared time together and emotional support than other friendships that can be maintained with only occasional contact. Maintenance is important, because friendships provide important opportunities for social support that take the place of or supplement family and romantic relationships. Sometimes, we may feel more comfortable being open with a friend about something than we would with a family member or romantic partner. Most people expect that friends will be there for them when needed, which is the basis of friendship maintenance. As with other relationships, tasks that help maintain friendships range from being there in a crisis to seemingly mundane day-to-day activities and interactions.

Failure to perform or respond to friendship-maintenance tasks can lead to the deterioration and eventual dissolution of friendships. Causes of dissolution may be voluntary (termination due to conflict), involuntary (death of friendship partner), external (increased family or work commitments), or internal (decreased liking due to perceived lack of support) (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). While there are often multiple, interconnecting causes that result in friendship dissolution, there are three primary sources of conflict in a friendship that stem from internal/interpersonal causes and may lead to voluntary dissolution: sexual interference, failure to support, and betrayal of trust (Fehr, 2000). Sexual interference generally involves a friend engaging with another friend's romantic partner or romantic interest and can lead to feelings of betrayal, jealousy, and anger. Failure to support may entail a friend not coming to another's aid or defense when criticized. Betrayal of trust can stem from failure to secure private information by telling a secret or disclosing personal information without permission. While these three internal factors may initiate conflict in a friendship, discovery of unfavorable personal traits can also lead to problems.

Have you ever started investing in a friendship only to find out later that the person has some character flaws that you didn't notice before? As was mentioned earlier, we are more likely to befriend someone whose personal qualities we find attractive. However, we may not get to experience the person in a variety of contexts and circumstances before we invest in the friendship. We may later find out that our easygoing friend becomes really possessive once we start a romantic relationship and spend less time with him. Or we may find that our happy-go-lucky friend gets moody and irritable when she doesn't get her way. These individual factors become interactional when our newly realized dissimilarity affects our communication. It is logical that as our liking decreases, as a result of personal reassessment of the friendship, we will engage in less friendship-maintenance tasks such as self-disclosure and supportive communication. In fact, research shows that the main termination strategy employed to end a friendship is avoidance. As we withdraw from the relationship, the friendship fades away and may eventually disappear, which is distinct from romantic relationships, which usually have an official "breakup." Aside from changes based on personal characteristics discovered through communication, changes in the external factors that help form friendships can also lead to their dissolution.

The main change in environmental factors that can lead to friendship dissolution is a loss of proximity, which may entail a large or small geographic move or school or job change. The two main situational changes that affect friendships are schedule changes and changes in romantic relationships. Even without a change in environment, someone's job or family responsibilities may increase, limiting the amount of time one has to invest in friendships. Additionally, becoming invested in a romantic relationship may take away from time previously allocated to friends. For environmental and situational changes, the friendship itself is not the cause of the dissolution. These external factors are sometimes difficult if not impossible to control, and lost or faded friendships are a big part of everyone's relational history.

Friendships across the Life Span

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

Adolescence

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

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



Friendships in adolescence become important as we begin to create an identity that is separate from our family.

Japharl – [Family](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

(Collins & Madsen, 2006). The transition to college marks a move from adolescence to early adulthood and opens new opportunities for friendship and challenges in dealing with the separation from hometown friends.

Early Adulthood

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

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

Adulthood

Adult friendships span a larger period of time than the previous life stages discussed, as adulthood encompasses the period from thirty to sixty-five years old (Rawlins, 1992). The exploration that occurs for most middle-class people in early adulthood gives way to less opportunity for friendships in adulthood, as many in this period settle into careers, nourish long-term relationships, and have children of their own. These new aspects of life bring more time constraints and interpersonal and task obligations, and with these obligations comes an increased desire for stability and continuity. Adult friendships tend to occur between people who are similar in terms of career position, race, age, partner status, class, and education level. This is partly due to the narrowed social networks people join as they become more educated and attain higher career positions. Therefore, finding friends through religious affiliation, neighborhood, work, or civic engagement is likely to result in similarity between friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992).

Even as social networks narrow, adults are also more likely than young adults to rely on their friends to help them process thoughts and emotions related to their partnerships or other interpersonal relationships (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). For example, a person may rely on a romantic partner to help process through work relationships and close coworkers to help process through family relationships. Work life and home life become connected in important ways, as career (money making) intersects with and supports the desires for stability (home making) (Rawlins, 1992). Since home and career are primary focuses, socializing outside of those areas may be limited to interactions with family (parents, siblings, and in-laws) if they are geographically close. In situations where family isn't close by, adults' close or best friends may adopt kinship roles, and a child may call a parent's close friend "Uncle Andy" even if they are not related. Spouses or partners are expected to be friends; it is often expressed that the best partner is one who can also serve as best friend, and having a partner as a best friend can be convenient if time outside the home is limited by parental responsibilities. There is not much research on friendships in late middle age (ages fifty to sixty-five), but it has been noted that relationships with partners may become even more important during this time, as parenting responsibilities diminish with grown children and careers and finances stabilize. Partners who have successfully navigated their middle age may feel a bonding sense of accomplishment with each other and with any close friends with whom they shared these experiences (Rawlins, 1992).

Later Life

Friendships in later-life adulthood, which begins in one's sixties, are often remnants of previous friends and friendship patterns. Those who have typically had a gregarious social life will continue to associate with friends

if physically and mentally able, and those who relied primarily on a partner, family, or limited close friends will have more limited, but perhaps equally rewarding, interactions. Friendships that have extended from adulthood or earlier are often “old” or “best” friendships that offer a look into a dyad’s shared past. Given that geographic relocation is common in early adulthood, these friends may be physically distant, but if investment in occasional contact or visits preserved the friendship, these friends are likely able to pick up where they left off (Rawlins, 1992). However, biological aging and the social stereotypes and stigma associated with later life and aging begin to affect communication patterns.



Although stereotypes of the elderly often present them as slow or out of touch, many people in later life enjoy the company of friends and maintain active social lives.

Felipe Neves – [3 old friends](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

Friendships in later life provide emotional support that is often only applicable during this life stage. For example, given the general stigma against aging and illness, friends may be able to shield each other from negative judgments from others and help each other maintain a positive self-concept (Rawlins, 1992). Friends can also be instrumental in providing support after the death of a partner. Men, especially, may need this type of support, as men are more likely than women to consider their spouse their sole confidante, which means the death of the wife may end a later-life man’s most important friendship. Women who lose a partner also go through considerable life changes, and in general more women are left single after the death of a spouse than men due to men’s shorter life span and the tendency for men to be a few years older than their wives. Given this fact, it is not surprising

that widows in particular may turn to other single women for support. Overall, providing support in later life is important given the likelihood of declining health. In the case of declining health, some may turn to family instead of friends for support to avoid overburdening friends with requests for assistance. However, turning to a friend for support is not completely burdensome, as research shows that feeling needed helps older people maintain a positive well-being (Rawlins, 1992).

Gender and Friendship

Gender influences our friendships and has received much attention, as people try to figure out how different men and women's friendships are. There is a conception that men's friendships are less intimate than women's based on the stereotype that men do not express emotions. In fact, men report a similar amount of intimacy in their friendships as women but are less likely than women to explicitly express affection verbally (e.g., saying "I love you") and nonverbally (e.g., through touching or embracing) toward their same-gender friends (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). This is not surprising, given the societal taboos against same-gender expressions of affection, especially between men, even though an increasing number of men are more comfortable expressing affection toward other men and women. However, researchers have wondered if men communicate affection in more implicit ways that are still understood by the other friend. Men may use shared activities as a way to express closeness—for example, by doing favors for each other, engaging in friendly competition, joking, sharing resources, or teaching each other new skills (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Some scholars have argued that there is a bias toward viewing intimacy as feminine, which may have skewed research on men's friendships. While verbal expressions of intimacy through self-disclosure have been noted as important features of women's friendships, activity sharing has been the focus in men's friendships. This research doesn't argue that one gender's friendships are better than the other's, and it concludes that the differences shown in the research regarding expressions of intimacy are not large enough to impact the actual practice of friendships (Monsour, 2006).

Cross-gender friendships are friendships between a male and a female. These friendships diminish in late childhood and early adolescence as boys and girls segregate into separate groups for many activities and socializing, reemerge as possibilities in late adolescence, and reach a peak potential in the college years of early adulthood. Later, adults with spouses or partners are less likely to have cross-sex friendships than single people (Rawlins, 1992). In any case, research studies have identified several positive outcomes of cross-gender friendships. Men and women report that they get a richer understanding of how the other gender thinks and feels (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009). It seems these friendships fulfill interaction needs not as commonly met in same-gender friendships. For example, men reported more than women that they rely on their cross-gender friendships for emotional support (Bleiszner & Adams, 1992). Similarly, women reported that they enjoyed the activity-oriented friendships they had with men (Halatsis & Christakis, 2009).

As discussed earlier regarding friends-with-benefits relationships, sexual attraction presents a challenge in cross-gender heterosexual friendships. Even if the friendship does not include sexual feelings or actions, outsiders may view the relationship as sexual or even encourage the friends to become "more than friends." Aside from the pressures that come with sexual involvement or tension, the exaggerated perceptions of differences between men and women can hinder cross-gender friendships. However, if it were true that men and women are too different to understand each other or be friends, then how could any long-term partnership such as husband/wife, mother/son, father/daughter, or brother/sister be successful or enjoyable?

Key Takeaways

- Friendships are voluntary interpersonal relationships between two people who are usually equals and who mutually influence one another.
- Friendship formation, maintenance, and deterioration/dissolution are influenced by environmental, situational, and interpersonal factors.
- Friendships change throughout our lives as we transition from adolescence to adulthood to later life.
- Cross-gender friendships may offer perspective into gender relationships that same-gender friendships do not, as both men and women report that they get support or enjoyment from their cross-gender friendships. However, there is a potential for sexual tension that complicates these relationships.

Exercises

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel like you could "accept applications" for new friends or were more eager than normal to "accept applications" for new friends? What were the environmental or situational factors that led to this situation?
2. Getting integrated: Review the types of friendships (reciprocal, associative, and receptive). Which of these types of friendships do you have more of in academic contexts and why? Answer the same question for professional contexts and personal contexts.
3. Of the life stages discussed in this chapter, which one are you currently in? How do your friendships match up with the book's description of friendships at this stage? From your experience, do friendships change between stages the way the book says they do? Why or why not?

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Communication and Families

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Defining Family

Who do you consider part of your family? Many people would initially name people who they are related to by blood. You may also name a person with whom you are in a committed relationship—a partner or spouse. But some people have a person not related by blood that they might refer to as *aunt* or *uncle* or even as a brother or sister. We can see from these examples that it's not simple to define a family.

The definitions people ascribe to families usually fall into at least one of the following categories: structural definitions, task-orientation definitions, and transactional definitions (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Structural definitions of family focus on form, criteria for membership, and often hierarchy of family members. One example of a structural definition of family is two or more people who live together and are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. From this definition, a father and son, two cousins, or a brother and sister could be considered a family if they live together. However, a single person living alone or with nonrelated friends, or a couple who chooses not to or are not legally able to marry would not be considered a family. These definitions rely on external, “objective” criteria for determining who is in a family and who is not, which makes the definitions useful for groups like the US Census Bureau, lawmakers, and other researchers who need to define family for large-scale data collection. The simplicity and time-saving positives of these definitions are countered by the fact that many family types are left out in general structural definitions; however, more specific structural definitions have emerged in recent years that include more family forms.

Family of origin refers to relatives connected by blood or other traditional legal bonds such as marriage or adoption and includes parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. Family of orientation refers to people who share the same household and are connected by blood, legal bond, or who act/live as if they are connected by either (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Unlike family of origin, this definition is limited to people who share the same household and represents the family makeup we choose. For example, most young people don't

get to choose who they live with, but as we get older, we choose our spouse or partner or may choose to have or adopt children.

There are several subdefinitions of families of orientation (Segrin & Flora, 2005). A nuclear family includes two heterosexual married parents and one or more children. While this type of family has received a lot of political and social attention, some scholars argue that it was only dominant as a family form for a brief part of human history (Peterson & Steinmetz, 1999). A binuclear family is a nuclear family that was split by divorce into two separate households, one headed by the mother and one by the father, with the original children from the family residing in each home for periods of time. A single-parent family includes a mother or father who may or may not have been previously married with one or more children. A stepfamily includes a heterosexual couple that lives together with children from a previous relationship. A cohabitating family includes a heterosexual couple who lives together in a committed relationship but does not have a legal bond such as marriage. Similarly, a gay or lesbian family includes a couple of the same gender who live together in a committed relationship and may or may not have a legal bond such as marriage, a civil union, or a domestic partnership. Cohabitating families and gay or lesbian families may or may not have children.

Is it more important that the structure of a family matches a definition, or should we define family based on the behavior of people or the quality of their interpersonal interactions? Unlike structural definitions of family, functional definitions focus on tasks or interaction within the family unit. Task-orientation definitions of family recognize that behaviors like emotional and financial support are more important interpersonal indicators of a family-like connection than biology. In short, anyone who fulfills the typical tasks present in families is considered family. For example, in some cases, custody of children has been awarded to a person not biologically related to a child over a living blood relative because that person acted more like a family member to the child. The most common family tasks include nurturing and socializing other family members. Nurturing family members entails providing basic care and support, both emotional and financial. Socializing family members refers to teaching young children how to speak, read, and practice social skills.

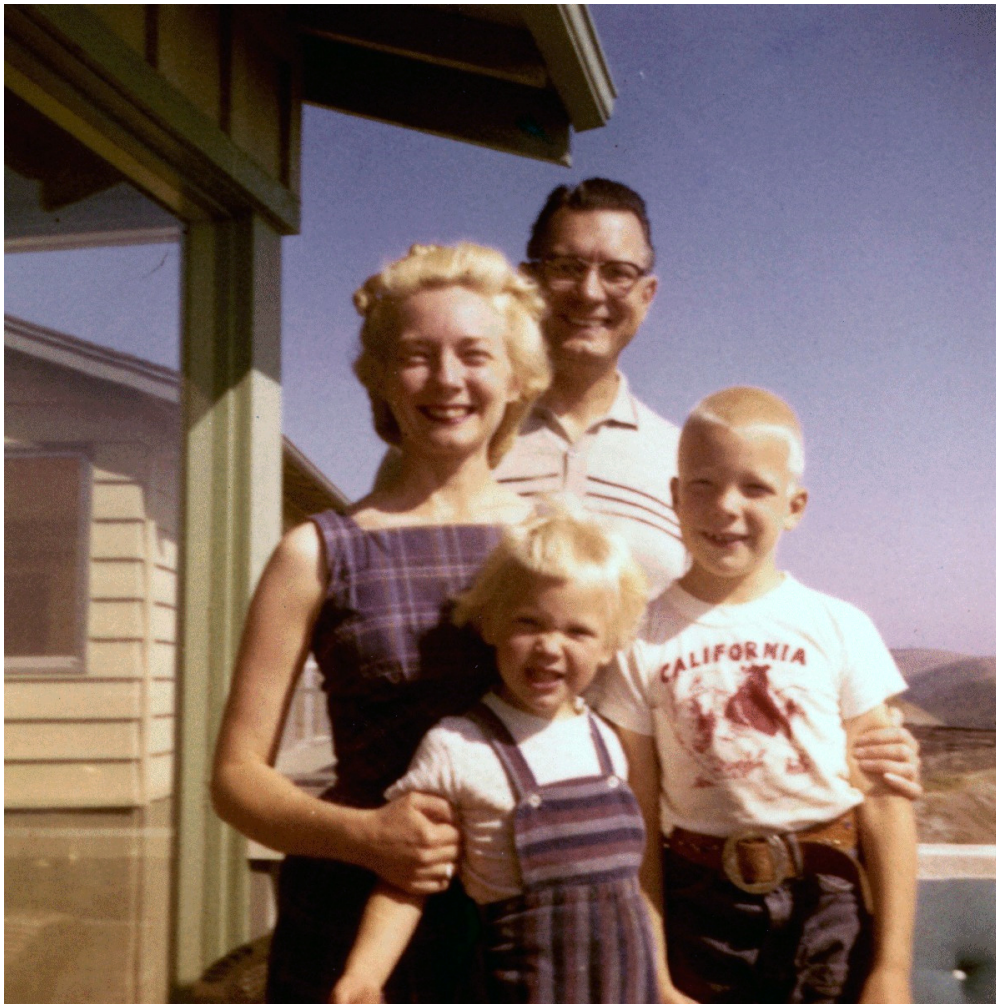
Transactional definitions of family focus on communication and subjective feelings of connection. While task-orientation definitions convey the importance of providing for family members, transactional definitions are concerned with the quality of interaction among family members. Specifically, transactional definitions stress that the creation of a sense of home, group identity, loyalty, and a shared past and future makes up a family. Isn't it true that someone could provide food, shelter, and transportation to school for a child but not create a sense of home? Even though there is no one, all-encompassing definition of *family*, perhaps this is for the best. Given that family is a combination of structural, functional, and communicative elements, it warrants multiple definitions to capture that complexity.

Family Communication Processes

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

Family Interaction Rituals

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



The nuclear family was the subject of many television shows in the 1950s that popularized the idea of family time.

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While family rituals and routines can definitely be fun and entertaining bonding experiences, they can also bring about interpersonal conflict and strife. Just think about Clark W. Griswold's string of well-intentioned but misguided attempts to manufacture family fun in the *National Lampoon's Vacation* series.

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

Family traditions are more formal, occur less frequently than patterned interactions, vary widely from family to family, and include birthdays, family reunions, and family vacations. Birthday traditions may involve a trip to a favorite restaurant, baking a cake, or hanging streamers. Family reunions may involve making t-shirts for the group or counting up the collective age of everyone present. Family road trips may involve predictable conflict between siblings or playing car games like "I spy" or trying to find the most number of license plates from different states.

Last, family celebrations are also formal, have more standardization between families, may be culturally specific, help transmit values and memories through generations, and include rites of passage and religious and secular

holiday celebrations. Thanksgiving, for example, is formalized by a national holiday and is celebrated in similar ways by many families in the United States. Rites of passage mark life-cycle transitions such as graduations, weddings, quinceañeras, or bar mitzvahs. While graduations are secular and may vary in terms of how they are celebrated, quinceañeras have cultural roots in Latin America, and bar mitzvahs are a long-established religious rite of passage in the Jewish faith.

Conversation and Conformity Orientations

The amount, breadth, and depth of conversation between family members varies from family to family. Additionally, some families encourage self-exploration and freedom, while others expect family unity and control. This variation can be better understood by examining two key factors that influence family communication: conversation orientation and conformity orientation (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A given family can be higher or lower on either dimension, and how a family rates on each of these dimensions can be used to determine a family type.

To determine conversation orientation, we determine to what degree a family encourages members to interact and communicate (converse) about various topics. Members within a family with a high conversation orientation communicate with each other freely and frequently about activities, thoughts, and feelings. This unrestricted communication style leads to all members, including children, participating in family decisions. Parents in high-conversation-orientation families believe that communicating with their children openly and frequently leads to a more rewarding family life and helps to educate and socialize children, preparing them for interactions outside the family. Members of a family with a low conversation orientation do not interact with each other as often, and topics of conversation are more restricted, as some thoughts are considered private. For example, not everyone's input may be sought for decisions that affect everyone in the family, and open and frequent communication is not deemed important for family functioning or for a child's socialization.

Conformity orientation is determined by the degree to which a family communication climate encourages conformity and agreement regarding beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A family with a high conformity orientation fosters a climate of uniformity, and parents decide guidelines for what to conform to. Children are expected to be obedient, and conflict is often avoided to protect family harmony. This more traditional family model stresses interdependence among family members, which means space, money, and time are shared among immediate family, and family relationships take precedent over those outside the family. A family with a low conformity orientation encourages diversity of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors and assertion of individuality. Relationships outside the family are seen as important parts of growth and socialization, as they teach lessons about and build confidence for independence. Members of these families also value personal time and space.

"Getting Real"

Family Therapists

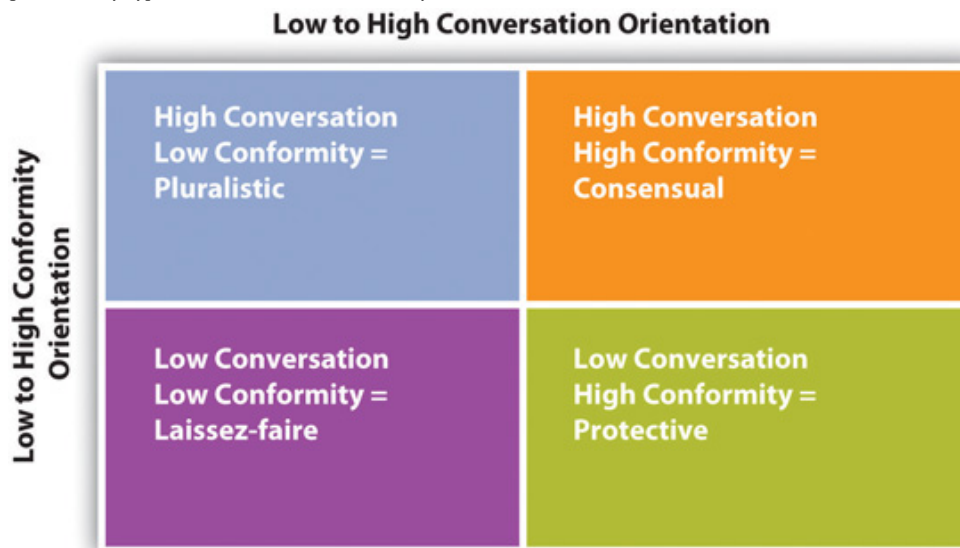
Family therapists provide counseling to parents, children, romantic partners, and other members of family units (Career Cruising, 2011). People may seek out a family therapist to deal with difficult past experiences or current problems such as family conflict, emotional processing related to grief or trauma, marriage/relationship stresses, children's behavioral concerns, and so on. Family therapists are trained to assess the systems of interaction within a family through counseling sessions that may be one-on-one or with other family members present. The therapist then evaluates how a family's patterns are affecting the individuals within the family. Whether through social services or private practice, family therapy is usually short term. Once the assessment and evaluation is complete, goals are established and sessions are scheduled to track the progress toward completion. The demand for family therapists remains strong, as people's lives grow more complex, careers take people away from support networks such as family and friends, and economic hardships affect interpersonal relationships. Family therapists usually have bachelor's and master's degrees and must obtain a license to practice in their state. More information about family and marriage therapists can be found through their professional organization, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, at <http://www.aamft.org>.

1. List some issues within a family that you think should be addressed through formal therapy. List some issues within a family that you think should be addressed directly with/by family members. What is the line that distinguishes between these two levels?
2. Based on what you've read in this book so far, what communication skills do you think would be most beneficial for a family

therapist to possess and why?

Determining where your family falls on the conversation and conformity dimensions is more instructive when you know the family types that result, which are consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire (see [Figure 7.2 “Family Types Based on Conflict and Conformity Orientations”](#)) (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A consensual family is high in both conversation and conformity orientations, and they encourage open communication but also want to maintain the hierarchy within the family that puts parents above children. This creates some tension between a desire for both openness and control. Parents may reconcile this tension by hearing their children’s opinions, making the ultimate decision themselves, and then explaining why they made the decision they did. A pluralistic family is high in conversation orientation and low in conformity. Open discussion is encouraged for all family members, and parents do not strive to control their children’s or each other’s behaviors or decisions. Instead, they value the life lessons that a family member can learn by spending time with non-family members or engaging in self-exploration. A protective family is low in conversation orientation and high in conformity, expects children to be obedient to parents, and does not value open communication. Parents make the ultimate decisions and may or may not feel the need to share their reasoning with their children. If a child questions a decision, a parent may simply respond with “Because I said so.” A laissez-faire family is low in conversation and conformity orientations, has infrequent and/or short interactions, and doesn’t discuss many topics. Remember that pluralistic families also have a low conformity orientation, which means they encourage children to make their own decisions in order to promote personal exploration and growth. Laissez-faire families are different in that parents don’t have an investment in their children’s decision making, and in general, members in this type of family are “emotionally divorced” from each other (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Figure 7.2 Family Types Based on Conflict and Conformity Orientations



Key Takeaways

- There are many ways to define a family.
 - Structural definitions focus on form of families and have narrow criteria for membership.
 - Task-orientation definitions focus on behaviors like financial and emotional support.
 - Transactional definitions focus on the creation of subjective feelings of home, group identity, and a shared history and future.

- Family rituals include patterned interactions like a nightly dinner or bedtime ritual, family traditions like birthdays and vacations, and family celebrations like holidays and weddings.
- **Conversation and conformity orientations play a role in the creation of family climates.**
 - *Conversation orientation* refers to the degree to which family members interact and communicate about various topics.
 - *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 laissez-faire.

Exercises

1. Of the three types of definitions for families (structural, task-orientation, or transactional), which is most important to you and why?
2. Identify and describe a ritual you have experienced for each of the following: patterned family interaction, family tradition, and family celebration. How did each of those come to be a ritual in your family?
3. Think of your own family and identify where you would fall on the conversation and conformity orientations. Provide at least one piece of evidence to support your decision.

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Romantic Relationships

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

Romance has swept humans off their feet for hundreds of years, as is evidenced by countless odes written by love-struck poets, romance novels, and reality television shows like *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*. Whether pining for love in the pages of a diary or trying to find a soul mate from a cast of suitors, love and romance can seem to take us over at times. As we have learned, communication is the primary means by which we communicate emotion, and it is how we form, maintain, and end our relationships. In this section, we will explore the communicative aspects of romantic relationships including love, sex, social networks, and cultural influences.

Relationship Formation and Maintenance

Much of the research on romantic relationships distinguishes between premarital and marital couples. However, given the changes in marriage and the diversification of recognized ways to couple, I will use the following distinctions: dating, cohabitating, and partnered couples. The category for dating couples encompasses the courtship period, which may range from a first date through several years. Once a couple moves in together, they fit into the category of cohabitating couple. Partnered couples take additional steps to verbally, ceremonially, or legally claim their intentions to be together in a long-term committed relationship. The romantic relationships people have before they become partnered provide important foundations for later relationships. But how do we choose our romantic partners, and what communication patterns affect how these relationships come together and apart?

Family background, values, physical attractiveness, and communication styles are just some of the factors that influence our selection of romantic relationships (Segrin & Flora, 2005). Attachment theory, as discussed earlier, relates to the bond that a child feels with their primary caregiver. Research has shown that the attachment style (secure, anxious, or avoidant) formed as a child influences adult romantic relationships. Other research shows that adolescents who feel like they have a reliable relationship with their parents feel more connection and attraction in their adult romantic relationships (Seiffge-Krenke, Shulman, & Kiessinger, 2001). Aside from attachment, which stems more from individual experiences as a child, relationship values, which stem more from societal expectations and norms, also affect romantic attraction.

We can see the important influence that communication has on the way we perceive relationships by examining the ways in which relational values have changed over recent decades. Over the course of the twentieth century, for example, the preference for chastity as a valued part of relationship selection decreased significantly. While

people used to indicate that it was very important that the person they partner with not have had any previous sexual partners, today people list several characteristics they view as more important in mate selection (Segrin & Flora, 2005). In addition, characteristics like income and cooking/housekeeping skills were once more highly rated as qualities in a potential mate. Today, mutual attraction and love are the top mate-selection values.

In terms of mutual attraction, over the past sixty years, men and women have more frequently reported that physical attraction is an important aspect of mate selection. But what characteristics lead to physical attraction? Despite the saying that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” there is much research that indicates body and facial symmetry are the universal basics of judging attractiveness. Further, the matching hypothesis states that people with similar levels of attractiveness will pair together despite the fact that people may idealize fitness models or celebrities who appear very attractive (Walster et al., 1966). However, judgments of attractiveness are also communicative and not just physical. Other research has shown that verbal and nonverbal expressiveness are judged as attractive, meaning that a person’s ability to communicate in an engaging and dynamic way may be able to supplement for some lack of physical attractiveness. In order for a relationship to be successful, the people in it must be able to function with each other on a day-to-day basis, once the initial attraction stage is over. Similarity in preferences for fun activities and hobbies like attending sports and cultural events, relaxation, television and movie tastes, and socializing were correlated to more loving and well-maintained relationships. Similarity in role preference means that couples agree whether one or the other or both of them should engage in activities like indoor and outdoor housekeeping, cooking, and handling the finances and shopping. Couples who were not similar in these areas reported more conflict in their relationship (Segrin & Flora, 2005).

“Getting Critical”

Arranged Marriages

Although romantic love is considered a precursor to marriage in Western societies, this is not the case in other cultures. As was noted earlier, mutual attraction and love are the most important factors in mate selection in research conducted in the United States. In some other countries, like China, India, and Iran, mate selection is primarily decided by family members and may be based on the evaluation of a potential partner’s health, financial assets, social status, or family connections. In some cases, families make financial arrangements to ensure the marriage takes place. Research on marital satisfaction of people in autonomous (self-chosen) marriages and arranged marriages has been mixed, but a recent study found that there was no significant difference in marital satisfaction between individuals in marriages of choice in the United States and those in arranged marriages in India (Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). While many people undoubtedly question whether a person can be happy in an arranged marriage, in more collectivistic (group-oriented) societies, accommodating family wishes may be more important than individual preferences. Rather than love leading up to a marriage, love is expected to grow as partners learn more about each other and adjust to their new lives together once married.

1. Do you think arranged marriages are ethical? Why or why not?
2. Try to step back and view both types of marriages from an outsider’s perspective. The differences between the two types of marriage are fairly clear, but in what ways are marriages of choice and arranged marriages similar?
3. List potential benefits and drawbacks of marriages of choice and arranged marriages.

Love and Sexuality in Romantic Relationships

When most of us think of romantic relationships, we think about love. However, love did not need to be a part of a relationship for it to lead to marriage until recently. In fact, marriages in some cultures are still arranged based on pedigree (family history) or potential gain in money or power for the couple’s families. Today, love often doesn’t lead directly to a partnership, given that most people don’t partner with their first love. Love, like all emotions, varies in intensity and is an important part of our interpersonal communication.

To better understand love, we can make a distinction between passionate love and companionate love (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000). Passionate love entails an emotionally charged engagement between two people that can be both exhilarating and painful. For example, the thrill of falling for someone can be exhilarating, but feelings of vulnerability or anxiety that the love may not be reciprocated can be painful. Companionate love is affection felt between two people whose lives are interdependent. For example, romantic partners may come to find a stable and consistent love in their shared time and activities together. The main idea behind this distinction is that relationships that are based primarily on passionate love will terminate unless the passion cools overtime into a more enduring and stable companionate love. This doesn’t mean that passion must completely die out for a

relationship to be successful long term. In fact, a lack of passion could lead to boredom or dissatisfaction. Instead, many people enjoy the thrill of occasional passion in their relationship but may take solace in the security of a love that is more stable. While companionate love can also exist in close relationships with friends and family members, passionate love is often tied to sexuality present in romantic relationships.

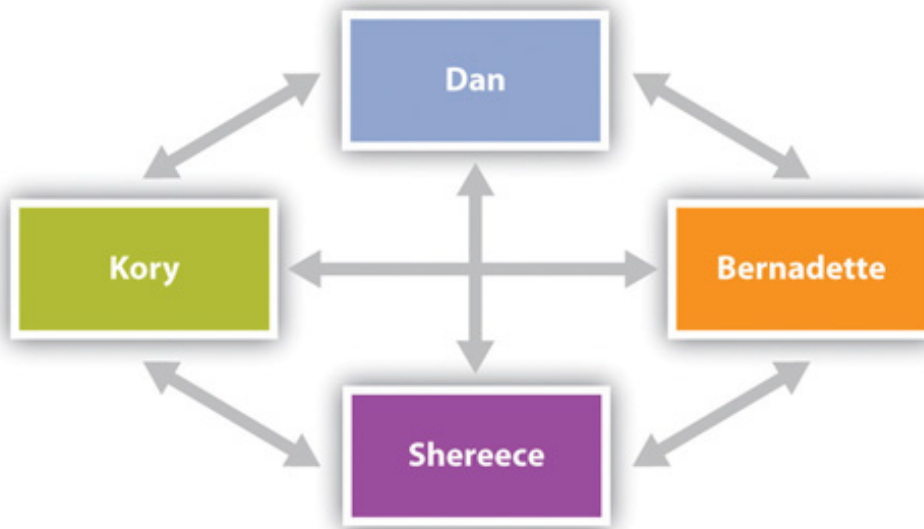
There are many ways in which sexuality relates to romantic relationships and many opinions about the role that sexuality should play in relationships, but this discussion focuses on the role of sexuality in attraction and relational satisfaction. Compatibility in terms of sexual history and attitudes toward sexuality are more important predictors of relationship formation. For example, if a person finds out that a romantic interest has had a more extensive sexual history than their own, they may not feel compatible, which could lessen attraction (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). Once together, considerable research suggests that a couple's sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction are linked such that sexually satisfied individuals report a higher quality relationship, including more love for their partner and more security in the future success of their relationship (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). While sexual activity often strengthens emotional bonds between romantic couples, it is clear that romantic emotional bonds can form in the absence of sexual activity and sexual activity is not the sole predictor of relational satisfaction. In fact, sexual communication may play just as important a role as sexual activity. Sexual communication deals with the initiation or refusal of sexual activity and communication about sexual likes and dislikes (Sprecher & Regan, 2000). For example, a sexual communication could involve a couple discussing a decision to abstain from sexual activity until a certain level of closeness or relational milestone (like marriage) has been reached. Sexual communication could also involve talking about sexual likes and dislikes. Sexual conflict can result when couples disagree over frequency or type of sexual activities. Sexual conflict can also result from jealousy if one person believes their partner is focusing sexual thoughts or activities outside of the relationship. While we will discuss jealousy and cheating more in the section on the dark side of relationships, it is clear that love and sexuality play important roles in our romantic relationships.

Romantic Relationships and Social Networks

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

Network overlap refers to the number of shared associations, including friends and family, that a couple has (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). For example, if Dan and Shereece are both close with Dan's sister Bernadette, and all three of them are friends with Kory, then those relationships completely overlap (see [Figure 7.3 "Social Network Overlap"](#)).

Figure 7.3 Social Network Overlap



Network overlap creates some structural and interpersonal elements that affect relational outcomes. Friends and family who are invested in both relational partners may be more likely to support the couple when one or both parties need it. In general, having more points of connection to provide instrumental support through the granting of favors or emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help a couple manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000).

In addition to providing a supporting structure, shared associations can also help create and sustain a positive relational culture. For example, mutual friends of a couple may validate the relationship by discussing the partners as a “couple” or “pair” and communicate their approval of the relationship to the couple separately or together, which creates and maintains a connection (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). Being in the company of mutual friends also creates positive feelings between the couple, as their attention is taken away from the mundane tasks of work and family life. Imagine Dan and Shereece host a board-game night with a few mutual friends in which Dan wows the crowd with charades, and Kory says to Shereece, “Wow, he’s really on tonight. It’s so fun to hang out with you two.” That comment may refocus attention onto the mutually attractive qualities of the pair and validate their continued interdependence.

“Getting Plugged In”

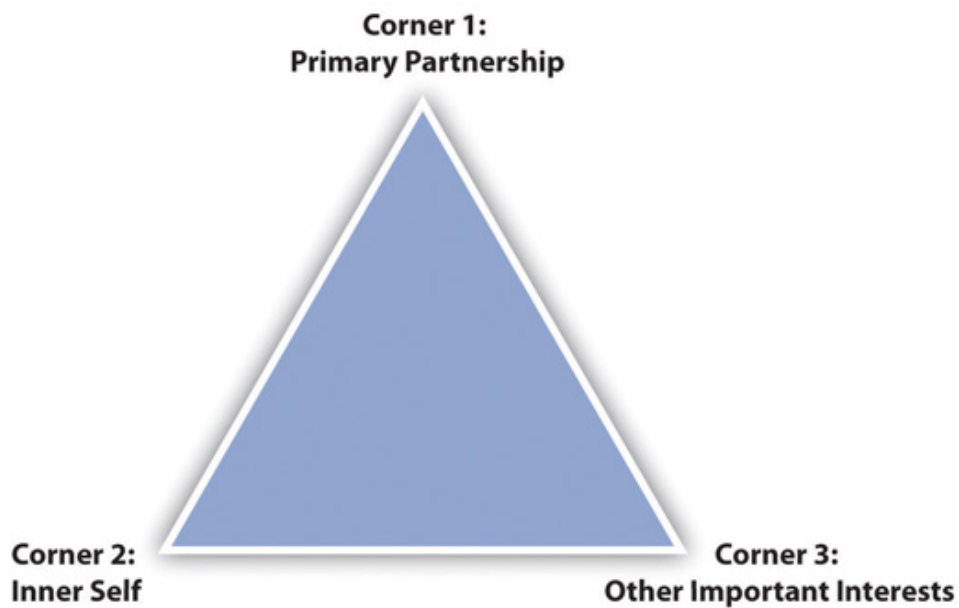
Online Dating

It is becoming more common for people to initiate romantic relationships through the Internet, and online dating sites are big business, bringing in \$470 million a year (Madden & Lenhart, 2006). Whether it’s through sites like Match.com or OkCupid.com or through chat rooms or social networking, people are taking advantage of some of the conveniences of online dating. But what are the drawbacks?

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online dating?
2. What advice would you give a friend who is considering using online dating to help him or her be a more competent communicator?

Interdependence and relationship networks can also be illustrated through the theory of triangles (see [Figure 7.4 “Theory of Triangles”](#)), which examines the relationship between three domains of activity: the primary partnership (corner 1), the inner self (corner 2), and important outside interests (corner 3) (Marks, 1986).

Figure 7.4 Theory of Triangles



All of the corners interact with each other, but it is the third corner that connects the primary partnership to an extended network. For example, the inner self (corner 2) is enriched by the primary partnership (corner 1) but also gains from associations that provide support or a chance for shared activities or recreation (corner 3) that help affirm a person's self-concept or identity. Additionally, the primary partnership (corner 1) is enriched by the third-corner associations that may fill gaps not met by the partnership. When those gaps are filled, a partner may be less likely to focus on what they're missing in their primary relationship. However, the third corner can also produce tension in a relationship if, for example, the other person in a primary partnership feels like they are competing with their partner's third-corner relationships. During times of conflict, one or both partners may increase their involvement in their third corner, which may have positive or negative effects. A strong romantic relationship is good, but research shows that even when couples are happily married they reported loneliness if they were not connected to friends. While the dynamics among the three corners change throughout a relationship, they are all important.

Key Takeaways

- Romantic relationships include dating, cohabitating, and partnered couples.
- Family background, values, physical attractiveness, and communication styles influence our attraction to and selection of romantic partners.
- Passionate, companionate, and romantic love and sexuality influence relationships.
- Network overlap is an important predictor of relational satisfaction and success.

Exercises

1. In terms of romantic attraction, which adage do you think is more true and why? "Birds of a feather flock together" or "Opposites attract."
2. List some examples of how you see passionate and companionate love play out in television shows or movies. Do you think this is an accurate portrayal of how love is experienced in romantic relationships? Why or why not?
3. Social network overlap affects a romantic relationship in many ways. What are some positives and negatives of network overlap?

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[34]

Relationships at Work

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Supervisor-Subordinate Relationships

Given that most workplaces are based on hierarchy, it is not surprising that relationships between supervisors and their subordinates develop (Sias, 2009). The supervisor-subordinate relationship can be primarily based in mentoring, friendship, or romance and includes two people, one of whom has formal authority over the other. In any case, these relationships involve some communication challenges and rewards that are distinct from other workplace relationships.

Information exchange is an important part of any relationship, whether it is self-disclosure about personal issues or disclosing information about a workplace to a new employee. Supervisors are key providers of information, especially for newly hired employees who have to negotiate through much uncertainty as they are getting oriented. The role a supervisor plays in orienting a new employee is important, but it is not based on the same norm of reciprocity that many other relationships experience at their onset. On a first date, for example, people usually take turns communicating as they learn about each other. Supervisors, on the other hand, have information power because they possess information that the employees need to do their jobs. The imbalanced flow of communication in this instance is also evident in the supervisor's role as evaluator. Most supervisors are tasked with giving their employees formal and informal feedback on their job performance. In this role, positive feedback can motivate employees, but what happens when a supervisor has negative feedback? Research shows that supervisors are more likely to avoid giving negative feedback if possible, even though negative feedback has been shown to be more important than positive feedback for employee development. This can lead to strains in a relationship if behavior that is in need of correcting persists, potentially threatening the employer's business and the employee's job.

We're all aware that some supervisors are better than others and may have even experienced working under

good and bad bosses. So what do workers want in a supervisor? Research has shown that employees more positively evaluate supervisors when they are of the same gender and race (Sias, 2009). This isn't surprising, given that we've already learned that attraction is often based on similarity. In terms of age, however, employees prefer their supervisors be older than them, which is likely explained by the notion that knowledge and wisdom come from experience built over time. Additionally, employees are more satisfied with supervisors who exhibit a more controlling personality than their own, likely because of the trust that develops when an employee can trust that their supervisor can handle his or her responsibilities. Obviously, if a supervisor becomes coercive or is an annoying micromanager, the controlling has gone too far. High-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships in a workplace reduce employee turnover and have an overall positive impact on the organizational climate (Sias, 2005). Another positive effect of high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships is the possibility of mentoring.

The mentoring relationship can be influential in establishing or advancing a person's career, and supervisors are often in a position to mentor select employees. In a mentoring relationship, one person functions as a guide, helping another navigate toward career goals (Sias, 2009). Through workplace programs or initiatives sponsored by professional organizations, some mentoring relationships are formalized. Informal mentoring relationships develop as shared interests or goals bring two people together. Unlike regular relationships between a supervisor and subordinate that focus on a specific job or tasks related to a job, the mentoring relationship is more extensive. In fact, if a mentoring relationship succeeds, it is likely that the two people will be separated as the mentee is promoted within the organization or accepts a more advanced job elsewhere—especially if the mentoring relationship was formalized. Mentoring relationships can continue in spite of geographic distance, as many mentoring tasks can be completed via electronic communication or through planned encounters at conferences or other professional gatherings. Supervisors aren't the only source of mentors, however, as peer coworkers can also serve in this role.

Workplace Friendships

Relationships in a workplace can range from someone you say hello to almost daily without knowing her or his name, to an acquaintance in another department, to your best friend that you go on vacations with. We've already learned that proximity plays an important role in determining our relationships, and most of us will spend much of our time at work in proximity to and sharing tasks with particular people. However, we do not become friends with all our coworkers.

As with other relationships, perceived similarity and self-disclosure play important roles in workplace relationship formation. Most coworkers are already in close proximity, but they may break down into smaller subgroups based on department, age, or even whether or not they are partnered or have children (Sias, 2005). As individuals form relationships that extend beyond being acquaintances at work, they become peer coworkers. A peer coworker relationship refers to a workplace relationship between two people who have no formal authority over the other and are interdependent in some way. This is the most common type of interpersonal workplace relationship, given that most of us have many people we would consider peer coworkers and only one supervisor (Sias, 2005).

Peer coworkers can be broken down into three categories: information, collegial, and special peers (Sias, 2005). Information peers communicate about work-related topics only, and there is a low level of self-disclosure and trust. These are the most superficial of the peer coworker relationships, but that doesn't mean they are worthless. Almost all workplace relationships start as information peer relationships. As noted, information exchange is an important part of workplace relationships, and information peers can be very important in helping us through the day-to-day functioning of our jobs. We often form information peers with people based on a particular role they play within an organization. Communicating with a union representative, for example, would be an important information-based relationship for an employee. Collegial peers engage in more self-disclosure about work and personal topics and communicate emotional support. These peers also provide informal feedback through daily conversations that help the employee develop a professional identity (Sias, 2009). In an average-sized workplace, an employee would likely have several people they consider collegial peers. Special peers have high levels of self-disclosure with relatively few limitations and are highly interdependent in terms of providing emotional and professional support for one another (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Special peer relationships are the rarest and mirror the intimate relationships we might have with a partner, close sibling, or parent. As some relationships with information peers grow toward collegial peers, elements of a friendship develop.



Having coworkers who are also friends enhances information exchange and can lead to greater job satisfaction.

Chris Hunkeler – [Three Coworkers](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Even though we might not have a choice about whom we work with, we do choose who our friends at work will be. Coworker relationships move from strangers to friends much like other friendships. Perceived similarity may lead to more communication about workplace issues, which may lead to self-disclosure about non-work-related topics, moving a dyad from acquaintances to friends. Coworker friendships may then become closer as a result of personal or professional problems. For example, talking about family or romantic troubles with a coworker may lead to increased closeness as self-disclosure becomes deeper and more personal. Increased time together outside of work may also strengthen a workplace friendship (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Interestingly, research has shown that close friendships are more likely to develop among coworkers when they perceive their supervisor to be unfair or unsupportive. In short, a bad boss apparently leads people to establish closer friendships with coworkers, perhaps as a way to get the functional and relational support they are missing from their supervisor.

Friendships between peer coworkers have many benefits, including making a workplace more intrinsically rewarding, helping manage job-related stress, and reducing employee turnover. Peer friendships may also supplement or take the place of more formal mentoring relationships (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Coworker friendships also serve communicative functions, creating an information chain, as each person can convey information they know about what's going on in different areas of an organization and let each other know about opportunities for promotion or who to avoid. Friendships across departmental boundaries in particular have been shown to help an organization adapt to changing contexts. Workplace friendships may also have negative effects. Obviously information chains can be used for workplace gossip, which can be unproductive. Additionally, if a close friendship at work leads someone to continue to stay in a job that they don't like for the sake of the friendship, then the friendship is not serving the interests of either person or the organization. Although this section has focused on peer coworker friendships, some friendships have the potential to develop into workplace romances.

Romantic Workplace Relationships

Workplace romances involve two people who are emotionally and physically attracted to one another (Sias, 2009). We don't have to look far to find evidence that this relationship type is the most controversial of all the workplace relationships. For example, the president of the American Red Cross was fired in 2007 for having a personal

relationship with a subordinate. That same year, the president of the World Bank resigned after controversy over a relationship with an employee (Boyd, 2010). So what makes these relationships so problematic?

Some research supports the claim that workplace romances are bad for business, while other research claims workplace romances enhance employee satisfaction and productivity. Despite this controversy, workplace romances are not rare or isolated, as research shows 75 to 85 percent of people are affected by a romantic relationship at work as a participant or observer (Sias, 2009). People who are opposed to workplace romances cite several common reasons. More so than friendships, workplace romances bring into the office emotions that have the potential to become intense. This doesn't mesh well with a general belief that the workplace should not be an emotional space. Additionally, romance brings sexuality into workplaces that are supposed to be asexual, which also creates a gray area in which the line between sexual attraction and sexual harassment is blurred (Sias, 2009). People who support workplace relationships argue that companies shouldn't have a say in the personal lives of their employees and cite research showing that workplace romances increase productivity. Obviously, this is not a debate that we can settle here. Instead, let's examine some of the communicative elements that affect this relationship type.

Individuals may engage in workplace romances for many reasons, three of which are job motives, ego motives, and love motives (Sias, 2009). Job motives include gaining rewards such as power, money, or job security. Ego motives include the "thrill of the chase" and the self-esteem boost one may get. Love motives include the desire for genuine affection and companionship. Despite the motives, workplace romances impact coworkers, the individuals in the relationship, and workplace policies. Romances at work may fuel gossip, especially if the couple is trying to conceal their relationship. This could lead to hurt feelings, loss of trust, or even jealousy. If coworkers perceive the relationship is due to job motives, they may resent the appearance of favoritism and feel unfairly treated. The individuals in the relationship may experience positive effects such as increased satisfaction if they get to spend time together at work and may even be more productive. Romances between subordinates and supervisors are more likely to slow productivity. If a relationship begins to deteriorate, the individuals may experience more stress than other couples would, since they may be required to continue to work together daily.

Over the past couple decades, there has been a national discussion about whether or not organizations should have policies related to workplace relationships, and there are many different opinions. Company policies range from complete prohibition of romantic relationships, to policies that only specify supervisor-subordinate relationships as off-limits, to policies that don't prohibit but discourage love affairs in the workplace (Sias, 2009). One trend that seeks to find middle ground is the "love contract" or "dating waiver" (Boyd, 2010). This requires individuals who are romantically involved to disclose their relationship to the company and sign a document saying that it is consensual and they will not engage in favoritism. Some businesses are taking another route and encouraging workplace romances. Southwest Airlines, for example, allows employees of any status to date each other and even allows their employees to ask passengers out on a date. Other companies like AT&T and Ben and Jerry's have similar open policies (Boyd, 2010).

Key Takeaways

- The supervisor-subordinate relationship includes much information exchange that usually benefits the subordinate. However, these relationships also have the potential to create important mentoring opportunities.
- Peer coworker relationships range from those that are purely information based to those that are collegial and include many or all of the dimensions of a friendship.
- Workplace romances are controversial because they bring the potential for sexuality and intense emotions into the workplace, which many people find uncomfortable. However, research has shown that these relationships also increase employee satisfaction and productivity in some cases.

Exercises

1. Describe a relationship that you have had where you were either the mentor or the mentee. How did the relationship form? What did you and the other person gain from the relationship?
2. Think of a job you have had and try to identify someone you worked with who fit the characteristics of an information

and a collegial peer. Why do you think the relationship with the information peer didn't grow to become a collegial peer? What led you to move from information peer to collegial peer with the other person? Remember that special peers are the rarest, so you may not have an experience with one. If you do, what set this person apart from other coworkers that led to such a close relationship?

3. If you were a business owner, what would your policy on workplace romances be and why?

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Media Attributions

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[35]

The Dark Side of Relationships

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

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

Lying

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

We tend to lie more during the initiating phase of a relationship (Knapp, 2006). At this time, people may lie about their personality, past relationships, income, or skill sets as they engage in impression management and try to project themselves as likable and competent. For example, while on a first date, a person may lie and say they

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



Some lies are meant to protect someone or make someone feel better.

Pamela Jackson – [crossed fingers](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

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

Sexual and Emotional Cheating

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

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

The increase in technology and personal media has made extradyadic relationships somewhat easier to conceal, since smartphones and laptops can be taken anywhere and people can communicate to fulfill emotional and/or sexual desires. In some cases, this may only be to live out a fantasy and may not extend beyond electronic communication. But is sexual or emotional computer-mediated communication considered cheating? You may recall the case of former Congressman Anthony Weiner, who resigned his position in the US House of Representatives after it was discovered that he was engaging in sexually explicit communication with people using Twitter, Facebook, and e-mail. The view of this type of communication as a dark side of relationships is evidenced by the pressure put on Weiner to resign. So what leads people to engage in ERA? Generally, ERA is triggered by jealousy, sexual desire, or revenge (Tafoya & Spitzberg, 2007).

Jealousy, as we will explore more later, is a complicated part of the emotional dark side of interpersonal relationships. Jealousy may also motivate or justify ERA. Let’s take the following case as an example. Julie and Mohammed have been together for five years. Mohammed’s job as a corporate communication consultant involves travel to meet clients and attend conferences. Julie starts to become jealous when she meets some of Mohammed’s new young and attractive coworkers. Julie’s jealousy builds as she listens to Mohammed talk about the fun he had with them during his last business trip. The next time Mohammed goes out of town, Julie has a one-night-stand and begins to drop hints about it to Mohammed when he returns. In this case, Julie is engaging in counterjealousy induction—meaning she cheated on Mohammed in order to elicit in him the same jealousy she feels. She may also use jealousy as a justification for her ERA, claiming that the jealous state induced by Mohammed’s behavior caused her to cheat.

Sexual desire can also motivate or be used to justify ERA. Individuals may seek out sexual activity to boost their self-esteem or prove sexual attractiveness. In some cases, sexual incompatibility with a partner such as different sex drives or sexual interests can motivate or be used to justify ERA. Men and women may seek out sexual ERA for the thrill of sexual variety, and affairs can have short-term positive effects on emotional states as an individual relives the kind of passion that often sparks at the beginning of a relationship (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2006). However, the sexual gratification and emotional exhilaration of an affair can give way to a variety of negative consequences for psychological and physical health. In terms of physical health, increased numbers of sexual partners increases one’s risk for contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and may increase the chance for unplanned pregnancy. While sexual desire is a strong physiological motive for ERA, revenge is a strong emotional motive.

Engaging in ERA to get revenge may result from a sense of betrayal by a partner and a desire to get back at them. In some cases, an individual may try to make the infidelity and the revenge more personal by engaging in ERA with a relative, friend, or ex of their partner. In general, people who would engage in this type of behavior are predisposed to negative reciprocity as a way to deal with conflict and feel like getting back at someone is the best way to get justice. Whether it is motivated by jealousy, sexual desire, or revenge, ERA has the potential to stir up emotions from the dark side of relationships. Emotionally, anxiety about being “found out” and feelings of guilt

and shame by the person who had the affair may be met with feelings of anger, jealousy, or betrayal from the other partner.

Anger and Aggression

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

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to physical, verbal, and emotional violence that occurs between two people who are in or were recently in a romantic relationship. In order to understand the complexity of IPV, it is important to understand that there are three types: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence (Johnson, 2006). While control is often the cause of violence, it is usually short-term control (e.g., a threat to get you to turn over your money during a mugging). In intimate terrorism (IT), one partner uses violence to have general control over the other. The quest for control takes the following forms: economic abuse by controlling access to money; using children by getting them on the abuser's side and turning them against the abused partner or threatening to hurt or take children away; keeping the abused partner in isolation from their friends and family; and emotional abuse by degrading self-esteem and intimidating the other partner.

Violent resistance (VR) is another type of violence between intimate partners and is often a reaction or response to intimate terrorism (IT). The key pattern in VR is that the person resisting uses violence as a response to a partner that is violent and controlling; however, the resistor is not attempting to control. In short, VR is most often triggered by living with an intimate terrorist. There are very clear and established gender influences on these two types of violence. The overwhelming majority of IT violence is committed by men and directed toward women, and most VR is committed by women and directed at men who are intimate terrorists. Statistics on violence show that more than one thousand women a year are killed by their male partners, while three hundred men are killed by their female partners, mostly as an act of violent resistance to ongoing intimate terrorism (Johnson, 2006). The influence of gender on the third type of IPV is not as uneven.

Situational couple violence (SCV) is the most common type of IPV and does not involve a quest for control in the relationship. Instead, SCV is provoked by a particular situation that is emotional or difficult that leads someone to respond or react with violence. SCV can play out in many ways, ranging from more to less severe and isolated to frequent. Even if SCV is frequent and severe, the absence of a drive for control distinguishes it from intimate terrorism. This is the type of violence we most often imagine when we hear the term *domestic violence*. However, domestic violence doesn't capture the various ways that violence plays out between people, especially the way intimate terrorism weaves its way into all aspects of a relationship. Domestic violence also includes other types of abuse such as child-to-parent abuse, sibling abuse, and elder abuse.

Child abuse is another type of interpersonal violence that presents a serious problem in the United States, with over one million cases confirmed yearly by Child Protective Services (Morgan & Wilson, 2007). But what are the communicative aspects of child abuse? Research has found that one interaction pattern related to child abuse is evaluation and attribution of behavior (Morgan & Wilson, 2007). As you'll recall from our earlier discussion, attributions are links we make to identify the cause of a behavior. In the case of abusive parents, they are not as able to distinguish between mistakes and intentional behaviors, often seeing honest mistakes as intended and reacting negatively to the child. Abusive parents also communicate generally negative evaluations to their child by saying, for example, "You can't do anything right!" or "You're a bad girl." When children do exhibit positive behaviors, abusive parents are more likely to use external attributions, which diminish the achievement of the child by saying, for example, "You only won because the other team was off their game." In general, abusive parents have unpredictable reactions to their children's positive and negative behavior, which creates an uncertain and often

scary climate for a child. Other negative effects of child abuse include lower self-esteem and erratic or aggressive behavior. Although we most often think of children as the targets of violence, they can also be perpetrators.

Reports of adolescent-to-parent abuse are increasing, although there is no reliable statistic on how prevalent this form of domestic violence is, given that parents may be embarrassed to report it or may hope that they can handle the situation themselves without police intervention. Adolescent-to-parent abuse usually onsets between ages ten and fourteen (Eckstein, 2007). Mothers are more likely to be the target of this abuse than fathers, and when the abuse is directed at fathers, it most often comes from sons. Abusive adolescents may also direct their aggression at their siblings. Research shows that abusive adolescents are usually not reacting to abuse directed at them. Parents report that their children engage in verbal, emotional, and physical attacks in order to wear them down to get what they want.



Aggression and even abuse directed from child to parent is becoming more of an issue.

The Mighty Tim Inconnu – [Aggressive Children](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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

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

While incidents of communicative aggression might not reach the level of abuse found in an intimate terrorism

situation, it is a pervasive form of abuse. Even though we may view physical or sexual abuse as the most harmful, research indicates that psychological abuse can be more damaging and have more wide-ranging and persistent effects than the other types of abuse (Dailey, Lee, & Spitzberg, 2007). Psychological abuse can lead to higher rates of depression, anxiety, stress, eating disorders, and attempts at suicide. The discussion of the dark side of relationships shows us that communication can be hurtful on a variety of fronts.

“Getting Competent”

Handling Communicative Aggression at Work

Workplace bullying is a form of communicative aggression that occurs between coworkers as one employee (the bully) attempts to degrade, intimidate, or humiliate another employee (the target), and research shows that one in three adults has experienced workplace bullying (Petrecca, 2010). In fact, there is an organization called Civility Partners, LLC devoted to ending workplace bullying—you can visit their website at <http://www.noworkplacebullies.com/home>. This type of behavior has psychological and emotional consequences, but it also has the potential to damage a company's reputation and finances. While there are often mechanisms in place to help an employee deal with harassment—reporting to Human Resources for example—the situation may be trickier if the bully is your boss. In this case, many employees may be afraid to complain for fear of retaliation like getting fired, and transferring to another part of the company or getting another job altogether is a less viable option in a struggling economy. Apply the communication concepts you've learned so far to address the following questions.

1. How can you distinguish between a boss who is demanding or a perfectionist and a boss who is a bully?
2. If you were being bullied by someone at work, what would you do?

Key Takeaways

- The dark side of relationships exists in relation to the light side and includes actions that are deemed unacceptable by society at large and actions that are unproductive for those in the relationship.
- Lying does not always constitute a dark side of relationships, as altruistic lies may do more good than harm. However, the closer a relationship, the more potential there is for lying to have negative effects.
- Extradynamic romantic activity involves sexual or emotional contact with someone other than a primary romantic partner and is most often considered cheating or infidelity and can result in jealousy, anger, or aggression.
- **There are three main types of intimate partner violence (IPV).**
 - Intimate terrorism (IT) involves violence used to have general control over the other person.
 - Violent resistance (VR) is usually a response or reaction to violence from an intimate terrorist.
 - Situational couple violence (SCV) is the most common type of IPV and is a reaction to stressful situations and does not involve a quest for control.
- Communicative aggression is recurring verbal or nonverbal communication that negatively affects another person's sense of self and can take the form of verbal, psychological, or emotional abuse.

Exercises

1. Describe a situation in which lying affected one of your interpersonal relationships. What was the purpose of the lie and how did the lie affect the relationship?
2. How do you think technology has affected extradynamic romantic activity?
3. Getting integrated: In what ways might the “dark side of relationships” manifest in your personal relationships in academic contexts, professional contexts, and civic contexts?

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Chapter 9: Small Group Communication

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.

Understanding Small Groups

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define small group communication.
2. Discuss the characteristics of small groups.
3. Explain the functions of small groups.
4. Compare and contrast different types of small groups.
5. 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 (Hargie, 2011). As you can see, when we double the number of group members, we more than double the number of connections, which shows that network connection points in small groups grow exponentially as membership increases. So, while there is no set upper limit on the number of group members, it makes sense that the number of group members should be limited to those necessary to accomplish the goal or serve the

purpose of the group. Small groups that add too many members increase the potential for group members to feel overwhelmed or disconnected.

Structure of Small Groups

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



A self-formed study group likely has a more flexible structure than a city council committee.

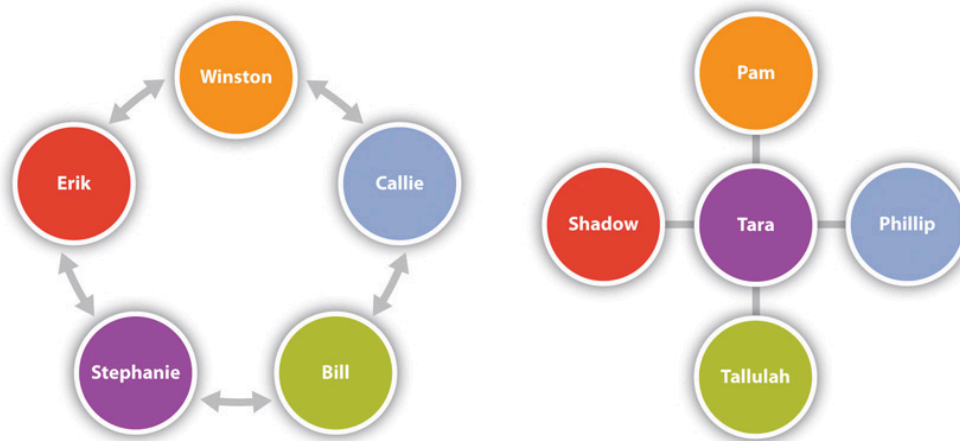
William Rotza – [Group](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections. In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. 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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. Reachability refers to the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in [Figure 13.1 "Small Group Structures"](#) shows that each group member is connected to two other members. This can make coordination easy when only one or

two people need to be brought in for a decision. In this case, Erik and Callie are very reachable by Winston, who could easily coordinate with them. However, if Winston needed to coordinate with Bill or Stephanie, he would have to wait on Erik or Callie to reach that person, which could create delays. The circle can be a good structure for groups who are passing along a task and in which each member is expected to progressively build on the others' work. A group of 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 13.1 "Small Group Structures"](#) shows an alternative organization pattern. In this structure, Tara is very reachable by all members of the group. This can be a useful structure when Tara is the person with the most expertise in the task or the leader who needs to review and approve work at each step before it is passed along to other group members. But Phillip and Shadow, for example, wouldn't likely work together without Tara being involved.

Figure 13.1 Small Group Structures



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

Interdependence

Small groups exhibit interdependence, meaning they share a common purpose and a common fate. If the actions of one or two group members lead to a group deviating from or not achieving their purpose, then all members of the group are affected. Conversely, if the actions of only a few of the group members lead to success, then all members of the group benefit. This is a major contributor to many college students' dislike of group assignments, because they feel a loss of control and independence that they have when they complete an assignment alone. This concern is valid 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, 2012). The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds dynamism to the group as it looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

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

Functions of Small Groups

Why do we join groups? Even with the challenges of group membership that we have all faced, we still seek out and desire to be a part of numerous groups. In some cases, we join a group because we need a service or access to information. We may also be drawn to a group because we admire the group or its members. Whether we are conscious of it or not, our identities and self-concepts are built 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.



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

Lostintheredwoods – [Spiral of Hands](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

The prestige of a group can initially attract us because we want that group's identity to "rub off" on our own identity. Likewise, the achievements we make as a group member can enhance our self-esteem, add to our reputation, and allow us to create or project certain identity characteristics to engage in impression management. For example, a person may take numerous tests to become a part of Mensa, which is an organization for people with high IQs, for no material gain but for the recognition or sense of achievement that the affiliation may bring. Likewise, people may join sports teams, professional organizations, and honor societies for the sense of achievement and affiliation. 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 (Hargie, 2011). Task-oriented groups are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). 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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). 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. Since other chapters in this book focus specifically on interpersonal relationships, this chapter focuses more 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 (Barker, 1991). 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 (Larson & LaFasto,

1989). 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 (Adler & Elmhurst, 2005)

- 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 (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). 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 (Walther & Bunz, 2005). 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 (Comer, 1991). Virtual groups experience more difficulty with this part of socialization than copresent 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 (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). 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 (Walther & Bunz, 2005). 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 (Walter & Bunz, 2005):

- 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 colocated 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 colocated 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 colocated 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 (Larson Jr., 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.



A social loafer is a dreaded group member who doesn't do his or her share of the work, expecting that others on the group won't notice or will pick up the slack.

Henry Burrows – [Sleeping On The Job](#) – CC BY-SA 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 (Karau & Williams, 1993). 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’” (Weimer, 2008). 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 (Myers & Goodboy, 2005). 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 contract 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 study group for this class
 - A committee to decide on library renovation plans
 - An upper-level college class in your major
 - 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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Small Group Development

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the process of group development.
2. Discuss the characteristics of each stage of group development.

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

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 (Hargie, 2011). 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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). 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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994).

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.



Although we often have negative connotations of storming and conflict, the group conflict that happens in this stage is necessary and productive.

Benjamin Benson – [Lightning Storm](#) – CC BY 2.0.

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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). 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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). 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 (Hargie, 2011). 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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Small Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the relationship between group cohesion and group climate.
2. Describe the process of group member socialization.
3. Explain the relationship between conformity and groupthink.
4. 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 (Hargie, 2011)

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

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

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



Cohesion and shared identity help create symbolic convergence as group members develop a group identity and shared social reality.

Ram K – [Watching the big game](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

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

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

"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 (Jain et al., 2008). 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 (du Chatenier et al., 2010). 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 *interorganizational 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 (Daniel & Davis, 2009). 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 (Solansky, 2011).

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 (du Chatenier et al., 2010). 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 (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). 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 (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). 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 (Hargie, 2011). 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.



Even though group members are different, failure to conform to the group's identity could create problems.

Airwolfhound – [Odd one out](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity. 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 (Hargie, 2011). Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity

pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

"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 (Richardson, Wang, & Hall, 2012). 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 (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). 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 (Richardson, Wang, & Hall, 2012).

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 (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005; Cimino, 2011). 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 (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). 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 antihazing 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 (Janis, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). When people rush to agreement or fear argument, groupthink has a tendency to emerge. Decisions made as a result of groupthink may range from a poorly-thought-out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

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

To Avoid Groupthink, Groups Should (Hargie, 2011)

- 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 (Fujishin, 2001). Each of these types of conflict can vary in intensity, which can affect how much the conflict impacts the group and its members.

Procedural Conflict

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



Procedural conflict can often be resolved with a group vote.

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Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Rather than focusing on questions of *how*, substantive conflicts focus on questions of *what*. Substantive conflicts may emerge as a group tries to determine its purpose or mission. As members figure out how to complete a task or debate which project to start on next, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion on what something means, what is acceptable in terms of supporting evidence for a proposal, or what is acceptable for a goal or performance standard. Leaders and other group members shouldn't rush to close this type of conflict down. 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 (Ellis & Fisher, 1994).

Primary and Secondary Tensions

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

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

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

Managing Conflict in Small Groups

Some common ways to manage conflict include clear decision-making procedures, third-party mediation, and leader facilitation (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Decision making is discussed in more detail in [Chapter 14 "Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups"](#), but commonly used methods such as majority vote can help or hurt conflict management efforts. While an up-and-down vote can allow a group to finalize a decision and move on, members whose vote fell on the minority side may feel resentment toward other group members. This can create a win/lose climate that leads to further conflict. Having a leader who makes ultimate decisions can also help move a group toward completion of a task, but conflict may only be pushed to the side and left not fully addressed. Third-party mediation can help move a group past a conflict and may create less feelings of animosity, since the person mediating and perhaps making a decision isn't a member of the group. In some cases, the leader can act as an internal third-party mediator to help other group members work productively through their conflict.

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

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

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict

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

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

Fisher, 1994). Hopefully a skilled leader or other group members can take on conflict resolution roles, which we will discuss more in [Chapter 14 “Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups”](#) 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.**
 - The Watergate scandal and cover-up (1972–74)
 - The space shuttle Challenger explosion (1986)
 - The rationale for the invasion of Iraq—specifically the supposed existence of weapons of mass destruction (2001–2)
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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Group Member Roles

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

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

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

Task-Related Roles and Behaviors

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

Task Leader

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

people in these roles may experience higher levels of stress. A task leader's stresses, however, may be lessened through some of the maintenance role behaviors that we will discuss later.

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

Expediter

The expediter is a task-related role that functions to keep the group on track toward completing its task by managing the agenda and setting and assessing goals in order to monitor the group's progress. An expeditor doesn't push group members mindlessly along toward the completion of their task; an expeditor must have a good sense of when a topic has been sufficiently discussed or when a group's extended focus on one area has led to diminishing returns. In such cases, the expeditor may say, "Now that we've had a thorough discussion of the pros and cons of switching the office from PCs to Macs, which side do you think has more support?" or "We've spent half of this meeting looking for examples of what other libraries have done and haven't found anything useful. Maybe we should switch gears so we can get something concrete done tonight."



An expeditor in a restaurant keeps the food flowing from the kitchen to the diners in a timely and orderly fashion, just as the expeditor in a group keeps the group on an agenda.

Lester Guijarro – [chef](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

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

and summarizing what has been accomplished in such a way that makes it easier for group members to see the need to move on.

Information Provider

The role of information provider includes behaviors that are more evenly shared than in other roles, as ideally, all group members present new ideas, initiate discussions of new topics, and contribute their own relevant knowledge and experiences. When group members are brought together because they each have different types of information, early group meetings may consist of group members taking turns briefing each other on their area of expertise. In other situations, only one person in the group may be chosen because of his or her specialized knowledge and this person may be expected to be the primary information provider for all other group members. For example, I was asked to serve on a university committee that is reviewing our undergraduate learning goals. Since my official role is to serve as the “faculty expert” on the subcommittee related to speaking, I played a more central information-provider function for our group during most of our initial meetings. Since other people on the subcommittee weren’t as familiar with speaking and its place within higher education curriculum, it made sense that information-providing behaviors were not as evenly distributed in this case.

Information Seeker

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

Gatekeeper

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

Recorder

The recorder takes notes on the discussion and activities that occur during a group meeting. The recorder is the only role that is essentially limited to one person at a time since in most cases it wouldn’t be necessary or beneficial to have more than one person recording. At less formal meetings there may be no recorder, while at formal meetings there is almost always a person who records meeting minutes, which are an overview of what occurred at the meeting. Each committee will have different rules or norms regarding the level of detail within and availability of the minutes. While some group’s minutes are required by law to be public, others may be strictly confidential. Even though a record of a group meeting may be valuable, the role of recorder is often regarded as a low-status position, since the person in the role may feel or be viewed as subservient to the other members who

are able to more actively contribute to the group's functioning. Because of this, it may be desirable to have the role of recorder rotate among members (Cragan & Wright, 1991).



The recorder writes and/or types notes during group meetings in order to document the discussion and other interactions.

Chung Ho Leung – [Note Taking](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

Maintenance Roles and Behaviors

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

Social-Emotional Leader

The social-emotional leader within a group may perform a variety of maintenance roles and is generally someone who is well liked by the other group members and whose role behaviors complement but don't compete with the task leader. The social-emotional leader may also reassure and support the task leader when he or she becomes stressed. In general, the social-emotional leader is a reflective thinker who has good perception skills that he or she uses to analyze the group dynamics and climate and then initiate the appropriate role behaviors to maintain a positive climate. Unlike the role of task leader, this isn't a role that typically shifts from one person to another. While all members of the group perform some maintenance role behaviors at various times, the socioemotional leader reliably functions to support group members and maintain a positive relational climate. Social-emotional leadership functions can actually become detrimental to the group and lead to less satisfaction among members when the maintenance behaviors being performed are seen as redundant or as too distracting from the task (Pavitt, 1999).

Supporter

The role of supporter is characterized by communication behaviors that encourage other group members and provide emotional support as needed. The supporter's work primarily occurs in one-on-one exchanges that are more intimate and in-depth than the exchanges that take place during full group meetings. While many group members may make supporting comments publicly at group meetings, these comments are typically superficial and/or brief. A supporter uses active empathetic listening skills to connect with group members who may seem down or frustrated by saying something like "Tayesha, you seemed kind of down today. Is there

anything you'd like to talk about?" Supporters also follow up on previous conversations with group members to maintain the connections they've already established by saying things like "Alan, I remember you said your mom is having surgery this weekend. I hope it goes well. Let me know if you need anything." The supporter's communication behaviors are probably the least noticeable of any of the other maintenance roles, which may make this group member's efforts seem overlooked. Leaders and other group members can help support the supporter by acknowledging his or her contributions.

Tension Releaser

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

Harmonizer

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



An interpreter is a group member who has cultural sensitivity and experience interacting with multiple cultures and can help facilitate intercultural interactions within a group.

Laura – [Estrenando cabina](#) – CC BY 2.0.

Interpreter

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

Negative Roles and Behaviors

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

role is guaranteed to negatively impact the group. We will divide our discussion of negative roles into self-centered and unproductive roles.

Self-Centered Roles

The behaviors associated with all the self-centered roles divert attention from the task to the group member exhibiting the behavior. Although all these roles share in their quest to divert attention, they do it in different ways and for different reasons. The self-centered roles we will discuss are the central negative, monopolizer, self-confessor, insecure compliment seeker, and joker (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

Central Negative

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

Monopolizer

The monopolizer is a group member who makes excessive verbal contributions, preventing equal participation by other group members. In short, monopolizers like to hear the sound of their own voice and do not follow typical norms for conversational turn taking. There are some people who are well informed, charismatic, and competent communicators who can get away with impromptu lectures and long stories, but monopolizers do not possess the magnetic qualities of such people. A group member's excessive verbal contributions are more likely to be labeled as monopolizing when they are not related to the task or when they provide unnecessary or redundant elaboration. Some monopolizers do not intentionally speak for longer than they should. Instead, they think they are making a genuine contribution to the group. These folks likely lack sensitivity to nonverbal cues, or they would see that other group members are tired of listening or annoyed. Other monopolizers just like to talk and don't care what others think. Some may be trying to make up for a lack of knowledge or experience. This type of monopolizer is best described as a dilettante, or an amateur who tries to pass himself or herself off as an expert.

There are some subgroups of behaviors that fall under the monopolizer's role. The "stage hog" monopolizes discussion with excessive verbal contributions and engages in one-upping and narcissistic listening. One-upping is a spotlight-stealing strategy in which people try to verbally "out-do" others by saying something like "You think that's bad? Listen to what happened to me!" They also listen to others in order to find something they can connect back to themselves, not to understand the message. The stage hog is like the diva that refuses to leave the stage to let the next performer begin. Unlike a monopolizer, who may engage in his or her behaviors unknowingly, stage hogs are usually aware of what they're doing.



A monopolizer makes excessive verbal contributions and holds the floor without allowing others to speak.

Kev-shine – [Business man point](#) – CC BY 2.0.

The “egghead” monopolizes the discussion with excessive contributions that are based in actual knowledge but that exceed the level of understanding of other group members or the needs of the group (Cragan & Wright, 1999). The egghead is different from the dilettante monopolizer discussed earlier because this person has genuine knowledge and expertise on a subject, which may be useful to the group. But like the monopolizer and stage hog, the egghead’s excessive contributions draw attention away from the task, slow the group down, and may contribute to a negative group climate. The egghead may be like an absentminded professor who is smart but lacks the social sensitivity to tell when he or she has said enough and is now starting to annoy other group members. This type of egghead naively believes that other group members care as much about the subject as he or she does. The second type of egghead is more pompous and monopolizes the discussion to flaunt his or her intellectual superiority. While the first type of egghead may be tolerated to a point by the group and seen as eccentric but valuable, the second type of egghead is perceived more negatively and more quickly hurts the group. In general, the egghead’s advanced knowledge of a subject and excessive contributions can hurt the group’s potential for synergy, since other group members may defer to the egghead expert, which can diminish the creativity that comes from outside and nonexpert perspectives.

Self-Confessor

The self-confessor is a group member who tries to use group meetings as therapy sessions for issues not related to the group’s task. Self-confessors tend to make personal self-disclosures that are unnecessarily intimate. While it is reasonable to expect that someone experiencing a personal problem may want to consult with the group, especially if that person has formed close relationships with other group members, a self-confessor consistently comes to meetings with drama or a personal problem. A supporter or gatekeeper may be able to manage some degree of self-confessor behavior, but a chronic self-confessor is likely to build frustration among other group members that can lead to interpersonal conflict and a lack of cohesion and productivity. Most groups develop a norm regarding how much personal information is discussed during group meetings, and some limit such disclosures to time before or after the meeting, which may help deter the self-confessor.

Insecure Compliment Seeker

The insecure compliment seeker wants to know that he or she is valued by the group and seeks recognition that is often not task related. For example, they don’t want to be told they did a good job compiling a report; they want

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

Joker

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

Unproductive Roles

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

Blocker

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



A blocker prevents the group from progressing toward the completion of its task by creating barriers, suggesting unnecessary work, or avoiding group members.

Kev-shine – [Business man phone](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Withdrawer

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

Aggressor

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

Doormat

While we all need to take one for the team sometimes or compromise for the sake of the group, the doormat is a person who is chronically submissive to the point that it hurts the group's progress (Cragan & Wright, 1999). Doormat behaviors include quickly giving in when challenged, self-criticism, and claims of inadequacy. Some people who exhibit doormat behaviors may have difficulty being self-assured and assertive, may be conflict avoidant, or may even feel that their behaviors will make other group members like them. Other people play the martyr and make sure to publicly note their "sacrifices" for the group, hoping to elicit praise or attention. If their sacrifices aren't recognized, they may engage in further negative behaviors such as whining and/or insecure compliment seeking.

Key Takeaways

- Task-related group roles and behaviors contribute directly to the group's completion of a task or the achievement of its goal. These roles typically serve leadership, informational, or procedural functions and include the following: task leader, expediter, information provider, information seeker, gatekeeper, and recorder.
- Maintenance group roles and behaviors function to create and maintain social cohesion and fulfill the interpersonal needs of the group members. To perform these role behaviors, a person needs strong and sensitive interpersonal skills. These roles include social-emotional leader, supporter, tension releaser, harmonizer, and interpreter.
- Negative role behaviors delay or distract the group. Self-centered role behaviors are those that seek to divert the group's attention to the group member exhibiting the behavior. These roles include central negative, monopolizer, stage hog, egghead, self-confessor, and insecure compliment seeker. Unproductive role behaviors prevent or make it difficult for the group to make progress. These roles include blocker, withdrawer, aggressor, and doormat.

Exercises

1. Which of the task-related roles do you think has the greatest potential of going wrong and causing conflict within the group and why?
2. Which maintenance role do you think you've performed the best in previous group experiences? How did your communication and behaviors help you perform the role's functions? Which maintenance role have you had the most difficulty or least interest in performing? Why?
3. Describe a situation in which you have witnessed a person playing one of the self-centered roles in a group. How did the person communicate? What were the effects? Now describe a situation in which you have witnessed a person playing one of the unproductive roles in a group. How did the person communicate? What were the effects?

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Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Discuss the common components and characteristics of problems.
2. Explain the five steps of the group problem-solving process.
3. Describe the brainstorming and discussion that should take place before the group makes a decision.
4. Compare and contrast the different decision-making techniques.
5. 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 (Adams & Galanes, 2009):

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 (Adams & Galanes, 2009).

1. **Task difficulty.** Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing a difficult and complex task in order to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information.
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.



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

Muness Castle – [Problem Solving](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Group Problem-Solving Process

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

Step 1: Define the Problem

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way (Adams & Galanes, 2009). At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some good questions to ask during this stage: What is the current difficulty? How did we come to know that the difficulty exists? Who/what is involved? Why is it meaningful/urgent/important? What have the effects been so far? What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification? At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a problem statement. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of 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?



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.

Jocko Benoit – [Prodigal Light](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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 (Stanton, 2009).

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 (Stanton, 2012). 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 (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). Group decision making can appear fair and democratic but really only be a gesture that covers up the fact that certain group members or the group leader have already decided. Group decision making also takes more time than individual decisions and can be burdensome if some group members do not do their assigned work, divert the group with self-centered or unproductive role behaviors, or miss meetings. Conversely, though, group decisions are often more informed, since all group members develop a shared understanding of a problem through discussion and debate. The shared understanding may also be more complex and deep than what an individual would develop, because the group members are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that can broaden their own perspectives. Group decisions also benefit from synergy, one of the key advantages of group

communication that we discussed earlier. Most groups do not use a specific method of decision making, perhaps thinking that they'll work things out as they go. This can lead to unequal participation, social loafing, premature decisions, prolonged discussion, and a host of other negative consequences. So in this section we will learn some practices that will prepare us for good decision making and some specific techniques we can use to help us reach a final decision.

Brainstorming before Decision Making

Before groups can make a decision, they need to generate possible solutions to their problem. The most commonly used method is brainstorming, although most people don't follow the recommended steps of brainstorming. As you'll recall, brainstorming refers to the quick generation of ideas free of evaluation. The originator of the term *brainstorming* said the following four rules must be followed for the technique to be effective (Osborn, 1959):

1. Evaluation of ideas is forbidden.
2. Wild and crazy ideas are encouraged.
3. Quantity of ideas, not quality, is the goal.
4. New combinations of ideas presented are encouraged.

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

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

Discussion before Decision Making

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

1. Silently and individually list ideas.
2. Create a master list of ideas.

3. Clarify ideas as needed.
4. Take a secret vote to rank group members' acceptance of ideas.

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

During the second step, the facilitator goes around the group in a consistent order asking each person to share one idea at a time. As the idea is shared, the facilitator 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 14.1 "Pros and Cons of Agreement-Based Decision-Making Techniques"](#) reviews the pros and cons of each of these methods.



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

Becky McCray – [Voting](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

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

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

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

Decision-Making Technique	Pros	Cons
Majority rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick • Efficient in large groups • Each vote counts equally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick • Decision quality is better than what less knowledgeable people could produce • Experts are typically objective and less easy to influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise must be verified • Experts can be difficult to find / pay for • Group members may feel useless
Minority rule by authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick • Buy-in could be high if authority is respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-quality decisions due to time invested • Higher level of commitment because of participation in decision • Satisfaction with decision because of shared agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (de Bono, 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 metacommunication 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.



The urgency of a decision can have a major influence on the decision-making process. As a situation becomes more urgent, it requires more specific decision-making methods and types of communication.

Judith E. Bell – [Urgent](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

The origin and urgency of a problem are also situational factors that influence decision making. In terms of origin, problems usually occur in one of four ways:

1. **Something goes wrong.** Group members must decide how to fix or stop something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that half of the building is contaminated with mold and must be closed down.
2. **Expectations change or increase.** Group members must innovate more efficient or effective ways of doing something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that the district they are responsible for is being expanded.
3. **Something goes wrong and expectations change or increase.** Group members must fix/stop and become more efficient/effective. Example—the firehouse crew has to close half the building and must start responding to more calls due to the expanding district.
4. **The problem existed from the beginning.** Group members must go back to the origins of the situation and walk through and analyze the steps again to decide what can be done differently. Example—a firehouse crew has consistently had to work with minimal resources in terms of building space and firefighting tools.

In each of the cases, the need for a decision may be more or less urgent depending on how badly something is going wrong, how high the expectations have been raised, or the degree to which people are fed up with a broken system. Decisions must be made in situations ranging from crisis level to mundane.

Personality Influences on Decision Making

A long-studied typology of value orientations that affect decision making consists of the following types of decision maker: the economic, the aesthetic, the theoretical, the social, the political, and the religious (Spranger, 1928).

- The *economic* decision maker makes decisions based on what is practical and useful.
- The *aesthetic* decision maker makes decisions based on form and harmony, desiring a solution that is elegant and in sync with the surroundings.
- The *theoretical* decision maker wants to discover the truth through rationality.
- The *social* decision maker emphasizes the personal impact of a decision and sympathizes with those who may be affected by it.
- The *political* decision maker is interested in power and influence and views people and/or property as divided into groups that have different value.
- The *religious* decision maker seeks to identify with a larger purpose, works to unify others under that goal, and commits to a viewpoint, often denying one side and being dedicated to the other.

In the United States, economic, political, and theoretical decision making tend to be more prevalent decision-making orientations, which likely corresponds to the individualistic cultural orientation with its emphasis on competition and efficiency. But situational context, as we discussed before, can also influence our decision making.



Personality affects decision making. For example, “economic” decision makers decide based on what is practical and useful.

One Way Stock – [Tough Decisions Ahead](#) – CC BY-ND 2.0.

The personalities of group members, especially leaders and other active members, affect the climate of the group. Group member personalities can be categorized based on where they fall on a continuum anchored by the following descriptors: dominant/submissive, friendly/unfriendly, and instrumental/emotional (Cragan & Wright, 1999). The more group members there are in any extreme of these categories, the more likely that the group climate will also shift to resemble those characteristics.

- **Dominant versus submissive.** Group members that are more dominant act more independently and directly, initiate conversations, take up more space, make more direct eye contact, seek leadership positions, and take control over decision-making processes. More submissive members are reserved, contribute to the group only when asked to, avoid eye contact, and leave their personal needs and thoughts unvoiced or give into the suggestions of others.
- **Friendly versus unfriendly.** Group members on the friendly side of the continuum find a balance between talking and listening, don't try to win at the expense of other group members, are flexible but not weak, and value democratic decision making. Unfriendly group members are disagreeable, indifferent, withdrawn, and selfish, which leads them to either not invest in decision making or direct it in their own interest rather than in the interest of the group.
- **Instrumental versus emotional.** Instrumental group members are emotionally neutral, objective, analytical, task-oriented, and committed followers, which leads them to work hard and contribute to the group's decision making as long as it is orderly and follows agreed-on rules. Emotional group members are creative, playful, independent, unpredictable, and expressive, which leads them to make rash decisions, resist group norms or decision-making structures, and switch often from relational to task focus.

Cultural Context and Decision Making

Just like neighborhoods, schools, and countries, small groups vary in terms of their degree of similarity and difference. Demographic changes in the United States and increases in technology that can bring different people together make it more likely that we will be interacting in more and more heterogeneous groups (Allen, 2011). Some small groups are more homogenous, meaning the members are more similar, and some are more heterogeneous, meaning the members are more different. Diversity and difference within groups has advantages and disadvantages. In terms of advantages, research finds that, in general, groups that are culturally heterogeneous have better overall performance than more homogenous groups (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999). Additionally, when group members have time to get to know each other and competently communicate across their differences, the advantages of diversity include better decision making due to different perspectives (Thomas, 1999). Unfortunately, groups often operate under time constraints and other pressures that make the possibility for intercultural dialogue and understanding difficult. The main disadvantage of heterogeneous groups is the possibility for conflict, but given that all groups experience conflict, this isn't solely due to the presence of diversity. We will now look more specifically at how some of the cultural value orientations we've learned about already in this book can play out in groups with international diversity and how domestic diversity in terms of demographics can also influence group decision making.

International Diversity in Group Interactions

Cultural value orientations such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles all manifest on a continuum of communication behaviors and can influence group decision making. Group members from individualistic cultures are more likely to value task-oriented, efficient, and direct communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as dividing up tasks into individual projects before collaboration begins and then openly debating ideas during discussion and decision making. Additionally, people from cultures that value individualism are more likely to openly express dissent from a decision, essentially expressing their disagreement with the group. Group members from collectivistic cultures are more likely to value relationships over the task at hand. Because of this, they also tend to value conformity and face-saving (often indirect) communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as establishing norms that include periods of socializing to build relationships before task-oriented communication like negotiations begin or norms that limit

public disagreement in favor of more indirect communication that doesn't challenge the face of other group members or the group's leader. In a group composed of people from a collectivistic culture, each member would likely play harmonizing roles, looking for signs of conflict and resolving them before they become public.

Power distance can also affect group interactions. Some cultures rank higher on power-distance scales, meaning they value hierarchy, make decisions based on status, and believe that people have a set place in society that is fairly unchangeable. Group members from high-power-distance cultures would likely appreciate a strong designated leader who exhibits a more directive leadership style and prefer groups in which members have clear and assigned roles. In a group that is homogenous in terms of having a high-power-distance orientation, members with higher status would be able to openly provide information, and those with lower status may not provide information unless a higher status member explicitly seeks it from them. Low-power-distance cultures do not place as much value and meaning on status and believe that all group members can participate in decision making. Group members from low-power-distance cultures would likely freely speak their mind during a group meeting and prefer a participative leadership style.

How much meaning is conveyed through the context surrounding verbal communication can also affect group communication. Some cultures have a high-context communication style in which much of the meaning in an interaction is conveyed through context such as nonverbal cues and silence. Group members from high-context cultures may avoid saying something directly, assuming that other group members will understand the intended meaning even if the message is indirect. So if someone disagrees with a proposed course of action, he or she may say, "Let's discuss this tomorrow," and mean, "I don't think we should do this." Such indirect communication is also a face-saving strategy that is common in collectivistic cultures. Other cultures have a low-context communication style that places more importance on the meaning conveyed through words than through context or nonverbal cues. Group members from low-context cultures often say what they mean and mean what they say. For example, if someone doesn't like an idea, they might say, "I think we should consider more options. This one doesn't seem like the best we can do."

In any of these cases, an individual from one culture operating in a group with people of a different cultural orientation could adapt to the expectations of the host culture, especially if that person possesses a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Additionally, people with high ICC can also adapt to a group member with a different cultural orientation than the host culture. Even though these cultural orientations connect to values that affect our communication in fairly consistent ways, individuals may exhibit different communication behaviors depending on their own individual communication style and the situation.

Domestic Diversity and Group Communication

While it is becoming more likely that we will interact in small groups with international diversity, we are guaranteed to interact in groups that are diverse in terms of the cultural identities found within a single country or the subcultures found within a larger cultural group.

Gender stereotypes sometimes influence the roles that people play within a group. For example, the stereotype that women are more nurturing than men may lead group members (both male and female) to expect that women will play the role of supporters or harmonizers within the group. Since women have primarily performed secretarial work since the 1900s, it may also be expected that women will play the role of recorder. In both of these cases, stereotypical notions of gender place women in roles that are typically not as valued in group communication. The opposite is true for men. In terms of leadership, despite notable exceptions, research shows that men fill an overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of leadership positions. We are socialized to see certain behaviors by men as indicative of leadership abilities, even though they may not be. For example, men are often perceived to contribute more to a group because they tend to speak first when asked a question or to fill a silence and are perceived to talk more about task-related matters than relationally oriented matters. Both of these tendencies create a perception that men are more engaged with the task. Men are also socialized to be more competitive and self-congratulatory, meaning that their communication may be seen as dedicated and their behaviors seen as powerful, and that when their work isn't noticed they will be more likely to make it known to the group rather than take silent credit. Even though we know that the relational elements of a group are crucial for success, even in high-performance teams, that work is not as valued in our society as the task-related work.

Despite the fact that some communication patterns and behaviors related to our typical (and stereotypical) gender socialization affect how we interact in and form perceptions of others in groups, the differences in

group communication that used to be attributed to gender in early group communication research seem to be diminishing. This is likely due to the changing organizational cultures from which much group work emerges, which have now had more than sixty years to adjust to women in the workplace. It is also due to a more nuanced understanding of gender-based research, which doesn't take a stereotypical view from the beginning as many of the early male researchers did. Now, instead of biological sex being assumed as a factor that creates inherent communication differences, group communication scholars see that men and women both exhibit a range of behaviors that are more or less feminine or masculine. It is these gendered behaviors, and not a person's gender, that seem to have more of an influence on perceptions of group communication. Interestingly, group interactions are still masculinist in that male and female group members prefer a more masculine communication style for task leaders and that both males and females in this role are more likely to adapt to a more masculine communication style. Conversely, men who take on social-emotional leadership behaviors adopt a more feminine communication style. In short, it seems that although masculine communication traits are more often associated with high status positions in groups, both men and women adapt to this expectation and are evaluated similarly (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999).

Other demographic categories are also influential in group communication and decision making. In general, group members have an easier time communicating when they are more similar than different in terms of race and age. This ease of communication can make group work more efficient, but the homogeneity may sacrifice some creativity. As we learned earlier, groups that are diverse (e.g., they have members of different races and generations) benefit from the diversity of perspectives in terms of the quality of decision making and creativity of output.

In terms of age, for the first time since industrialization began, it is common to have three generations of people (and sometimes four) working side by side in an organizational setting. Although four generations often worked together in early factories, they were segregated based on their age group, and a hierarchy existed with older workers at the top and younger workers at the bottom. Today, however, generations interact regularly, and it is not uncommon for an older person to have a leader or supervisor who is younger than him or her (Allen, 2011). The 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 midsixties to mideighties, 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 (Clarke, 1970).
- **The Baby Boomers.** Born between 1946 and 1964, currently in their late forties to midsixties, 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 midforties, 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. Reviewing [Chapter 8 "Culture and Communication"](#) will give you useful knowledge to help you navigate both international and domestic diversity and increase your communication competence in small groups and elsewhere.

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.
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **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.
 - **Scenario 2: Professional.** A group of coworkers must decide which person from their department to

nominate for a company-wide award.

- **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.
 - **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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Leadership and Small Group Communication

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Discuss the various perspectives on how and why people become leaders.
2. Compare and contrast various leadership styles.
3. 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 (Hargie, 2011). The leader is a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members. Leadership is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task. A person in the role of leader may provide no or poor leadership. Likewise, a person who is not recognized as a "leader" in title can provide excellent leadership. In the remainder of this section, we will discuss some approaches to the study of leadership, leadership styles, and leadership and group dynamics.

Why and How People Become Leaders

Throughout human history, some people have grown into, taken, or been given positions as leaders. Many early leaders were believed to be divine in some way. In some indigenous cultures, shamans are considered leaders because they are believed to be bridges that can connect the spiritual and physical realms. Many early kings, queens, and military leaders were said to be approved by a god to lead the people. Today, many leaders are elected or appointed to positions of power, but most of them have already accumulated much experience in leadership roles. Some leaders are well respected, some are feared, some are hated, and many elicit some combination of these reactions. This brief overview illustrates the centrality of leadership throughout human history, but it wasn't until the last hundred years that leadership became an object of systematic study.

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

when leadership is needed. Emergent leaders may play an important role when a designated leader unexpectedly leaves. We will now turn our attention to three common perspectives on why some people are more likely to be designated leaders than others and how leaders emerge in the absence of or in addition to a designated leader.



A group leader may be formally designated by someone inside or outside the group or may emerge naturally during early group meetings.

[New City Church](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Leaders Emerge Because of Their Traits

The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics (Pavitt, 1999). Some traits that leaders, in general, share are related to physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality (Cragan & Wright, 1991). In terms of physical appearance, designated leaders tend to be taller and more attractive than other group members. This could be because we consciously and/or subconsciously associate a larger size (in terms of height and build, 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 (Pavitt, 1999). The situational context that surrounds a group influences what type of leader is best. Situations may be highly structured, highly unstructured, or anywhere in between (Cragan & Wright, 1991). Research has found that leaders with a high task orientation are likely to emerge in both highly structured contexts like a group that works to maintain a completely automated factory unit and highly unstructured contexts like a group that is responding to a crisis. Relational-oriented leaders are more likely to emerge in semistructured contexts that are less formal and in groups composed of people who have specific knowledge and are therefore be trusted to do much of their work independently (Fiedler, 1967). For example, a group of local business owners who form a group for professional networking would likely prefer a leader with a relational-oriented style, since these group members are likely already leaders in their own right and therefore might resent a person who takes a rigid task-oriented style over a more collegial style.

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

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

Leaders Emerge Based on Communication Skill and Competence

This final approach to the study of leadership is considered a functional approach, because it focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This last approach is the most useful for communication scholars and for people who want to improve their leadership skills, because leadership behaviors (which are learnable and adaptable) rather than traits or situations (which are often beyond our control) are the primary focus of study. As we've already learned, any group member can exhibit leadership behaviors, not just a designated or emergent leader. Therefore leadership behaviors are important for all of us to understand even if we don't anticipate serving in leadership positions (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

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

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's task-related functions include providing, seeking, and evaluating information. Leaders may want to be cautious about contributing ideas before soliciting ideas from group members, since the leader's contribution may sway or influence others in the group, therefore diminishing the importance of varying perspectives. Likewise a leader may want to solicit evaluation of ideas from members

before providing his or her own judgment. In group situations where creativity is needed to generate ideas or solutions to a problem, the task leader may be wise to facilitate brainstorming and discussion.



A group leader with high communication competence can facilitate brainstorming and group discussion to enhance the creativity and quality of group members' ideas.

Luca Mascaro – [Brainstorming](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

This can allow the leader to keep his or her eye on the “big picture” and challenge group members to make their ideas more concrete or discuss their implications beyond the group without adding his or her own opinion. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the task-related functions of a group include the following (Cragan & Wright, 1991):

- Contributing ideas
- Seeking ideas
- Evaluating ideas
- Seeking idea evaluation
- Visualizing abstract ideas
- Generalizing from specific ideas

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group’s procedural-related functions help guide the group as it proceeds from idea generation to implementation. Some leaders are better at facilitating and managing ideas than they are at managing the administrative functions of a group. So while a group leader may help establish the goals of the group and set the agenda, another group member with more experience in group operations may step in to periodically revisit and assess progress toward completion of goals and compare the group’s performance against its agenda. It’s also important to check in between idea-generating sessions to clarify, summarize, and gauge the agreement level of group members. A very skilled and experienced leader may take primary responsibility for all these behaviors, but it’s often beneficial to share them with group members to avoid becoming overburdened. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the procedural functions of a group include the following (Cragan & Wright, 1991):

- Goal setting

- Agenda making
- Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Verbalizing consensus
- Generalizing from specific ideas

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's relational functions include creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection and self-analysis, and managing conflict. By encouraging participation among group members, a leader can help quell people who try to monopolize discussion and create an overall climate of openness and equality. Leaders want to make sure that people don't feel personally judged for their ideas and that criticism remains idea centered, not person centered. A safe and positive climate typically leads to higher-quality idea generation and decision making. Leaders also encourage group members to metacommunicate, or talk about the group's communication. This can help the group identify and begin to address any interpersonal or communication issues before they escalate and divert the group away from accomplishing its goal. A group with a well-established participative and inclusive climate will be better prepared to handle conflict when it emerges. Remember that conflict when handled competently can enhance group performance. Leaders may even instigate productive conflict by playing devil's advocate or facilitating civil debate of ideas. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the relational functions of a group include the following (Cragan & Wright, 1991):

- Regulating participation
- Climate making
- Instigating group self-analysis
- Resolving conflict
- Instigating productive conflict

Leadership Styles

Given the large amount of research done on leadership, it is not surprising that there are several different ways to define or categorize leadership styles. In general, effective leaders do not fit solely into one style in any of the following classifications. Instead, they are able to adapt their leadership style to fit the relational and situational context (Wood, 1977). One common way to study leadership style is to make a distinction among autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). 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 (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Directive Leaders

Directive leaders help provide psychological structure for their group members by clearly communicating expectations, keeping a schedule and agenda, providing specific guidance as group members work toward the completion of their task, and taking the lead on setting and communicating group rules and procedures. Although

this is most similar to the autocratic leadership style mentioned before, it is more nuanced and flexible. The originators of this model note that a leader can be directive without being seen as authoritarian. To do this, directive leaders must be good motivators who encourage productivity through positive reinforcement or reward rather than through the threat of punishment.



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

The Open University – [Speaker](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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

Participative Leaders

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

The participative method of leadership is similar to the democratic style discussed earlier, and it is a style of leadership practiced in many organizations that have established work groups that meet consistently over long periods of time. US companies began to adopt a more participative and less directive style of management in the 1980s after organizational scholars researched teamwork and efficiency in Japanese corporations. Japanese managers included employees in decision making, which blurred the line between the leader and other group members and enhanced productivity. These small groups were called quality circles, because they focused on group interaction intended to improve quality and productivity (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

Supportive Leaders

Supportive leaders show concern for their followers' needs and emotions. They want to support group members' welfare through a positive and friendly group climate. These leaders are good at reducing the stress and frustration of the group, which helps create a positive climate and can help increase group members' positive feelings about the task and other group members. As we will learn later, some group roles function to maintain the relational climate of the group, and several group members often perform these role behaviors. With a supportive leader as a model, such behaviors would likely be performed as part of established group norms, which can do much to enhance social cohesion. Supportive leaders do not provide unconditionally positive praise. They also competently provide constructive criticism in order to challenge and enhance group members' contributions.

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

Achievement-Oriented Leaders

Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations. These leaders often engage in systematic social comparison, keeping tabs on other similar high-performing groups to assess their expectations and the group's progress. This type of leadership is similar to what other scholars call transformational or visionary leadership and is often associated with leaders like former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, talk show host and television network CEO Oprah Winfrey, former president Bill Clinton, and business magnate turned philanthropist Warren Buffett. Achievement-oriented leaders are likely less common than the other styles, as this style requires a high level of skill and commitment on the part of the leader and the group. Although rare, these leaders can be found at all levels of groups ranging from local school boards to *Fortune* 500 companies. Certain group dynamics must be in place in order to accommodate this leadership style. Groups for which an achievement-oriented leadership style would be effective are typically intentionally created and are made up of members who are skilled and competent in regards to the group's task. In many cases, the leader is specifically chosen because of his or her reputation and expertise, and even though the group members may not have a history of working with the leader, the members and leader must have a high degree of mutual respect.

"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?" (Deutschman, 2012) 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 (French Jr. & Raven, 1959). Effective leaders do not need to possess all five types of power. Instead, competent leaders know how to draw on other group members who may be better able to exercise a type of power in a given situation.

Legitimate Power

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

Expert Power



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

group. For example, a transplant surgeon may lead a team of other doctors and nurses during the surgery while a critical care nurse may take the lead during postsurgery recovery.

UCD School of Medicine – [Surgery Image 2](#) – CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

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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[PART X]

Chapter 10: The Basics of Public Speaking



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=204>

What is Public Speaking?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define public speaking, channel, feedback, noise, encode, decode, symbol, denotative, and connotative;
2. Explain what distinguishes public speaking from other modes of communication;
3. List the elements of the communication process;
4. Explain the origins of anxiety in public speaking;
5. Apply some strategies for dealing with personal anxiety about public speaking;
6. Discuss why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

What is Public Speaking?

What is your mental picture when you think about “public speaking?” The President of the United States delivering an inaugural address? A sales representative seeking to persuade clients in a board room? Your minister, priest, or rabbi presenting a sermon at a worship service? Your professor lecturing? A dramatic courtroom scene, probably from *Law & Order*? Politicians debating before an election? A comedian doing stand-up at a night club?

All of these and more are instances of public speaking. Be assured that public speaking takes many forms every day in our country and across the world. Now let’s get personal: Do you see yourself as a public speaker? And when you do, do you see yourself as confident, prepared, and effective? Or do you see a person who is nervous, unsure of what to say, and feeling as if they are failing to get their message across?

You find yourself in this Fundamentals of Speech course and probably have mixed emotions. More than likely, it is required for graduation in your major. Perhaps you have taken a formal public speaking course before. Although they are not as common in secondary education as in colleges (Education Commission of the States, 2015), public speaking instruction may have been part of your high school experience. Maybe you competed in debate or individual speaking events or you have acted in plays. These activities can help you in this course, especially in terms of confidence and delivery.

On the other hand, it might be that the only public speaking experience you have had felt like a failure and therefore left you embarrassed and wanting to forget it and stay far away from public speaking. It might have been years ago, but the feeling still stays with you. This class is not something you have been looking forward to, and you may have put it off. Maybe your attitude is, “Let’s just get it over with.” You might think that it’s just another course you have to “get through” in order to study your major—what really interests you—and start a career in your field.

These are all understandable emotions because, as you have probably heard or read, polls indicate public speaking is one of the things Americans fear the most. As Jerry Seinfeld has said in his stand-up comedy routine,

According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does

that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.

While it is a stretch to think that most people fear death less than giving a short speech, aversion toward public speaking situations and tasks is common.

Before we go any further, though, what do we mean by “public speaking?” The most obvious answer is “talking in front of a group of people.” For the purposes of this class and this book, public speaking is more formal than that. **Public speaking** is an organized, face-to-face, prepared, intentional (purposeful) attempt to inform, entertain, or persuade a group of people (usually five or more) through words, physical delivery, and (at times) visual or audio aids. In almost all cases, the speaker is the focus of attention for a specific amount of time. There still may be some back-and-forth interaction, such as questions and answers with the audience, but the speaker usually holds the responsibility to direct that interaction either during or after the prepared speech has concluded.

As Stephen A. Lucas (2015) has written, public speaking is an “enlarged conversation,” and as such it has some similarities to conversations but some major differences, too. As a conversation, it has elements of:

Public speaking

an organized, face-to-face, prepared, intentional (purposeful) attempt to inform, entertain, or persuade a group of people (usually five or more) through words, physical delivery, and (at times) visual or audio aids.

- awareness of and sensitivity toward your audience (in this case, more than one person);
- an exchange of explicit messages about content (facts, ideas, information) and less explicit ones about relationship (how you relate to one another, such as trust, liking, respect); [this content/relationship dichotomy will come up again in this book and is characteristic of all communication];
- a dependence on feedback to know if you are successful in being understood (usually nonverbal in public speaking, but still present);
- the fact that the public speaking communication is (almost always) face-to-face rather than mediated (through a computer, telephone, mass media, or writing).

As an “enlarged conversation” public speaking needs to be more purposeful (to entertain, inform, or persuade); highly organized with certain formal elements (introduction and clear main points, for example); and usually dependent on resources outside of your personal experience (research to support your ideas).

Of course, the delivery would have to be “enlarged” or “projected” as well—louder, more fluid, and more energetic, depending on the size and type of room in which you are speaking—and you will be more conscious of the correctness and formality of your language. You might say, “That sucks” in a conversation but are less likely to do so in front of a large audience in certain situations. If you can keep in mind the basic principle that public speaking is formalized communication with an audience designed to achieve mutual understanding for mutual benefit (like a conversation), rather than a “performance,” you will be able to relate to your audience on the human and personal level.

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Anxiety and Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define public speaking, channel, feedback, noise, encode, decode, symbol, denotative, and connotative;
2. Explain what distinguishes public speaking from other modes of communication;
3. List the elements of the communication process;
4. Explain the origins of anxiety in public speaking;
5. Apply some strategies for dealing with personal anxiety about public speaking;
6. Discuss why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

Anxiety and Public Speaking

Why are so many people afraid of public speaking? This is a complex question, and the answer is tied to many personal and psychological factors such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, past experience, training, culture, and context. The term “**glossophobia**,” combining the two Greek words for “tongue” and “fear or dread,” has been coined to refer to

...a severe fear of public speaking. People who suffer from glossophobia tend to freeze in front of any audience, even a couple of people. They find their mouth dries up, their voice is weak and their body starts shaking. They may even sweat, go red and feel their heart thumping rapidly. (“Do You Suffer From Glossophobia?,” 2015)

This fear may be in situations such as responding to a professor in class or having to interact with a stranger, not just giving formal speeches as this book is addressing.

Glossophobia
a severe fear of public speaking

For many people, fear of public speaking or being interviewed for a job does not rise to the level of a true “phobia” in psychological terms. A phobia is defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV* as a state where someone experiences “significant and persistent fear when in the presence of, or anticipating the presence of, the object of fear, which may be an object, place or situation” (Grohol, 2013). They are just uncomfortable in public speaking situations and need strategies for addressing the task.

Why Anxiety and Public Speaking?

Scholars at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (“Public Speaking Anxiety,” 2015) explain that anxiety in public speaking can result from one of several misperceptions:

- “all or nothing” thinking—a mindset that if your speech falls short of “perfection” (an unrealistic standard), then you are a failure as a public speaker;

- overgeneralization—believing that a single event (such as failing at a task) is a universal or “always” event; and
- fortune telling—the tendency to anticipate that things will turn out badly, no matter how much practice or rehearsal is done.

Likewise, many new college students operate under the false belief that intelligence and skill are “fixed.” In their minds, a person is either smart or skilled in something, or she is not. Some students apply this false belief to math and science subjects, saying things like “I’m just no good at math and I never will be,” or even worse, “I guess I am just not smart enough to be in college.” As you can tell, these beliefs can sabotage someone’s college career. Also unfortunately, the same kind of false beliefs are applied to public speaking, and people conclude that because public speaking is hard, they are just not “natural” at it and have no inborn skill. They give up on improving and avoid public speaking at all costs.

image

Modern research by Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck (2007) and others shows that intelligence and related skills are “malleable,” meaning that they are open to change and growth. Understanding and accepting that your intelligence and skill in different areas is not fixed or “stuck,” but open to growth, will have a significant influence on your success in life. It will also help you see that just because learning a subject or task is hard does not mean you are not good at it. Obstacles and barriers that make learning hard are opportunities for growth, not “getting off places.”

There is more to Dr. Dweck’s research. I would recommend her book *Mindset*. Many students enter a public speaking class thinking “I’m just no good at this and never will be,” just like some students feel about college algebra or science. Dr. Dweck and other learning psychologists show that learning a new skill might be hard work, but the difficulty is not a sign that learning is impossible.

Along with the wrong way of thinking about one’s learning and growth, two other fears contribute to anxiety in public speaking. The first is fear of failure. This fear can result from several sources: real or perceived bad experiences involving public speaking in the past, lack of preparation, lack of knowledge about public speaking, not knowing the context, and uncertainty about one’s task as a public speaker (such as being thrown into a situation at the last minute).

It is not the goal of this book to belittle that fear. It is real and justified to some extent, because you might lack understanding of the public speaking task or lack good speaking experiences upon which to build. One of the goals and fringe benefits of this course is that you are not just going to learn about public speaking, but you are going to do it—at least four or five times—with a real audience. You will overcome some of your fears and feel that you have accomplished something of personal benefit.

The second fear is fear of rejection of one’s self or one’s ideas. This one is more serious in some respects. You may feel rejection because of fear of failure, or you may feel that the audience will reject your ideas, or worse, you as a person. Knowing how to approach the public speaking task and explain your ideas can help. However, you should ask yourself deep and probing questions as to why you believe that your audience will reject you *because this fear is rooted in a belief*. You should ask yourself what possibly false belief is causing your anxiety.

One of the core attitudes an effective and ethical public speaker must have is respect for and empathy with the audience. Your audience in this class is your peers who want to learn and want to get through the class successfully (just like you do). Your audience also includes your instructor who wants to see you succeed in the course as well. Believe me, public speaking teachers get a lot of pleasure from hearing successful student speeches! Your audience wants you to succeed if for no other reason than a good speech is much easier and pleasant to listen to than a poor one! Again, gaining practice in this class with a real, live audience can help you work through the roots of your fear of rejection.

Beyond dealing with the root fears that may cause you to have a “fright or flight” response when it comes to public speaking, there are some practical answers to dealing with fears about public speaking. Of course, fear responses can be reduced if you know how public speaking works, as you will see throughout this textbook. But there are some other strategies, and all of them have to do with preparation.

Addressing Public Speaking Anxiety

Mental Preparation

If your neighbor's house were on fire, getting to the phone to call the fire department would be your main concern. You would want to get the address right and express the urgency. That is admittedly an extreme example, but the point is about focus. To mentally prepare, you want to put your focus where it belongs, on the audience and the message. Mindfulness and full attention to the task are vital to successful public speaking. If you are concerned about a big exam or something personal going on in your life, your mind will be divided and add to your stress.

The main questions to ask yourself are "Why am I so anxiety-ridden about giving a presentation?" and "What is the worst that can happen?" For example, you probably won't know most of your classmates at the beginning of the course, adding to your anxiety. By midterm, you should be developing relationships with them and be able to find friendly faces in the audience. However, very often we make situations far worse in our minds than they actually are, and we can lose perspective. One of the authors tells her students, "Some of you have been through childbirth and even through military service. That is much worse than public speaking!" Your instructor will probably try to help you get to know your classmates and minimize the "unknowns" that can cause you worry.

Physical preparation

The first step in physical preparation is adequate sleep and rest. You might be thinking such a thing is impossible in college, where sleep deprivation and late nights come with the territory. However, research shows the extreme effects a lifestyle of limited sleep can have, far beyond yawning or dozing off in class (Mitru, Millrood, & Mateika, 2002). As far as public speaking is concerned, your energy level and ability to be alert and aware during the speech will be affected by lack of sleep.

Secondly, you would be better off to eat something that is protein-based rather than processed sugar-based before speaking. In other words, cheese or peanut butter on whole grain toast, Greek yogurt, or eggs for breakfast rather than a donut and soft drink. Some traditionalists also discourage the drinking of milk because it is believed to stimulate mucus production, but this has not been scientifically proven (Lai & Kardos, 2013).

A third suggestion is to wear clothes that you know you look good in and are comfortable but also meet the context's requirements (that is, your instructor may have a dress code for speech days). Especially, wear comfortable shoes that give you a firm base for your posture. Flip-flops and really high heels may not fit these categories.

A final suggestion for physical preparation is to utilize some stretching or relaxation techniques that will loosen your limbs or throat. Essentially, your emotions want you to run away but the social system says you must stay, so all that energy for running must go somewhere. The energy might go to your legs, hands, stomach, sweat glands, or skin, with undesirable physical consequences. Tightening and stretching your hands, arms, legs, and throat for a few seconds before speaking can help release some of the tension. Your instructor may be able to help you with these exercises, or you can find some on the Internet.

Contextual preparation

The more you can know about the venue where you will be speaking, the better. For this class, of course, it will be your classroom, but for other situations where you might experience "communication apprehension," you should check out the space beforehand or get as much information as possible. For example, if you were required to give a short talk for a job interview, you would want to know what the room will be like, if there is equipment for projection, how large the audience will be, and the seating arrangements. If possible, you will want to practice your presentation in a room that is similar to the actual space where you will deliver it.

The best advice for contextual preparation is to be on time, even early. If you have to rush in at the last minute, as so many students do, you will not be mindful, focused, or calm for the speech. Even more, if you are early, you can make sure equipment is working, and can converse with the audience as they enter. Professional speakers often do this to relax themselves, build credibility, and gain knowledge to adapt their presentations to the audience. Even if you don't want to "schmooze," being on time will help you create a good first impression and thus enhance your credibility before the actual speech.

image

Speech preparation

Procrastination, like lack of sleep, seems to just be part of the college life. Sometimes we feel that we just don't get the best ideas until the last minute. Writing that essay for literature class at 3:00 a.m. just may work for you. However, when it comes to public speaking, there are some definite reasons you would not want to do that. First, of course, if you are finishing up your outline at 3:00 a.m. and have a 9:00 speech, you are going to be tired and unable to focus. Second, your instructor may require you to turn in your outline several days ahead of the speech date. However, the main reason is that public speaking requires active, oral, repeated practice before the actual delivery.

You do not want the first time that you say the words to be when you are in front of your audience. Practicing is the only way that you will feel confident, fluent, and in control of the words you speak. Practicing (and timing yourself) repeatedly is also the only way that you will be assured that your speech meets the assignment's time limits, and speaking within the expected time limits is a cardinal rule of public speaking. You may think your speech is five minutes long but it may end up being ten minutes the first time you practice it—or only two minutes!

Your practicing should be out loud, standing up, with shoes on, with someone to listen, if possible (other than your dog or cat), and with your visual aids. If you can record yourself and watch it, that is even better. If you do record yourself, make sure you record yourself from the feet up—or at least the hips up—so you can see your body language. The need for oral practice will be emphasized over and over in this book and probably by your instructor. As you progress as a speaker, you will always need to practice but perhaps not to the extent you do as a novice speaker.

As hard as it is to believe,

YOU NEVER LOOK AS NERVOUS AS YOU FEEL.

You may feel that your anxiety is at level seventeen on a scale of one to ten, but the audience does not perceive it the same way. They may perceive it at a three or four or even less. That's not to say they won't see any signs of your anxiety and that you don't want to learn to control it, only that what you are feeling inside is not as visible as you might think. This principle relates back to focus. If you know you don't look as nervous as you feel, you can focus and be mindful of the message and audience rather than your own emotions.

Also, you will probably find that your anxiety decreases throughout the class (Finn, Sawyer, & Schrodtt, 2009). [In her Ted Talk video](#), Harvard Business School social psychologist Amy Cuddy discusses nonverbal communication and suggests that instead of “faking it until you make it,” that you can, and should, “fake it until you become it.” She shares research that shows how our behavior affects our mindsets, not just the other way around. Therefore, the act of giving the speech and “getting through it” will help you gain confidence. Interestingly, Dr. Cuddy directs listeners to strike a “power pose” of strong posture, feet apart, hands on hips or stretched over head to enhance confidence.

Final Note: If you are an audience member, you can help the speaker with his/her anxiety, at least a little bit. Mainly, be an engaged listener from beginning to end. You can imagine that a speaker is going to be more nervous if the audience looks bored from the start. A speaker with less anxiety is going to do a better job and be more interesting. Of course, do not walk into class during your classmates' speeches, or get up and leave. In addition to being rude, it pulls their minds away from their message and distracts the audience. Your instructor will probably have a policy on this behavior, too, as well as a dress code and other expectations on speech days. There are good reasons for these policies, so respect them.

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Understanding the Process of Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define public speaking, channel, feedback, noise, encode, decode, symbol, denotative, and connotative;
2. Explain what distinguishes public speaking from other modes of communication;
3. List the elements of the communication process;
4. Explain the origins of anxiety in public speaking;
5. Apply some strategies for dealing with personal anxiety about public speaking;
6. Discuss why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

Understanding the Process of Public Speaking

Earlier it was stated that public speaking is like an enlarged or projected conversation. Conversation and public speaking are two forms of human communication, of which there are also small group communication, organizational communication, mass communication, and intercultural communication. All human communication is a process composed of certain necessary elements:

- People (often referred to as senders and receivers);
- context;
- message;
- channel;
- noise;
- feedback; and
- outcome.

With all these elements working together, the act of communication can be very complex. The famous German philosopher Johann Goethe said that if we understood how complex communication really is, we probably would not attempt it! Perhaps here we can demystify some of it. Communication is a process, not a singular event. Later we will look at models of communication, which can be helpful for understanding communication but are basically snapshots because a model cannot capture the dynamic process of communication. A simple, basic definition of **communication** is “sharing meaning between two or more people.” Beyond a definition, we can break it down into its part or components and examine each.

Human communication first involves **people**. That is pretty obvious, but we do not want to be so focused on the message or channel that

Communication

we forget that people are at the center of communication. In public speaking it is common to call one person (the speaker) the “sender” and the audience the “receiver(s),” but in the real world it is not always as simple as that. Sometimes the speaker initiates the message, but other times the speaker is responding to the audience’s initiation. It is enough to say that sender and receiver exchange roles sometimes and both are as necessary as the other to the communication process.

sharing meaning between two or more people

Human communication and public speaking secondly requires **context**. Context has many levels, and there are several “contexts” going on at the same time in any communication act. These contexts can include:

- Historical, or what has gone on between the sender(s) and receiver(s) before the speech. The historical elements can be positive or negative, recent or further back in time. In later chapters we will see that these past events can influence the speaker’s credibility with the audience, as well as their understanding.
- Cultural, which sometimes refers to the country where someone was born and raised but can also include ethnic, racial, religious, and regional cultures or co-cultures. Culture is defined (Floyd, 2017) as “the system of learned and shared symbols, language, values, and norms that distinguish one group of people from another.”
- Social, or what kind of relationship the sender(s) and receiver(s) are involved in, such as teacher-student, co-workers, employer-employee, or members of the same civic organization, faith, profession, or community.
- Physical, which involves where the communication is taking place and the attributes of that location. The physical context can have cultural meaning (a famous shrine or monument) that influences the form and purpose of the communication, or attributes that influence audience attention (temperature, seating arrangements, or external noise).

Each one of these aspects of context bears upon how we behave as a communicator and specifically a public speaker.

Third, human communication of any kind involves a **message**. That message may be informal and spontaneous, such as small talk with a seatmate on a plane, conversing for no other reason than to have someone to talk to and be pleasant. On the other hand, it might be very formal, intentional, and planned, such as a commencement address or a speech in this course. In this textbook all the chapters will be devoted to the creation of that formal message, but that does not diminish the importance of the other elements. The message is a product of all of them.

Culture

the system of learned and shared symbols, language, values, and norms that distinguish one group of people from another

Fourth, public speaking, like all communication, requires a **channel**. We think of channel in terms of television or something like a waterway (The English Channel). Channel is how the message gets from sender to receiver. In interpersonal human communication, we see each other and hear each other, in the same place and time. In mediated or mass communication, some sort of machine or technology (tool) comes between the people—phone, radio, television, printing press and paper, or computer.

The face-to-face channel adds to the immediacy and urgency of public speaking, but it also means that physical appearance and delivery can affect the receiver(s) positively and negatively. It also means that public speaking is linear in time and we do not always get a “redo” or “do-over.” This element of channel influence structure, transitions, and language choices, which are discussed later in the book.

Channel

the means through which a message gets from sender to receiver

The fifth element of human communication is **feedback**, which in public speaking is usually nonverbal, such as head movement, facial expressions, laughter, eye contact, posture, and other behaviors that we use to judge audience involvement, understanding, and approval. These types of feedback can be positive (nodding, sitting up, leaning forward, smiling) or less than positive (tapping fingers, fidgeting, lack of eye contact, checking devices).

Can you think of some others that would indicate the audience is either not engaged in, confused about, or dis-approving of the message or speaker? Feedback is important because we use it in all communication encounters to evaluate our effectiveness and to decide the next step to take in the specific communication interaction. For example, a quizzical expression may mean we

Feedback

direct or indirect messages sent from an audience (receivers) back to the original sender of the message

should explain ourselves again. Someone's turning away from us is interpreted as disapproval, avoidance, or dismissal.

image

These examples are all of nonverbal feedback, which is most common in public speaking. There are times when verbal feedback from the audience is appropriate. You may stop and entertain questions about your content, or the audience may fill out a comment card at the end of the speech. You should stay in control of the verbal feedback, however, so that the audience does not feel as if they can interrupt you during the speech.

The sixth element of human communication is **noise**, which might be considered interruptions or interference. Some amount of noise is almost always present due to the complexity of human behavior and context. There are just so many things that can come into the communication process to obscure the messages being sent. Some of the ways that noise can be classified include:

- Contextual – something in the room or physical environment keeps them from attending to or understanding a message
- Physical – the receiver(s)' health affects their understanding of the message, or the sender's physical state affects her ability to be clear and have good delivery.
- Psychological – the receiver(s) or sender(s) have stress, anxiety, past experience, personal concerns, or some other psychological issue that prevents the audience from receiving an intended message.

Noise

anything that disrupts, interrupts, or interferes with the communication process

This short list of three types of noise is not exhaustive, but it is enough to point out that many things can “go wrong” in a public speaking situation, enough to make us agree with Mr. Philosopher Goethe. However, the reason for studying public speaking is to become aware of the potential for these limitations or “noise” factors, to determine if they could happen during your speech, and take care of them. Some of them are preventable; for example, ones related to physical context can be taken care of ahead of time. Others can be addressed directly; for example, if you know the audience is concerned about a recent event, you can bring it up and explain how it relates to your topic.

The final element of the communication process is **outcome** or result, which means a change in either the audience or the context. For example, if you ask an audience to consider becoming bone marrow donors, there are certain outcomes. They will either have more information about the subject and feel more informed; they will disagree with you; they will take in the information but do nothing about the topic; and/or they will decide it's a good idea to become a donor and go through the steps to do so. If they become potential donors, they will add to the pool of existing donors and perhaps save a life. Thus, either they have changed or the social context has changed, or both. This change feeds back into the communication process.

It is common for textbooks on public speaking and communication to provide models of the communication process, depicting the relationship of these factors. There are several varieties of such models, some of which are considered foundational to the field of communication (such as Shannon and Weaver's original linear, transmissional model from 1949) and some more recent ones. One model that focuses more on the process is the transactional model of communication. In it, the emphasis is more on the relationship between the communicators and co-meanings created between them. This textbook depends on a transactional model. If you go to Google images and search for “models of communication,” you will find many. You can also see an example of a communication model specific to public speaking in Figure 9.2 of this book.

What these models have in common is the idea of process in time. They also will often use the word **encode** to express the process of the sender putting his/her thoughts and feelings into words or other symbols. Models also use the word **decode** to express the process of the listener or receiver understanding those words and symbols and making meaning of them for him- or herself personally. Models of communication attempt to show the interplay of the many elements that take place in the communication act.

Em Griffin (1987), a professor of communication at Wheaton College and author of several

Decode

the process of the listener or receiver understanding the words and symbols of a message and making meaning of them

Encode

the process of the sender putting his/her thoughts and feelings into words or other symbols

textbooks, compares the communication process to three games, dependent on one's theory of how it works. Some think of communication like bowling, where the speaker throws a message at an audience in order to knock

them down. The audience does not really respond or have very much to say about the act; they only react. Some think of communication like table tennis (ping-pong); there is back and forth between the participants, but the goal is to win. Griffin says the better game metaphor is charades, or Pictionary®, where a team together tries to understand meaning and one player has to make many attempts to get the team to guess the right answer. It is collaborative and involves trial and error. Models of communication that show the value of feedback in recalibrating the message are like the image of charades. An ethical speaker sees public speaking as more than attacking the audience and more than winning.

Additionally, communication is referred to a symbolic process. In this context, a **symbol** is a word, icon, picture, object, or number that is used to stand for or represent a concept, thing, or experience. Symbols almost always have more than one specific meaning or concept they represent. A flag, for example, is a symbol of a country or political unit, but it also represents the history, culture, and feelings that people in that country experience about various aspects of the culture.

The word “car” or “automobile” represents a machine with four tires, windows, metal body, internal combustion engine, and so on, but it also represents personal, individual experiences and associations with cars. We call this difference **denotative** (the objective or literal meaning shared by most people using the word) and the **connotative** (the subjective, cultural, or personal meaning the word evokes in people together or individually). One of the authors and her husband recently visited the National Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Nothing like a car museum shows that “car” has deep and broad cultural meanings beyond metal, rubber, and glass.

Now that we have looked at the process of communication, let’s apply it to public speaking.

Connotative

the subjective or personal meaning the word evokes in people together or individually

Symbol

a word, icon, picture, object, or number that is used to stand for or represent a concept, thing, or experience

Denotative

the objective or literal meaning shared by most people using the word

The speaker originates and creates a structured message and sends it through the visual/oral channel using symbols and nonverbal means to the audience members as a group, who provide (mostly nonverbal) feedback. The speaker and audience may or may not be aware of the types of interference or noise that exist, and the speaker may try to deal with them. As a result of the public speaking, the audience’s minds, emotions, and/or actions are affected, and possibly the speaker’s as well.

Public speaking as an art form and a social force has been around a long time. Marcus Cicero (106-43 B.C. E.) was the most renowned politician, orator, and advocate of rhetoric in the late Roman Republic. For centuries he was considered the role model for aspiring public speakers. He discussed the process of public speaking in a unique way, proposing that a speaker go through the “canons (laws) of rhetoric” to create a speech. These steps are:

1. invention (creating content),
2. disposition (organization and logic of arguments),
3. style (choosing the right level and quality of vocabulary),
4. memory (actually, memorizing famous speeches to learn good public speaking technique), and
5. delivery (nonverbal communication).

This book will take this same basic approach as the canons of rhetoric in helping you walk through the process of constructing a presentation.

Value of Public Speaking in Your Life

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define public speaking, channel, feedback, noise, encode, decode, symbol, denotative, and connotative;
2. Explain what distinguishes public speaking from other modes of communication;
3. List the elements of the communication process;
4. Explain the origins of anxiety in public speaking;
5. Apply some strategies for dealing with personal anxiety about public speaking;
6. Discuss why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC SPEAKING IN YOUR LIFE

Despite the long history of public speaking, dating back to at least 500 BCE, it is not unusual for students to question why this course is included in the curriculum of their major. You might have put it off or be taking it in your first semester. You might believe that it will have little use in your future career. The actual experience of completing the course may change your mind, and we would encourage you to do some research on our own about the question of how public speaking fits into your career. Perhaps you could talk to some professionals in your future career field, or perhaps your instructor will discuss this in class or assign a short speech about it.

However, here are three reasons why you can benefit from this course. First, public speaking is one of the major communication skills desired by employers. Employers are frequently polled regarding the skills they most want employees to possess, and communication is almost always in the top three (Adams, 2014). Of course, “communication skills” is a broad term and involves a number of abilities such as team leadership, clear writing in business formats, conflict resolution, interviewing, and listening. However, public speaking is one of those sought-after skills, even in fields where the entry-level workers may not do much formal public speaking. Nurses give training presentations to parents of newborn babies; accountants advocate for new software in their organizations; managers lead team meetings.

If you are taking this class at the beginning of your college career, you will benefit in your other future classes from the research, organizational, and presentational skills learned here. According to the National Survey on Student Engagement, college freshmen tend to think they will not be giving many presentations in college classes, but that is wishful thinking. Different kinds of presentations will be common in your upcoming classes.

Another reason for taking a public speaking course is the harder-to-measure but valuable personal benefits. As an article on the USA Today College website states, a public speaking course can help you be a better, more informed and critical listener; it can “encourage you to voice your ideas and take advantage of the influence you have;” and it gives you an opportunity to face a major fear you might have in a controlled environment (Massengale, 2014). Finally, the course can attune you to the power of public speaking to change the world. Presentations that lead to changes in laws, policies, leadership, and culture happen every day, all over the world.

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Getting Started in Public Speaking

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define public speaking, channel, feedback, noise, encode, decode, symbol, denotative, and connotative;
2. Explain what distinguishes public speaking from other modes of communication;
3. List the elements of the communication process;
4. Explain the origins of anxiety in public speaking;
5. Apply some strategies for dealing with personal anxiety about public speaking;
6. Discuss why public speaking is part of the curriculum at this college and important in personal and professional life.

Getting Started in Public Speaking

To finish this first chapter, let's close with some foundational principles about public speaking, which apply no matter the context, audience, topic, or purpose.

Timing is everything

We often hear this about acting or humor. In this case, it has to do with keeping within the time limits. As mentioned before, you can only know that you are within time limits by practicing and timing yourself; being within time limits also shows preparation and forethought. More importantly, being on time (or early) for the presentation and within time limits shows respect for your audience.

Public speaking requires muscle memory

If you have ever learned a new sport, especially in your teen or adult years, you know that you must consciously put your body through some training to get it used to the physical activity of the sport. An example is golf. A golf swing, unlike swinging a baseball bat, is not a natural movement and requires a great deal of practice, over and over, to get right. Pick up any golf magazine and there will be at least one article on “perfecting the swing.” In fact, when done incorrectly, the swing can cause severe back and knee problems over time.

Public speaking is a physical activity as well. You are standing and sometimes moving around; your voice, eye contact, face, and hands are involved. You will expend physical energy, and after the speech you may be tired. Even more, your audience's understanding and acceptance of your message may depend somewhat on how energetic, controlled, and fluid your physical delivery. Your credibility as a speaker hinges to some extent on these matters. Consequently, learning public speaking means you must train your body to be comfortable and move in predictable and effective ways.

Public speaking involves a content and relationship dimension

You may have heard the old saying, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” According to Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967), all human communication has two elements going on at the same time: content and relationship. There are statements about ideas, facts, and information, and there are messages communicated about the relationship between the communication partners, past and present. These relationship messages have to do with trust, respect, and credibility, and are conveyed through evidence, appeals, wording (and what the speaker does not say) as well as nonverbal communication.

That said, public speaking is not a good way to provide a lot of facts and data to your audience. In fact, there are limits to how much information you can pile on your audience before listening is too difficult for them. However, public speaking is a good way to make the information meaningful for your audience. You can use a search engine with the term “Death by PowerPoint” and find lots of humorous, and too true, cartoons of audiences overwhelmed by charts, graphs, and slides full of text. In the case, less is more. This “less as more” principle will be re-emphasized throughout this textbook.

Emulation is the sincerest form of flattery

Learn from those who do public speaking well, but find what works best for you. Emulation is not imitation or copying someone; it is following a general model. Notice what other speakers do well in a speech and try to incorporate those strategies. An example is humor. Some of us excel at using humor, or some types of it. Some of us do not, or do not believe we do, no matter how hard we try. In that case, you may have to find other strengths to becoming an effective speaker.

Know your strengths and weaknesses

Reliable personality inventories, such as the Myers Briggs or the Gallup StrengthsQuest tests, can be helpful in knowing your strengths and weaknesses. One such area is whether you are an extravert or introvert. Introverts (about 40% of the population) get their psychological energy from being alone while extraverts tend to get it from being around others. This is a very basic distinction and there is more to the two categories, but you can see how an extravert may have an advantage with public speaking. However, the extravert may be tempted not to prepare and practice as much because he or she has so much fun in front of an audience, while the introvert may overprepare but still feel uncomfortable. Your public speaking abilities will benefit from increased self-awareness about such characteristics and your strengths. (For an online self-inventory about introversion and extraversion, go to <http://www.quietrev.com/the-introvert-test/>)

Remember the Power of Story

Stories and storytelling, in the form of anecdotes and narrative illustrations, are your most powerful tool as a public speaker. For better or worse, audiences are likely to remember anecdotes and narratives long after a speech’s statistics are forgotten. Your instructor may assign you to do a personal narrative speech, or require you to write an introduction or conclusion for one of your speeches that includes a story. This does not mean that other types of proof are unimportant and that you just want to tell stories in your speech, but human beings love stories and often will walk away from a speech moved by or remembering a powerful story or example more than anything.

Conclusion

This chapter has been designed to be informative but also serve as a bit of a pep talk. Many students face this course with trepidation, for various reasons. However, as studies have shown over the years, a certain amount of tension when preparing to speak in public can be good for motivation. A strong course in public speaking should be grounded in the communication research, the wisdom of those who have taught it over the last 2,000 years, and reflecting on your own experience.

John Dewey (1916), the twentieth century education scholar, is noted for saying, “Education does not come just from experience, but from reflecting on the experience.” As you finish this chapter and look toward your first presentation in class, be sure to give yourself time after the experience to reflect, whether by talking to

another person, journaling, or sitting quietly and thinking, about how the experience can benefit the next speech encounter. Doing so will get you on the road to becoming more confident in this endeavor of public speaking.

image

Something to Think About

Investigate some other communication models on the Internet. What do they have in common? How are they different? Which ones seem to explain communication best to you?

[PART XI]

Chapter 11: Audience Analysis



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=238>

The Importance of Audience Analysis

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define audience-centered, audience analysis, and demographic characteristics;
2. List and explain the various demographic characteristics used to analyze an audience;
3. Define the meanings of attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs;
4. Diagram Maslow's hierarchy of needs and explain its usefulness to public speaking;
5. Describe contextual factors that should be considered when preparing a speech;
6. Describe typical barriers to listening in public speaking situations;
7. Explain ways an individual can improve his/her listening when in an audience; and
8. Apply what he/she knows about listening to improve personal preparation of a speech.

The Importance of Audience Analysis

One of the advantages of studying public speaking and improving your own skills is that you become much more aware of what other speakers do. In one respect, we are able to look for ways to emulate what they do—for example, how they might seamlessly incorporate stories or examples into their speaking, or how they might use transitions to help audiences follow the speech's logic. In another respect, we become aware of how a speaker might use dramatic delivery or emotional appeals to hide a lack of facts or logic. A course in public speaking should include ways to improve one's listening to public speaking.

This chapter will look at the audience from both sides of the lectern, so to speak. First it will examine how a presenter can fully understand the audience, which will aid the speaker in constructing the approach and content of the speech. Secondly, this chapter will examine the public speaker as audience member and how to get the most out of a speech, even if the topic does not seem immediately interesting.

As discussed in Chapter 1, we have Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson (1967) to thank for pointing out to us that communication always involves a content dimension and a relationship dimension. Nowhere does that become more important than when we look into what is commonly known as audience analysis. Their concept about content and relationship dimension will guide this chapter. You are not using the speech to dump a large amount of content on the audience; you are making that content important, meaningful, and applicable to them. Additionally, the way the audience perceives you and your connection to them—such as whether there is mutual trust and respect—will largely determine your success with the audience. The speaker must respect the audience as well as the audience trusting the speaker.

Demographic Characteristics

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define audience-centered, audience analysis, and demographic characteristics;
2. List and explain the various demographic characteristics used to analyze an audience;
3. Define the meanings of attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs;
4. Diagram Maslow's hierarchy of needs and explain its usefulness to public speaking;
5. Describe contextual factors that should be considered when preparing a speech;
6. Describe typical barriers to listening in public speaking situations;
7. Explain ways an individual can improve his/her listening when in an audience; and
8. Apply what he/she knows about listening to improve personal preparation of a speech.

Demographic Characteristics

When we use the term **audience analysis**, we mean looking at the audience first by its demographic characteristics and then by their internal psychological traits. “Demo-” comes the Greek root word demos meaning “people,” and “-graphic” means description or drawing. **Demographic characteristics** describe the outward characteristics of the audience. This textbook will discuss eleven of them below, although you might see longer or shorter lists in other sources. Some of them are obvious and some not as much. But before we get into the specific demographic characteristics, let’s look at three principles.

First, be careful not to stereotype on the basis of a demographic

Demographic characteristics
the outward characteristics of the audience

characteristic. **Stereotyping** is generalizing about a group of people and assuming that because a few persons in that group have a characteristic, all of them do. If someone were sitting near campus and saw two students drive by in pickup trucks and said, “All students at that college drive pickup trucks,” that would be both stereotyping and the logical fallacy of hasty generalization (see Chapter 14). At the same time, one should not totalize about a person or group of persons. **Totalizing** is taking one characteristic of a group or person and making that the “totality” or sum total of what that person or group is. Totalizing often happens to persons with disabilities, for example; the disability is seen as the totality of that person, or all that person is about. This can be both harmful to the relationship and ineffective as a means of communicating. If a speaker before a group of professional women totalizes and concludes that some perception of “women’s issues” are all they care about, the speaker will be less effective and possibly unethical.

Audience analysis
examining and looking at your audience first by its demographic characteristics and then by their internal psychological traits

Avoiding stereotyping and totalizing are important because you cannot assume everything about an audience based

Totalizing

taking one characteristic of a group or person and making that the “totality” or sum total of what that person or group is

Stereotyping

generalizing about a group of people and assuming that because a few persons in that group have a characteristic, all of them do

on just one demographic characteristic. Two or three might be important. The age of a group will be important in how they think about investing their money, but so will the socio-economic level, career or profession, and even where they live. Even their religious beliefs may come into it. A good speaker will be aware of more than one or two characteristics of the audience.

Second, in terms of thinking about demographic characteristics, not all of them are created equal, and not all of them are important in every situation. When parents come to a PTA meeting, they are concerned about their children and playing the important role of “parent,” rather than being concerned about their profession. When senior citizens are thinking about how they will pay for their homes in retirement years, their ethnicity probably has less to do with it as much as their age and socio-economic level.

Third, there are two ways to think about demographic characteristics: positively and negatively. In a positive sense, the demographic characteristics tell you what might motivate or interest the audience or even bind it together. In a negative sense, the demographic characteristic might tell you what subjects or approaches to avoid. Understanding your audience is not a game of defensive tic-tac-toe, but a means of relating to them.

For example, a common example is given about audiences of the Roman Catholic faith. Speakers are warned not to “offend” them by talking about abortion, since official Roman Catholic teaching is against abortion. However, this analysis misses three points. First, even if most Roman Catholics take a pro-life position, they are aware of the issues and are adults who can listen and think about topics. Additionally, not all Roman Catholics agree with the official church stance, and it is a complex issue. Second, Roman Catholics are not the only people who hold views against abortion. Third, and most important, if all the speaker thinks about Roman Catholics is that they are against something, he or she might miss all the things the audience is for and what motivates them. In short, think about how the demographic characteristics inform what to talk about and how, not just what to avoid talking about.

There is one more point to be made about demographic characteristics before they are listed and explained. In a country of increasing diversity, demographic characteristics are dynamic. People change as the country changes. What was true about demographic characteristics—and even what was considered a demographic characteristic—has changed in the last fifty years. For example, the number of Internet users in 1980 was minuscule (mostly military personnel). Another change is that the percentage of the population living in the Great Lakes areas has dropped as the population has either aged or moved southward.

What follows is a listing of ten of the more common demographic characteristics that you might use in understanding your audience and shaping your speech to adapt to your audience.

Age

The first demographic characteristic is age. In American culture, we have traditionally ascribed certain roles, behaviors, motivations, interests, and concerns to people of certain ages. Young people are concerned about career choices; people over 60 are concerned about retirement. People go to college from the age of 18 to about 24. Persons of 50 years old have raised their children and are “empty nesters. These neat categories still exist for many, but in some respects they seem outdated.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), 38% of college students are over 25 years old. Some women and men wait until their late thirties to have children, and thus at 50 have preteens in the house. More and more grandparents—middle and lower incomes—are raising grandchildren. Combining the longer lives Americans are living with the economic recession of 2008 and following, 62 is not a reasonable age for retirement for many.

Therefore, knowing that your audience is 18, 30, 55, or 70 is important, but it is just one of many factors. In your classroom audience, for example, you may find 30-year-old returning, nontraditional college students, young entrepreneurs, 17-year-old dual enrollment students, and veterans who have done three or four tours in the Middle East as well as 18-year-old traditional college students.

Gender

The second demographic characteristic commonly listed is gender. This area is open to misunderstanding as much as any other. Despite stereotypes, not all women have fifty pairs of shoes with stiletto heels in their closets, and not all men love football. In almost all cases you will be speaking to a “mixed” audience of men and women, so you will have to keep both groups in mind. If you are speaking to a group of all men or all women and you are of the same gender as the audience, you might be able to use some appropriate common experiences to connect with the audience. However, if you are a woman speaking to an all-male audience or a man speaking to an all-female audience, those are situations in which to be aware of overall gender differences in communication.

According to Deborah Tannen (2007), a scholar of linguistics and a well-known author, men and women in the United States have divergent communication styles. She is quick to point out neither is all good or all bad, nor do they apply to every single person. The two communication styles are just different, and not recognizing the differences can cause problems, or “noise,” in communication. Although she normally applies these principles to family, marital, and work relationships, they can be applied to public speaking.

According to Tannen, women tend to communicate more inductively; they prefer to give lots of details and then move toward a conclusion. Other research on differences in gender communication indicate that women listen better, interrupt less, and collaborate more, although there is research to indicate this is not the case. (Keep in mind these are generalized tendencies, not necessarily true of every single woman or man.) Women tend to be less direct, to ask more questions, to use “hedges” and qualifiers (“it seems to me,” “I may be wrong, but . . .”) and to apologize more, often unnecessarily. Other research indicates women praise more, consequently expect more praise, and interpret lack of praise differently from how men do.

This lack of direct communication does not sound the same to men as it does to women. To men it may seem that a female speaker is unsure or lacks confidence, whereas the female speaker is either doing it out of habit or because she thinks she sounds open-minded and diplomatic. Tannen calls women’s style of communication “rapport” style, whereas she labels male communication as more of a “report” style.



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Male speakers, on the other hand, are more deductive and direct; they state their point, give limited details to back it up, and then move on. Men may be less inclined to ask questions and qualify what they say; they might not see any reason to add unnecessary fillers. Men also may tend toward basic facts, giving some the impression they are less emotional in their communication, which is a stereotype. Finally, men are socialized to “fix” things and may give advice to women when it is not really needed or wanted.

In some ways, these differences are traditional and some writers, especially women, are trying to help others avoid these patterns without losing the positive side of female or male communication differences. For example, books such as *Lean In* (Sandberg, 2013) are meant to teach women to negotiate for better salaries and conditions and avoid common communication behaviors that hurt their ability to negotiate. Also, many differences are situational and have to do with relative levels of power and other factors. However, it is unlikely these general tendencies are going to disappear any time soon.

Therefore, if you are a woman speaking to an all-male audience, be direct without mimicking “male talk.” Avoid excessive detail and description; it will be seen as getting off topic. Do not follow the habit of starting sentences with “I don’t know if this is 100% correct, but...” or even worse, the habitual “I’m sorry, but. . .” If on the other hand you are a male speaking to a primarily female audience, realize that women want knowledge but not to have their problems fixed. Men also seem abrupt when talking to women, and much research supports the conclusion that men talk more than women in groups and interrupt more. So, male speakers should allow time for questions and work hard at listening.

This section on gender has taken a typical, traditional “binary” approach. Today, more people openly identify as a gender other than traditionally male or female. Even those of us who identify as strictly male or female do not fully follow traditional gender roles. This is an area for growing sensitivity. At the same time, the purpose, subject, and context of the speech will probably define how and whether you address the demographic characteristic of gender.

Age and gender are the two main ways we categorize people: a teenaged boy, an elderly lady, a middle-aged man; a young mother. There are several other demographic characteristics, however.

Race, Ethnicity, and Culture

Race, ethnicity, and culture are often lumped together; at the same time, these categorizations can be controversial. We will consider race, ethnicity, and culture in one section because of their interrelationship although they are distinct categories

We might think in terms of a few racial groups in the world: Caucasian, African, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American. Each one of these has many ethnicities. Caucasian has ethnicities of Northern European, Arab, Indian (from India), Mediterranean, etc. Then each ethnicity has cultures. Mediterranean ethnicities include Greek, Italian, Spanish, etc., and then each of these has subcultures, and so on. It should be noted that many social scientists today reject the idea of race as a biological reality altogether and see it as a social construct. This means it is a view of humanity that has arisen over time and affects our thinking about others.

Unfortunately, dividing these categories and groups is not that easy, and these categories are almost always clouded by complicated political and personal concerns, which we do not have time or space to address here. Most audiences will be **heterogeneous**, or a mixture of different types of people and demographic characteristics, as opposed to **homogeneous**, very similar in many characteristics (a group of single, 20-year-old, white female nursing students at your college). Therefore, be sensitive to your audience members’ identification with a culture. Anglos are often guilty of confusing Hispanic (a language category) with cultures (a more regional or historical category), and overlooking that Mexican is not Puerto Rican is not Cuban is not Colombian. In the same way for Caucasians, a Canadian is not an Australian is not an American is not a Scot, just because their last names, basic looks, and language seem almost the same (well, sort of!). “American” itself is a problematic term since “American” can refer to every country in the Western Hemisphere.

As mentioned in a previous example, focus as much on the positives—what that culture values—rather than what the culture does not like or value. Now we turn to an even more complicated category, religion.

Religion

Religion, casually defined as beliefs and practices

Homogeneous

a group of people that are very similar in many characteristics

Heterogeneous

a mixture of different types of people and demographic characteristics within a group of people

about the transcendent, deity, and the meaning of life, can be thought of as an affiliation and a commitment. According to polls, due to either family or choice, a majority of Americans (although the percentage is shrinking) have some kind of religious affiliation, identity, or connection. It may simply be where they were christened as an infant, but it is a connection—"I'm in that group." About 23% of Americans are being called "nones" because they do not claim a formal religious affiliation (Pew Research, 2015).

On the other hand, a person may have an affiliation with a religious group but have no real commitment to it. The teaching and practices of the group, such as a denomination, may not affect the personal daily life of the member. Likewise, someone who has an affiliation may develop his or her own variations of beliefs that do not match the established organization's doctrines. Unless the audience is brought together because of common faith concerns or the group shares the same affiliation or commitment, religious faith may not be relevant to your topic and not a central factor in the audience analysis.

Religion, like ethnicity and culture, is an area where you should be conscious of the diversity of your audience. Not everyone worships in a "church," and not everyone attends a house of worship on Sunday. Not everyone celebrates Christmas the way your family does, and some do not celebrate it at all. Inclusive language, which will be discussed in Chapter 10, will be helpful in these situations.

Group Affiliation

Without getting into a sociological discussion, we can note that one demographic characteristic and source of identity for some is group affiliation. To what groups do the audience members' predominantly belong? Sometimes it will be useful to know if the group is mostly Republican, Democrat, members of a union, members of a professional organization, and so on. In many cases, your reason for being the speaker is connected to the group identity. Again, be mindful of what the group values and what binds the audience together.

Region

Region, another demographic characteristic, relates to where the audience members live. We can think of this in two ways. We live in regions of the country: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Rocky Mountain region, and West Coast. These regions can be broken down even more, such as coastal Southeastern states. Americans, especially in the East, are very conscious of their state or region and identify with it a great deal.

The second way to think about region is as "residence" or whether the audience lives in an urban area, the suburbs, or a rural area. If you live in the city, you probably do not think about being without cell phone or Internet service, but many people in rural areas do not take those for granted. The clubs that students in rural high schools belong to might be very different from what a student in a city would join.

Occupation

Occupation may be a demographic characteristic that is central to your presentation. For the most part in the U.S., we choose our occupations because they reflect our values, interests, and abilities, and as we associate with colleagues in that occupation, those values, interests, and abilities are strengthened. You are probably in college to enter a specific career that you believe will be economically beneficial and personally fulfilling. We sometimes spend more time at work than any other activity, except sleeping. Messages that acknowledge the importance, diversity, and reasons for occupations will be more effective. At the same time, if you are speaking to an audience with different occupations, do not use jargon from one specific occupation. This idea is addressed more in Chapter 11.

Education

The next demographic characteristic is education, which is closely tied to occupation and is often, though not always, a matter of choice. In the United States, education usually reflects what kind of information and training a person has been *exposed to*, but it does not necessarily reflect intelligence. An individual with a bachelor's degree in physics or computer science may know a great deal more about that field than someone with a Ph.D. in English. Having a certain credential is supposed to be a guarantee of having learned a set of knowledge or attained certain skills. Some persons, especially employers, tend to see achieving a credential such as a college degree as

the person's having the "grit" to finish an academic program. We are also generally proud of our educational achievements, so they should not be dis-regarded.

Socio-economic Level

Socio-economic level, another demographic characteristic, is also tied to occupation and education in many cases. We expect certain levels of education or certain occupations to make more money. While you cannot know the exact pay of your audience members, you should be careful about references that would portray your own socio-economic level as superior to their own. Saying, "When I bought my BMW 7 Series" (a car that retails at over \$80,000) would not make a good impression on someone in the audience who is struggling to make a car payment on her used KIA. One time a lawyer for a state agency was talking to a group of college professors about how she negotiated her salary. She mentioned that she was able to get her salary raised by an amount that was more than the annual salary of the audience members. Her message, which was a good one, was lost in this case because of insensitivity to the audience.

Sexual Orientation

The next few demographic characteristics are more personal and may not seem important to your speech topic, but then again, they may be the most important for your audience. Sexual orientation, usually referred to by the letters LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-gendered, Queer), is a characteristic not listed in speech textbooks forty years ago. As acceptance of people of various sexual orientations and lifestyles becomes more common, we can expect that these differences will lead to people feeling free to express who they are and not be confined to traditional gender roles or stereotypes. For this reason, it is useful to employ inclusive language, such as "partner" or "spouse."

Family Status

Family status, such as whether the audience members are married, single, divorced, or have children or grandchildren may be very important to the concerns and values of your audience and even the reason the audience is brought together. For example, young parents could be gathered to listen to a speaker because they are concerned about health and safety of children in the community. Getting married and/or having a child often creates a seismic shift in how a person views the world, his responsibilities, and his priorities. A speaker should be aware if she is talking to single, married, divorced, or widowed persons and if the audience members are parents, especially with children at home.

Does this section on demographic characteristics leave you wondering, "With all this diversity, how can we even think about an audience?" If so, do not feel alone in that thought. As diversity increases, audience understanding and adaptation becomes more difficult. To address this concern, you should keep in mind the primary reason the audience is together and the demographic characteristics they have in common—*their common bonds*. For example, your classmates may be diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, or religion, but they have in common profession (all students) and region (living near or on the campus), as well as, possibly, other characteristics.

Perhaps your instructor will do an exercise in class that helps you explore the demographic characteristics displayed in your class audience. You might find that most live with their parents, or that 60% of them are planning to enter a health profession, or that one-third of them have children at home. Knowing these facts will help you find ways to choose topics, select approaches and sources for those topics, know when you should explain an idea in more detail, avoid strategies that would become barriers to communicating with the audience, and/or include personal examples to which the audience members can relate. In Chapter 4, we include case study exercises to bring together audience analysis in composing the foundational approach of the speech.

[49]

Psychographic Characteristics

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define audience-centered, audience analysis, and demographic characteristics;
2. List and explain the various demographic characteristics used to analyze an audience;
3. Define the meanings of attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs;
4. Diagram Maslow's hierarchy of needs and explain its usefulness to public speaking;
5. Describe contextual factors that should be considered when preparing a speech;
6. Describe typical barriers to listening in public speaking situations;
7. Explain ways an individual can improve his/her listening when in an audience; and
8. Apply what he/she knows about listening to improve personal preparation of a speech.

Psychographic Characteristics

Whereas demographic characteristics describe the “facts” about the people in your audience and are focused on the external, **psychographic characteristics** explain the inner qualities. Although there are many ways to think about this topic, here the ones relevant to a speech will be explored: beliefs, attitudes, needs, and values.

Beliefs

Daryl Bem (1970) defined **beliefs** as “statements we hold to be true.”

Notice this definition does not say the beliefs are true, only that we hold them to be true and as such they determine how we respond to the world around us. Stereotypes are a kind of belief: we believe all the people in a certain group are “like that” or share a trait. Beliefs are not confined to the religious realm, either. We have beliefs about many aspects of the world.

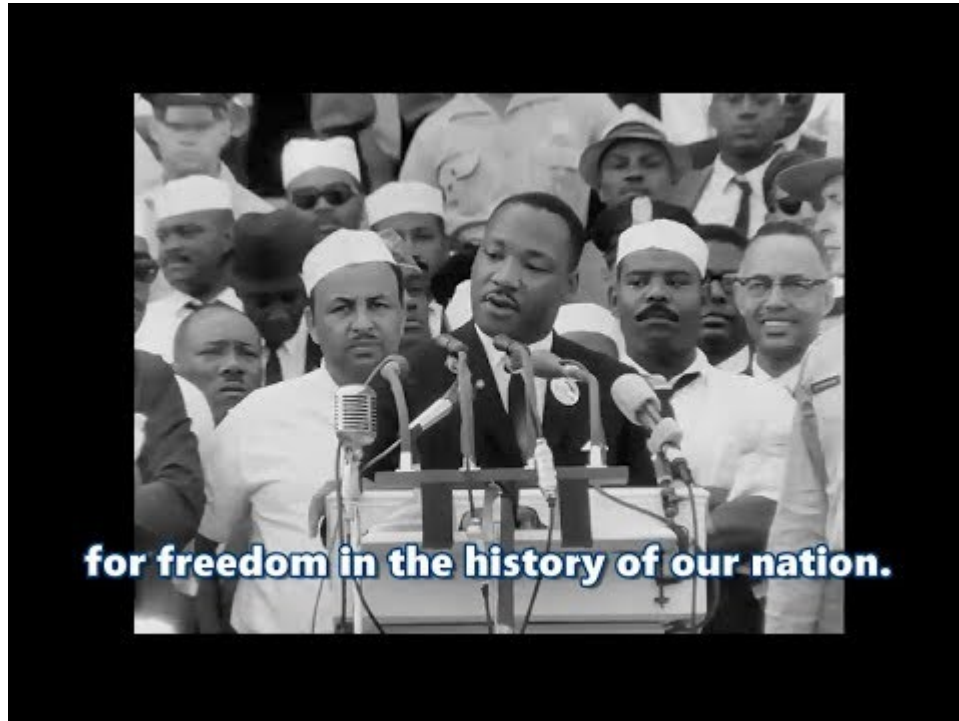
Beliefs, according to Bem, come essentially from our experience and from sources we trust. Therefore, beliefs are hard to change—not impossible, just difficult. Beliefs are hard to change because of:

- stability—the longer we hold them, the more stable or entrenched they are;
- centrality—they are in the middle of our identity, self-concept, or “who we are”;
- saliency—we think about them a great deal; and
- strength—we have a great deal of intellectual or experiential support for the belief or we engage in activities that strengthen the beliefs.

***Psychographic Characteristics**
the inner characteristics of the audience; beliefs,
attitudes, needs, and values*

***Beliefs**
statements we hold to be true*

Beliefs can have varying levels of stability, centrality, salience, and strength. An educator's beliefs about the educational process and importance of education would be strong (support from everyday experience and reading sources of information), central (how he makes his living and defines his work), salient (he spends every day thinking about it), and stable (especially if he has been an educator a long time). Beliefs can be changed, and we will examine how in Chapter 13 under persuasion, but it is not a quick process.



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Attitudes

The next psychographic characteristic, attitude, is sometimes a direct effect of belief. **Attitude** is defined as a stable positive or negative response to a person, idea, object, or policy. How do you respond when you hear the name of a certain singer, movie star, political leader, sports team, or law in your state? Your response will be either positive or negative, or maybe neutral if you are not familiar with the object of the attitude. Where did that attitude come from? Psychologists and communication scholars study attitude formation and change probably as much as any other subject, and have found that attitude comes from experiences, peer groups, beliefs, rewards, and punishments.

Do not confuse attitude with “mood.” Attitudes are stable; if you respond negatively to Brussels sprouts today, you probably will a week from now. That does not mean they are unchangeable, only that, like beliefs, they change slowly and in response to certain experiences, information, or strategies. As with beliefs, we will examine how to change attitudes in the chapter on persuasion. Changing attitudes is a primary task of public speakers because attitudes are the most determining factor in what people actually do. In other words, attitudes lead to actions, and interestingly, actions lead to and strengthen attitudes. Think back to the TedTalk video by Dr. Amy Cuddy that you watched in Chapter 1.

We may hold a belief that regular daily exercise is a healthy activity, but that does not mean we will have a positive attitude toward it. There may be other attitudes that compete with the belief, such as “I do not like to

Attitude

a stable positive or negative response to a person, idea, object, or policy

sweat,” or “I don’t like exercising alone.” Also, we may not act upon a belief because we do not feel there is a direct, immediate benefit from it or we may not believe we have time right now in college. If we have a positive attitude toward exercise, we will more likely engage in it than if we only believe it is generally healthy.

Values

As you can see, attitude and belief are somewhat complex “constructs,” but fortunately the next two are more straightforward. (A construct is “a tool used in psychology to facilitate understanding of human behavior; a label for a cluster of related but co-varying behaviors” [Rogelberg, 2007].) **Values** are goals we strive for and what we consider important and desirable. However, values are not just basic wants. A person may want a vintage sports car from the 1960s, and may value it because of the amount of money it costs, but the vintage sports car is not a value; it represents a value of either

- nostalgia (the person’s parents owned one in the 1960s and it reminds him of good times),
- display (the person wants to show it off and get “oohs” and “ahs”),
- materialism (the person believes the adage that the one who dies with the most toys wins),
- aesthetics and beauty (the person admires the look of the car and enjoys maintaining the sleek appearance),
- prestige (the person has earned enough money to enjoy and show off this kind of vehicle), or
- physical pleasure (the driver likes the feel of driving a sports car on the open road).

Values

goals we strive for and what we consider important and desirable

Therefore we can engage in the same behavior but for different values; one person may participate in a river cleanup because she values the future of the planet; another may value the appearance of the community in which she lives; another just because friends are involved and she values relationships. A few years ago political pundits coined the term “values voters,” usually referring to social conservatives, but this is a misnomer because almost everyone votes and otherwise acts upon his or her values—what is important to the individual.

Needs

The fourth psychographic characteristic is **needs**, which are important deficiencies that we are motivated to fulfill. You may already be familiar with the well-known diagram known as Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs. It is commonly discussed in the fields of management, psychology, and health professions. A version of it is shown in Figure 2.1. (More recent versions show it with 8 levels.) It is one way to think about needs. In trying to understand human motivation, Maslow theorized that as our needs represented at the base of the pyramid are fulfilled, we move up the hierarchy to fulfill other types of need (McLeod, 2014).

According to Maslow’s theory, our most basic physiological or survival needs must be met before we move to the second level, which is safety and security. When our needs for safety and security are met, we move up to relationship or connection needs, often called “love and belongingness.” The fourth level up is esteem needs, which could be thought of as achievement, accomplishment, or self-confidence. The highest level, self-actualization, is achieved by those who are satisfied and secure enough in the lower four that they can make sacrifices for others. Self-actualized persons are usually thought of as altruistic or charitable. Maslow also believed that studying motivation was best done by understanding psychologically healthy individuals.

Needs

important deficiencies that we are motivated to fulfill

[Cherry, K. \(2019\). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.](#)

In another course you might go into more depth about Maslow’s philosophy and theory, but the key point to remember here is that your audience members are experiencing both “felt” and “real” needs. They may not even be aware of their needs; in a persuasive speech one of your tasks is to show the audience that needs exist that they might not know about. For example, gasoline sold in most of the U.S. has ethanol, a plant-based product, added to

it, usually about 10%. Is this beneficial or detrimental for the planet, the engine of the car, or consumers' wallets? Your audience may not even be aware of the ethanol, its benefits, and the problems it can cause.

A "felt" need is another way to think about strong "wants" that the person believes will fulfill or satisfy them even if the item is not necessary for survival. For example, one humorous depiction of the Maslow's hierarchy of needs (seen on Facebook) has the words "wifi" scribbled at the bottom of the pyramid. Another meme has "coffee" scribbled at the bottom of the hierarchy. As great as wifi and coffee are, they are not crucial to human survival, either individually or collectively, but we do want them so strongly that they operate like needs.

So, how do these psychographic characteristics operate in preparing a speech? They are most applicable to a persuasive speech, but they do apply to other types of speeches as well. What are your audience's informational needs? What beliefs or attitudes do they have that could influence your choice of topic, sources, or examples? How can you make them interested in the speech by appealing to their values? The classroom speeches you give will allow you a place to practice audience analysis based on demographic and psychographic characteristics, and that practice will aid you in future presentations in the work place and community.

Contextual Factors of Audience Analysis

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define audience-centered, audience analysis, and demographic characteristics;
2. List and explain the various demographic characteristics used to analyze an audience;
3. Define the meanings of attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs;
4. Diagram Maslow's hierarchy of needs and explain its usefulness to public speaking;
5. Describe contextual factors that should be considered when preparing a speech;
6. Describe typical barriers to listening in public speaking situations;
7. Explain ways an individual can improve his/her listening when in an audience; and
8. Apply what he/she knows about listening to improve personal preparation of a speech.

Contextual Factors of Audience Analysis

The “facts about” and “inner qualities” (demographic and psychographic characteristics) of the audience influence your approach to any presentation. The context (place and time) of the speech does also. What follows are some questions to consider when planning your presentation.

1. How much time do I have for the presentation? As mentioned in Chapter 1, we must respect the time limits of a speech. In most cases you will have little control over the time limits. In class the instructor assigns a five- to six-minute speech; at work, there may be an understood twenty-minute presentation rule in the organization, since attention can diminish after a certain length. You might be asked to speak to a community group for your company and be told that you have thirty minutes—that seems like a long time, but if you are really passionate about the subject, that time can go quickly. Knowing the time limit for a speech does three things for the speaker. First, it lets her know how much of a given topic can realistically be covered. Secondly, the speaker must practice to be sure that his/her content actually fits in the time given, so the practice leads to a better speech. Third, time limits impose a discipline and focus on the speaker. In reference to practice, this might be a good place to dispel the “practice makes perfect” myth. It is possible to practice incorrectly, so in that case, **practice will make permanent, not perfect**. There is a right way and a wrong way to practice a speech, musical instrument, or sport.
2. What time of the day is the presentation? An audience at 8:00 in the morning is not the same as at 2:00 p.m. An audience at Monday at 10:00 a.m. is not the same as at 3:00 Friday afternoon. The time of your presentation may tell you a great deal about how to prepare. For example, if the audience is likely to be tired, you might want to get them physically active or talking to each other in a part of the speech, especially if it is a long presentation.

3. Why is the audience gathered? In the case of your speech class, everyone is there, of course, because they want a grade and because they are students at the college. However, they also have career and educational goals and probably are at a certain stage in their education. (Some people wait until the last semester of senior year to take this course, but most are going to be first-year students.) In other contexts, the audience is there because of a common interest, commitment, or responsibility. What is it? Everything you do in the speech should be relevant to that reason for their being there.
4. What is the physical space like? Straightforward, with the audience in rows and hard seats, as in a classroom? A typical boardroom with a long table and a dozen or more chairs around it? Big sofas and armchairs, where the audience might get too comfortable and drowsy? Can the speaker walk around and get closer to the audience? Does the speaker have to stay behind a lectern or on a platform? Is there audiovisual equipment? Is the room well-lit? Sometimes you will have no control over the physical space, especially in the speech classroom, but you should try to exert all the control you possibly can in other situations. Even the temperature of the room or outside noise can affect your speech's effectiveness. Just closing the door can make a world of difference in the physical space and its effect on the audience.
5. Related to number 4 is "How large will the audience be?" Ten people or one hundred? This factor will probably affect your delivery the most. You may need to increase your volume in a venue with a large audience, or you might have to use a microphone, which could limit your walking around and getting close to the group. On the other hand, you might want to directly interact with the audience if it is a smaller, more intimate number of people. The size of the audience will also affect your choice of visual aids.
6. What does the audience expect? Why were you asked to speak to them? Again, in the class you will have certain specifications for the presentations, such as type of speech, length, kinds of sources used, visual aids or lack of them. In other contexts, you will need to ask many questions to know the context fully.

Knowing these details about the audience can greatly impact how successful you are as a speaker, and not knowing them can potentially have adverse effects. One of the textbook authors was asked to speak to the faculty of another college about 120 miles away on the subject of research about teaching college students. Because the campus she was visiting was a branch campus, she assumed (always dangerous) that only the faculty on that small branch campus would be present. Actually, the faculty of the whole college—over 400 instructors in a college of over 21,000 students—showed up. Although the speaker was very conscious of time limits (30 minutes), subject matter, needs of the audience, and expectations, the change in the size of the expected audience was a shock.

It all went well because she was an experienced speaker, but she was a little embarrassed to realize she had not asked the actual size of the audience. Of course, the auditorium was much larger than she expected, the slides she planned to use were inappropriate, and she could not walk around. Instead, she was "stuck" behind a lectern. This is all to say that the importance of knowing your audience and taking the time to prepare based on that knowledge can make your speech go much more smoothly, and not doing so can lead to unexpected complications.

Chapter 12: Developing Topics for Your Speech

Chapter 12: Developing Topics for Your Speech

image

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
- Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
- Write a specific purpose statement;
- Write a thesis or central idea statement;
- Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
- Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

Chapter Preview

12.1 – Getting Started with Your Topic

12.2 – Formulating a Specific Purpose Statement

12.3 – Formulating a Central Idea Statement

12.4 – Problems to Avoid with Specific Purpose and Central Idea Statements

Getting Started with Your Topic and Purpose

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
2. Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
3. Write a specific purpose statement;
4. Write a thesis or central idea statement;
5. Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
6. Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

Getting Started with Your Topic and Purpose

So far in this book we have examined many practical and theoretical aspects of public speaking as a method of communicating and as an art form. In this chapter we are going to get into the real meat of putting your speech together.

Often when we get to the point of sitting down to prepare a speech, we think about topics. That is understandable, but before we go any further, let's recalibrate our minds to think also, or even more, about "purpose." There are some benefits to considering purpose and topic simultaneously. Doing so will help you focus your speech to a manageable amount of content and become more audience-centered. Also you will be able to make strategic decisions about other aspects of the speech, such as organization, supporting evidence, and visual aids.

Speeches have traditionally been seen to have one of three broad purposes: to inform, to persuade, and—Well, to be honest, different words are used for the third kind of speech purpose: to inspire, to amuse, to please, or to entertain. We will just use "to inspire" as the overall term here. These broad goals are commonly known as a speech's **general purpose**, since, in general, you are trying to inform, persuade, or entertain/inspire your audience without regard to specifically what the topic will be. Perhaps you could think of them as appealing to the understanding of the audience (informative), the will or action (persuasive), and the emotion or pleasure. Your instructor will most likely assign you an informative and a persuasive speech, and then perhaps one more, such as a tribute (commemorative), after-dinner, or special occasion speech. These last three types of speeches fit into the category of "to entertain." This book has chapters on and examples of all three types (Chapters 12, 13, and 15).

These three purposes are not necessarily exclusive of the others. A speech designed to be persuasive can also be informative and entertaining, even if either of those are not the main purpose.

General Purpose

the broad, overall goal of a speech; to inform, to persuade, to entertain, etc.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the canons of rhetoric is the traditional way to explain the process of preparing a speech. That process is still a practical guide for today. The first canon, invention, or *inventio*, is discussed, at least in part, in this chapter. (Actually chapters 5, 7, 12, and 13 also deal with invention.) Although in modern times we tend to think of invention as the creation of a new technology, invention basically means “discovery” of what to say.

The scholars of rhetoric from the ancient times encouraged the use of questions to “discover” the arguments and content of the speech. These were called “*topoi*” and there were a couple of dozen of them; modern scholars have reframed them as questions that can be used to develop reasons and material. These can be helpful in many ways, but here we will present just two basic questions you should consider for beginning your speech: 1. What value, connection, or interest does my purpose/topic have for the audience? What needs do they meet? and 2. Why would the audience consider me, the speaker, a credible source on this purpose/topic? We suggest that these two questions be in your mind as you develop your speech. You should answer them, directly or indirectly, in your speech. If your audience is unfamiliar with your topic, for instance, you would want to address the first one early in the speech. If your audience does not know anything about you, you should mention (in an appropriate way) your background in the subject area.

One of the authors has a core concept in her basic public speaking classes: The most effective speeches are the ones that answer the questions in the minds of the audience. She uses that to change the students’ focus from speaking just to express themselves to being audience-centered. She also uses the acronym “WIIFM.” This is not a new radio station, but the abbreviation for “What’s In It For Me?” The audience is asking this question, directly or indirectly, during a speech. Keep the WIIFM motto in mind as you start to think about your speeches more and more from your audience’s perspective.

Formulating a Specific Purpose Statement

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
2. Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
3. Write a specific purpose statement;
4. Write a thesis or central idea statement;
5. Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
6. Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

FORMULATING A SPECIFIC PURPOSE STATEMENT

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 (such as to inform) 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, for example, the history of NASA's Shuttle program.

In writing your specific purpose statement, you will take three contributing elements that will come together to help you determine your specific purpose. The diagram in Figure 4.1 shows those three elements. These three elements are **you** (your interests, your background, past jobs, experience, education, major), **your audience** (which you learned to analyze in Chapter 2), and **the context** or setting (also discussed in Chapter 2).

Specific Purpose Statement

an infinitive phrase that builds upon the speaker's general purpose to clearly indicate precisely what the goal of a given speech is

You

An old adage states, "Write about what you know." In many ways, that is a great place to start with creating a speech, although you will need to consult other sources as well. If you start with ideas that reflect your interests and passions, that passion and commitment will come across in your speech and give you more credibility in the eyes of your audience and make your speech more interesting.

This would be a good place for you to do an inventory. Retail stores do regular inventories to know what is "really there" in the stores. You have much more going on in your brain and background than you can be conscious of at any one time. Being asked the right kinds of prompts can help you find ideas. Figure 4.2 is a list of prompts for

this inventory. To help generate some ideas for your speeches, complete the phrases and/or answer the questions in Figure 4.2 to see if any ideas can be generated from experiences or interests you may not have realized you had.

This inventory may seem long and intrusive, but digging a little deeper may help you find ideas and directions that are unique to you. You want to find this kind of subject matter and not the same topics others will gravitate towards just because they saw a list on Google on informative speech topics. Also, generating your list based on these questions and prompts will get you excited about your topic and talking about it to your classmates. For example, a very common persuasive speech topic is organ donation. There is nothing wrong with that topic *per se* and it is an important issue. However, if you ask yourself the right questions, you may come up with something far more central to who you are and that would interest and/or apply to the audience more.

Another approach that you might find helpful is to determine what you are passionate about through two binary routes. First, you will obviously be passionate about the things you love, so talk about those. Is *The Simpsons* your favorite TV show? Then you can inform us on the people and vision of the team behind this highly popular and long-running TV show. Do you feel that Big Brothers Big Sisters is a vital organization in the way it helps kids? Then persuade us to volunteer there. Conversely, you can also be passionate about things you don't love (i.e., hate). Does it really annoy you when people don't use their turn signals? Then persuade us to always use them. Do you want to scream when you hear a cell phone go off at the movies? Then persuade us that cell phones should be banned in theaters.

The Audience

Of course, what you love or hate may be in stark contrast to how your audience feels, so it is important to keep them in mind as well, which brings us to the next contributing factor. After you examine what you know and are passionate about, you have to determine if and how the topic has practical value or interest for others. It may be that it is a topic the audience is not immediately interested in but needs to know about for their own benefit. Then it becomes necessary for you to find that angle and approach that will help them see the benefit of it and listen to you. The more you know about your audience, the better you can achieve this goal. Good speakers are very knowledgeable about their audiences.

The Context

Many aspects come into the context of a speech, but as mentioned in Chapter 2, the main ones are the time, place, and reason(s) for the event and the audience being there. Your classroom speeches have a fairly set context: time limits, the classroom, assignment specifications. Other speeches you will give in college (or in your career and personal life) will require you to think more deeply about the context just as you would the audience.

Putting It Together

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:

The purpose of this speech is to _____ **Specific Communication Word** (*inform, explain, demonstrate, describe, define, persuade, convince, prove, argue*);
 _____ **Target Audience** (*my classmates, the members of the Student Life Club, my coworkers*); **The Content** _____ (*how to properly wash your hands; that coffee is better than tea*)

Each of these parts of the specific purpose is important. The first two parts make sure you are clear on your purpose and know specifically who will be hearing your message. However, we will focus on the last part here.

The content part of the specific purposes statement must first be singular and focused, and the content must match the purpose. The word “and” really should not appear in the specific purpose statement since that would make it seem that you have two purposes and two topics. Obviously, the specific purpose statement's content must be very narrowly defined and, well, specific. One mistake beginning speakers often make is to try to “cover” too much material. They tend to speak about the whole alphabet, A-Z on a subject, instead of just “T” or “L.” This

comes from an emphasis on the topic more than the purpose, and from not keeping audience and context in mind. In other words, go deep (specific) not broad. Examples in this chapter will show what that means.

Second, the content must match the focus of the purpose word. A common error is to match an informative purpose with a persuasive content clause or phrase. For example,

To explain to my classmates why term life insurance is a better option than whole life insurance policies.

To inform my classmates about how the recent Supreme Court decision on police procedures during arrests is unconstitutional.

Sometimes it takes an unbiased second party to see where your content and purpose may not match.

Third, the specific purpose statement should be relevant to the audience. How does the purpose and its topic touch upon their lives, wallets, relationships, careers, etc.? It is also a good idea to keep in mind what you want the audience to walk away with or what you want them to know, to be able to do, to think, to act upon, or to respond to your topic—your ultimate outcome or result.

To revisit an earlier example, “to explain to my classmates the history of NASA” would be far too much material and the audience may be unsure of its relevance. A more specific one such as “to inform my classmates about the decline of the Shuttle program” would be more manageable and closer to their experience. Here are several examples of specific purposes statements. Notice how they meet the standards of being singular, focused, relevant, and consistent.

To inform my classmates of the origin of the hospice movement.

To describe to my coworkers the steps to apply for retirement.

To define for a group of new graduate students the term “academic freedom.”

To explain to the Lions Club members the problems faced by veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To persuade the members of the Greek society to take the spring break trip to Daytona Beach.

To motivate my classmates to engage in the College’s study abroad program.

To convince my classroom audience that they need at least seven hours of sleep per night to do well in their studies.

Now that you understand the basic form and function of a specific purpose statement, let’s revisit the original diagram in Figure 4.1. The same topic for a different audience will create a somewhat different specific purpose statement. Public speaking is not a “one-size-fits-all” proposition. Let’s take the subject of participating in the study abroad program. How would you change your approach if you were addressing first-semester freshmen instead of first-semester juniors? Or if you were speaking to high school students in one of the college’s feeder high schools? Or if you were asked to share your experiences with a local civic group that gave you a partial scholarship to participate in the program? You would have slightly different specific purpose statements although your experience and basic information are all the same.

For another example, let’s say that one of your family members has benefitted from being in the Special Olympics and you have volunteered two years at the local event. You could give a tribute (commemorative speech) about the work of Special Olympics (with the purpose to inspire), an informative speech on the scope or history of the Special Olympics, or a persuasive speech on why audience members should volunteer at next year’s event. “Special Olympics” is a key word in every specific purpose, but the statements would otherwise be different.

Despite all the information given about specific purpose statements so far, the next thing you read will seem strange: *Never start your speech by saying your specific purpose to the audience.* In a sense, it is just for you and the instructor. For you, it’s like a note you might tack on the mirror or refrigerator to keep you on track. For the instructor, it’s a way for him or her to know you are accomplishing both the assignment and what you set out to do. Avoid the temptation to default to saying it at the beginning of your speech. It will seem awkward and repetitive.

Formulating a Central Idea Statement

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
2. Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
3. Write a specific purpose statement;
4. Write a thesis or central idea statement;
5. Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
6. Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

Formulating a Central Idea Statement – developing the thesis 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 (preferably after using an introductory method such as those described in Chapter 8). The statement that reveals your main points is commonly known as the **central idea statement** (or just the central idea).

Now, at this point we need to make a point about terminology. Your instructor may call the central idea statement “the thesis” or “the thesis statement.” Your English composition instructor probably uses that term in your essay writing. Another instructor may call it the “main idea statement.” All of these are basically synonymous and you should not let the terms confuse you, but you should use the term your instructor uses.

Central Idea Statement
a statement that contains or summarizes a speech's main points

That said, is the central idea statement the very same thing as the thesis sentence in an essay? Yes, in that both are letting the audience know without a doubt your topic, purpose, direction, angle and/or point of view. No, in that the rules for writing a “thesis” or central idea statement in a speech are not as strict as in an essay. For example, it is acceptable in a speech to announce the topic and purpose, although it is usually not the most artful or effective way to do it. You may say,

“In this speech I will try to motivate you to join me next month as a volunteer at the regional Special Olympics.”

That would be followed by a preview statement of what the speech's arguments or reasons for participating will be, such as,

“You will see that it will benefit the community, the participants, and you individually.”

However, another approach is to “capsulize” the purpose, topic, approach, and preview in one succinct statement.

“Your involvement as a volunteer in next month’s regional Special Olympics will be a rewarding experience that will benefit the community, the participants, and you personally.”

This last version is really the better approach and most likely the one your instructor will prefer.

So, you don’t want to just repeat your specific purpose in the central idea statement, but you do want to provide complete information. Also, unlike the formal thesis of your English essays, the central idea statement in a speech can and should use personal language (I, me, we, us, you, your, etc.) and should attempt to be attention-getting and audience-focused. And importantly, just like a formal thesis sentence, it must be a complete, grammatical sentence.

The point of your central idea statement in terms of your audience is to reveal and clarify the ideas or assertions you will be addressing in your speech, more commonly known as your main points, to fulfill your specific purpose. However, as you are processing your ideas and approach, you may still be working on them. Sometimes those main points will not be clear to you immediately. As much as we would like these writing processes to be straightforward, sometimes we find that we have to revise our original approach. This is why preparing a speech the night before you are giving it is a really, really bad idea. You need lots of time for the preparation and then the practice.

Sometimes you will hear the writing process referred to as “iterative.” This word means, among other things, that a speech or document is not always written in the same order as the audience finally experiences it. You may have noticed that we have not said anything about the introduction of your speech yet. Even though that is the first thing the audience hears, it may be one of the last parts you actually compose. It is best to consider your speech flexible as you work on it, and to be willing to edit and revise. If your instructor asks you to turn the outline in before the speech, you should be clear on how much you can revise after that. Otherwise, it helps to know that you can keep editing your speech until you deliver it, especially while you practice.

Here are some examples of pairs of specific purpose statements and central idea statements.

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.

Specific Purpose: To persuade my political science class that labor unions are no longer a vital political force in the U.S.

Central Idea: Although for decades in the twentieth century labor unions influenced local and national elections, in this speech I will point to how their influence has declined in the last thirty years.

Specific Purpose: To motivate my audience to oppose the policy of drug testing welfare recipients.

Central Idea: Many voices are calling for welfare recipients to have to go through mandatory, regular drug testing, but this policy is unjust, impractical, and costly, and fair-minded Americans should actively oppose it.

Specific Purpose: To explain to my fellow civic club members why I admire Representative John Lewis.

Central Idea: John Lewis has my admiration for his sacrifices during the Civil Rights movement and his service to Georgia as a leader and U.S. Representative.

Specific Purpose: To describe how makeup is done for the TV show The Walking Dead.

Central Idea: The wildly popular zombie show The Walking Dead achieves incredibly scary and believable makeup effects, and in the next few minutes I will tell you who does it, what they use, and how they do it.

Notice that in all of the above examples that neither the specific purpose nor the central idea ever exceeds one sentence. You may divide your central idea and the preview of main points into two sentences or three sentences,

depending on what your instructor directs. If your central idea consists of more than three sentences, then you probably are including too much information and taking up time that is needed for the body of the speech.

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Problems to Avoid with Specific Purpose and Central Idea Statements

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
2. Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
3. Write a specific purpose statement;
4. Write a thesis or central idea statement;
5. Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
6. Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

Problems to Avoid with Specific Purpose and Central Idea Statements

The first problem many students have in writing their specific purpose statement has already been mentioned: specific purpose statements sometimes try to cover far too much and are too broad. For example:

To explain to my classmates the history of ballet.

Aside from the fact that this subject may be difficult for everyone in your audience to relate to, it is enough for a three-hour lecture, maybe even a whole course. You will probably find that your first attempt at a specific purpose statement will need refining. These examples are much more specific and much more manageable given the limited amount of time you will have.

To explain to my classmates how ballet came to be performed and studied in the U.S.

To explain to my classmates the difference between Russian and French ballet.

To explain to my classmates how ballet originated as an art form in the Renaissance.

To explain to my classmates the origin of the ballet dancers' clothing.

The second problem with specific purpose statements is the opposite of being too broad, in that some specific purposes statements are so focused that they might only be appropriate for people who are already extremely interested in the topic or experts in a field:

To inform my classmates of the life cycle of a new species of lima bean (botanists, agriculturalists).

To inform my classmates about the Yellow 5 ingredient in Mountain Dew (chemists, nutritionists).

To persuade my classmates that JIF Peanut Butter is better than Peter Pan. (organizational chefs in large institutions)

The third problem happens when the “communication verb” in the specific purpose does not match the content; for example, persuasive content is paired with “to inform” or “to explain.” If you resort to the word “why” in the thesis, it is probably persuasive.

To inform my audience why capital punishment is unconstitutional. **(This cannot be informative since it is taking a side)**

To persuade my audience about the three types of individual retirement accounts. **(This is not persuading the audience of anything, just informing)**

To inform my classmates that Universal Studios is a better theme park than Six Flags over Georgia. **(This is clearly an opinion, hence persuasive)**

The fourth problem exists when the content part of the specific purpose statement has two parts and thus uses “and.” A good speech follows the KISS rule—Keep It Simple, Speaker. One specific purpose is enough. These examples cover two different topics.

To explain to my audience how to swing a golf club and choose the best golf shoes.

To persuade my classmates to be involved in the Special Olympics and vote to fund better classes for the intellectually disabled.

To fix this problem, you will need to select one of the topics in these examples and speak on just that:

To explain to my audience how to swing a golf club.

OR

To explain to my audience how to choose the best golf shoes.

Of course, the value of this topic depends on your audience and our own experience as a golfer.

The fifth problem with both specific purpose and central idea statements is related to formatting. There are some general guidelines that need to be followed in terms of how you write out these elements of your speech:

- Do not write either statement as a question.
- Always use complete sentences for central idea statements and infinitive phrases (that is, “to”) for the specific purpose statement.
- Only use concrete language (“I admire Beyoncé for being a talented performer and businesswoman”), and avoid subjective terms (“My speech is about why I think Beyoncé is the bomb”) or jargon and acronyms (“PLA is better than CBE for adult learners.”)

Finally, the sixth problem occurs when the speech just gets off track of the specific purpose statement, in that it starts well but veers in another direction. This problem relates to the challenge of developing coherent main points, what might be called “the Roman numeral points” of the speech. The specific purpose usually determines the main points and the relevant structure. For example, if the specific purpose is:

To inform my classmates of the five stages of grief as described by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.

There is no place in this speech for a biography of Dr. Kubler-Ross, arguments against this model of grief, therapies for those undergoing grief, or steps for the audience to take to get counseling. All of those are different specific purposes. The main points would have to be the five stages, in order, as Dr. Kubler-Ross defined them.

There are also problems to avoid in writing the central idea statement. As mentioned above, remember that:

- The specific purpose and central idea statements are not the same thing, although they are related.
- The central idea statement should be clear and not complicated or wordy; it should “stand out” to the

audience. As you practice delivery, you should emphasize it with your voice.

- The central idea statement should not be the first thing you say, but should follow the steps of a good introduction as outlined in Chapter 8. Those steps include
 1. getting the audience's attention,
 2. revealing the topic,
 3. revealing the main points (i.e. your central idea),
 4. establishing your credibility, and
 5. establishing rapport with your audience.

One last word. You will notice that we have said nothing about titles of your speeches so far. A title is a good thing and serves purposes. Your instructor may or may not emphasize the title of your speech. This textbook chooses to focus on the purpose and central idea as the basis, even the spine of the speech. A good source on titles can be found here: Asbury, C. (2006-2018). How to write good speech titles. Retrieved from <https://www.best-speech-topics.com/speech-titles.html>

Case Studies in Specific Purposes and Central Idea Statements

Case Study One: Mitchell is taking a Fundamentals of Speech course in his second year of college. As a member of the college's tennis team, he wants to speak on his favorite subject, tennis. He is assigned an informative speech that should be seven minutes long and use four external sources (other than his own experience). He realizes off the bat that he knows a great deal about the subject as far as how to play and be good at it, but not much about the history or origins or the international impact of the sport. He brainstorms a list of topics, as his instructor tells him to: 1. Famous tennis players 2. Rules of tennis 3. How to start playing tennis 4. How to buy or choose equipment for tennis 5. Why tennis is a great sport 6. Tennis organizations 7. Where tennis came from 8. Dealing with tennis injuries 9. Tennis and the Olympics 10. Famous tennis tournaments—grand slam events

However, he also wants to be sure that his audience is not bored or confused. His instructor gives him a chance to get in a small group and have four of his classmates give him some ideas about the topics. He finds out no one in his group has ever played tennis but they do have questions. He knows that everyone in his class is 18-24 years old, single, no children, enrolled in college, and all have part-time jobs.

Critique Mitch's brainstorm topics based on what you know. What should he do? Can you come up with a good starting specific purpose?

Case Study Two: Bonita is required to give a 5- to 6-minute presentation as part of a job interview. The interview is for a position as public relations and social media director of a nonprofit organization that focuses on nutrition in a five-county region near her home. There will be five people in her audience: the president of the organization, two board members, the office manager (who is also the Human Resources director), and a volunteer. She has never met these people. Bonita has a college degree in public relations, so she knows her subject. She does as much research on the organization as she can and finds out about their use of social media and the Internet for publicity, marketing, and public relations. It does have a Facebook page but is not utilizing it well. It does not have any other social media accounts.

What would you suggest for Bonita? Here are some questions to consider. Should she be persuasive, informative, or inspiring? (General purpose). What should be her specific content area? How can she answer the two questions of the value of her topic to the audience and why would the audience think she is credible?

Possible Answer to Case Study One

Since Mitch's purpose is informative, he should not do #5. Since his audience knows little about the sport, #1, #6, and #8 probably do not apply since the audience does not have a base of knowledge to build on. He will have to do research for the speech, so #7, #9, and #10 might work. Since he has so much experience compared to his audience, #2, #3, and #4 might also be good topics, and they are not entirely separated: you have to have equipment to play, and you have to know the rules to start playing.

Mitch decides to base his speech on this specific purpose statement: To explain to my classmates how they can begin to play tennis. Central Idea: Although it may look like a sport for accomplished athletes, you can begin to play tennis this weekend with some basic knowledge and equipment. (Preview) In this speech I will explain the equipment, the court, the play, and the scoring of a tennis game.

Possible Answer to Case Study Two

The stakes for this scenario are even higher than for Mitch. Bonita wants this position and wants to do a fantastic job on her interview and presentation. She decides to be informative in her general purpose. She knows she should mention some of her past projects in her speech as examples of her use of and knowledge about social media, and she knows the big question in her audience's mind is "Will this candidate bring value and improvement to our communication processes?" At the same time, she does not want to come on too strong, so she decides to focus on how the three largest social media platforms of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram could be used to enhance the organization. Also at the same time, she decides that 5 minutes is not long enough to use all three, so she decides to just discuss Twitter. Specific Purpose: To describe for the hiring panel how the nonprofit organization could use Twitter to fulfill its mission, especially since the organization already uses Facebook (although not well) but not Twitter. Central Idea: Twitter's unique characteristics as a social media platform can contribute to the organization's mission by reaching a wider audience, engaging younger audiences, and using visuals.

Conclusion

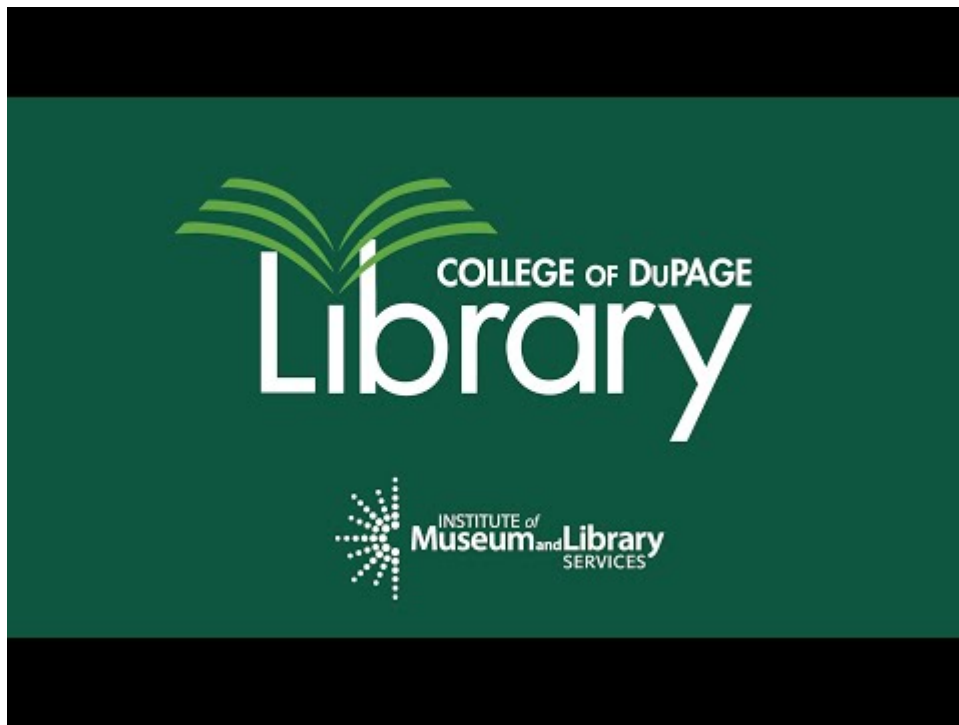
You should be aware that all aspects of your speech are constantly going to change as you move toward actually giving your speech. The exact wording of your central idea may change and you can experiment with different versions for effectiveness. However, your specific purpose statement should not change unless there is a really good reason, and in some cases, your instructor will either discourage that, forbid it, or expect to be notified. There are many aspects to consider in the seemingly simple task of writing a specific purpose statement and its companion the central idea statement. Writing good ones at the beginning will save you some trouble later in the speech preparation process.

Something to Think About

What if your informative speech has the specific purpose statement: To explain the biological and lifestyle cause of Type II diabetes. The assignment is a seven-minute speech, and when you practice it the first time, it is thirteen minutes long. Should you adjust the specific purpose statement? How?

[PART XIII]

Chapter 13: Researching Your Speeches



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=521>

[55]

Primary and Secondary Research

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
2. Distinguish between reliable and unreliable information on the Internet.
3. Access and find reliable information on the Internet.
4. Explain basic terminology needed for Internet research.
5. Construct a short survey usable for analyzing an audience.
6. Conduct short interviews for information for speeches.
7. Recognize information that should be cited.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH

As noted in Chapters 1 and 3, credibility as a speaker is one of your main concerns. Among many voices, you must prove that yours is worth attention. You can do this by

- using engaging narratives,
- having energetic delivery, and
- meeting the needs of your audience.

However, a foundational way is to offer support for the points you make in your speech, which you can do by providing evidence from other sources. You will find these resources by doing research.

You have access to many sources of information: books in print or electronic format, Internet webpages, scholarly journal articles in databases, and information from direct, primary sources through surveys and interviews. With so many sources, **information literacy** is a vital skill for researchers.

The term “research” is a broad one, for which the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2018) offers three basic definitions. The second one it lists is:

studious inquiry or examination; especially: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws.

Information Literacy

the ability to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information
(American Library Association, 1989)

The third definition in Merriam-Webster is more applicable for this chapter: “the collecting of information about a particular subject.”

The first definition above refers to **primary research**, which depends on **primary sources**. The term “primary

source” means “those sources that provide first-hand accounts of the events, practices or conditions” being researched (“What are Primary Sources,” 2006). It is research that goes directly to the source (Futteross, 2018).

For example, if a psychology researcher wanted to understand the stressors on military personnel in Afghanistan,

Primary Sources

information that is first-hand or straight from the source; information that is unfiltered by interpretation or editing

Primary Research

new research, carried out to acquire data first-hand rather from previously published sources to answer specific questions or issues and discover knowledge

he or she could interview them personally, read blog posts or other writings of the service personnel, or give them a survey with clear questions about their experiences and concerns. The information gathered in each of these examples would come straight from the “source.”

Another example would be an education professor who wants to understand if texting in class affects student learning. She sets up an experiment with similar students in two classes taught exactly the same way. One class has to follow a strict policy of no texting and the other has no policy about texting. At the end of the semester she compares test scores. Going into the experiment, she formulates a hypothesis, or prediction, of which class will do better on tests. Her results will support the hypothesis or not.

Journalists, historians, biologists, chemists, psychologists, sociologists, and others conduct primary research, which is part of achieving a doctorate in one’s field and adding to what is called “the knowledge base.” For your speeches, you might use primary sources as well. Let’s say you want to do a persuasive speech to convince your classmates to wear their seatbelts. Some of the basic information you might need to do this is:

- how many people in the class don’t wear seatbelts regularly, and
- why they choose not to.

You could conduct primary research and directly ask your classmates if they wear their seatbelts and, if not, why not. This way, you are getting information directly from a primary source. (Later in this chapter we will look at some ways you could do this efficiently.)

It is possible that you will access published primary sources in your research for this speech class (and you will definitely do so as you progress in your discipline). Additionally, and more commonly, you will use **secondary sources**, which are articles, books, and websites that are compilations or interpretations of the primary sources. It may sound from this description that secondary sources are inferior to primary sources. That is not the case. Poorly done primary research is not better than quality secondary sources. Which one you use depends on our purpose, topic, audience, and context. If you engage in undergraduate research in your junior or senior year and present at a conference, you will be expected have some primary research. However, for most of your college work, you will be looking for reliable secondary sources.

One way to assess the quality of a secondary source is to look at its references or bibliography. A reliable source will cite other sources to support its claims. Likewise, a well-researched speech will provide support for its argument by using evidence obtained from reliable sources. In this section we will examine research on the Internet and how you can conduct your own primary research. The last section will show how to use the Roberts Library resources at Dalton State College. If you are not a student at Dalton State, your college’s library is probably very similar to Dalton State’s, so you should read that section for information on different types of sources, etc. Your instructor will probably provide instruction to your college’s library system.

Secondary Sources

information that is not directly from the first-hand source; information that has been compiled, filtered, edited, or interpreted in some way

Research on the Internet

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
2. Distinguish between reliable and unreliable information on the Internet.
3. Access and find reliable information on the Internet.
4. Explain basic terminology needed for Internet research.
5. Construct a short survey usable for analyzing an audience.
6. Conduct short interviews for information for speeches.
7. Recognize information that should be cited.

RESEARCH ON THE INTERNET

We've all had the experience of typing a search term into Google and coming up with 5,000,000 "hits." What can you do with 5,000,000 webpages? Of course, not all of them are relevant or reliable. The first ones, at least on Google, will be businesses trying to sell their products. This is how Google makes money and does it so well. The second one will probably be Amazon or Wikipedia, and the next few will be the websites that get the most traffic.

If you type in "attention deficit disorder" (with the quotation marks) on any given day (it will of course change from day to day), you might find something like the image shown in Figure 5.1. No surprises; you have seen this many times, or something very similar. In this case, some of the top links look like they could be useful for reliable information, but we know this is not always the case.

If you "Google" the term "Advanced Search," you will be taken to Google's Advanced Search page. The same is true in Yahoo!; if you type "Yahoo! Advanced Search USA" into the YAHOO! basic search engine, you will find a more sophisticated search engine. These advanced search engines are easy to use and more useful to someone looking for focused, reliable information for a speech. They are also intuitive and adaptive.

Before we continue, let's clarify some common terms used in Internet searches. First, a couple of definitions and some background. All Internet sites have a **top-level domain**. You know these as .edu, .gov., .org., .com., or .net; Merriam-Webster (2016) formally defines it as a "section of the Internet that is made up of computers or sites that are related in some way (such as by use or source)." A website ends in the domain term; a webpage (the individual pages of a website) will have letters, punctuation, and numbers after the domain term and backward slash mark. This is part of a page's overall web address, known as the URL, or **uniform resource locator**.

Domains, of course, indicate the type of organizations using that "after the dot" set of letters. .ORGs are nonprofit organizations. They can have good information, but are not totally free from bias; the Republican and Democratic parties' websites are .ORGs. .GOVs are websites for state, local, and federal governments. They also have a

Domain

a section of the Internet that is made up of computers or sites that are related in some way (such as by use or source); examples include .com, .edu, .net, and .gov

great deal of good information, but will not have information showing the negative sides of government policies. .EDUs are tied to colleges and universities (elementary and high schools are considered part of local governments and have .GOV in their URLs). Some of them have good research, but most are full of information geared for students at that institution. Of course, .COMs are for businesses. They are not totally unreliable, but one would not expect unbiased information on most of them. Ford.com is not going to post negative reviews of their vehicles' safety ratings. Monster.com is a good place for information on job searches, but it also wants to sell viewers a service.

Evaluating Websites

First, when you access a website, you should determine what you are looking at. Is it a blog? an online academic journal? an online newspaper? a website for an organization? Obviously, these are not all created equal. Let's use blogs for an example. There are literally millions of blogs—MediaKix states that in 2017 there were over 440 million of them (these include Tumblr.) Some blogs are maintained by true experts who have credentials in their fields. They are presenting the information either as a public service or they have found a way to “monetize” the site. Other bloggers use their blogs for propaganda, self-expression, or sharing ideas and photos with friends. You should be able to discern what kind it is; a reputable blog will let you know the author's credentials. Otherwise, stay away from blogs in general.

Finding a webpage with information on it is just the first step. How should they be evaluated so you know the information or analyses there is reliable? CAPOW is an acronym that can be used as a guide for determining how well suited a website or webpage may be for research purposes. According to Price (2008), who produced a video about CAPOW for YouTube, CAPOW stands for:

CURRENCY. Is the information posted on the site up-to-date? If studies are cited, are the dates of the information given? This standard will be more important with scientific, health, and current event topics. If information about the earthquakes in Haiti is from 2012, it is not reliable to explain what is happening there now.

AUTHORITY. Is the person or organization behind the site an authority, that is, has credentials, expertise, and the respect of others in the field? Having an education or doctorate is important, but it must be in that particular subject. Can you even determine or what person or organization is behind the website?

PURPOSE. Is the person or organization behind the website trying to persuade you to a viewpoint or trying to further a cause? Can you recognize it? The fact that the organization is trying to advocate for something, such as disaster relief or ending animal abuse, does not mean the information is unreliable. In fact, it may be from very good sources. It just means you should be aware that it is presenting good evidence on one side of an issue, and there could be good evidence on the other side.

OBJECTIVITY. This one is closely tied to purpose; it also has to do with the sources from which the website uses quotes and evidence. For example, one of the “hot” topics in recent years has been whether infants and toddlers should be vaccinated. As you probably know, anti-vaccination advocates cite studies from the past that seem to connect the chemicals in vaccines to autism and other conditions, even fatalities, in children. One must read carefully to determine who and what is being cited and look into more than a couple of sources on the Internet to get the full picture of this controversy. There are many websites that will provide information on both sides of the debate. Some will have .ORG in the domain. These organizations and sources can be very passionate in their writing, but passion, assertions, and name-calling do not signal reliable information.

WRITING STYLE. Have you ever received one of those emails telling you that you are inheriting money but you have to take some funds out of your bank account and wire it to someone, usually overseas? Many people fall for those, unfortunately, but they should not because the writing style usually has a number of mistakes in it and other signs that the person is not familiar with English (along with the fact that the claims are kind of ridiculous). There are websites like this, too. Additionally, note the tone of the writing. Using the example above, a website called www.humanosphere.org is pro-vaccine, and contains a report on how the media became more pro-vaccine after the measles scare at Disneyworld. It refers to Disneyworld as “one of our nation's holiest sites,” which shows a sarcastic tone. In fact, a good indicator of bias is how the writer refers to those who disagree with him or her.

Furthermore, in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7, the topic of using sources correctly is discussed. In both cases, you would want to be sure not to take information out of context. For example, on the website vaccines.procon.org, this statement appears in the “con” side: “According to the CDC, all vaccines carry a risk of a life-threatening allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) in about one per million children.” It is followed by a link to a formal citation. An unethical speaker could just leave out that last part and use the statement “According to the CDC, all vaccines carry

a risk of a life-threatening allergic reaction (anaphylaxis)” to give the wrong impression of what the Centers for Disease Control published.

If all this makes you think that you should be skeptical of information on the Internet, at least in terms of using it for your speeches, then that is good—you should!

Of course, one source that many students have questions about using is Wikipedia. Most of us use Wikipedia or similar sites to look up the answers to pressing questions such as “Was Val Kilmer in the film *Willow*?” or “When is the next solar eclipse?” However, it is unlikely that your instructor will be satisfied with your using evidence from Wikipedia (or other Wiki-type sites).

There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that Wikipedia is, like a dictionary, a basic reference source. Like a printed encyclopedia, it is used for basic or general information about a topic, but this means that it is not suitable for serious college-level research.

Additionally, because anyone on Wikipedia (or any Wiki site) can update information, there is no guarantee that what you read will be up-to-date or correct. While Wikipedia and its editors make every effort to maintain the accuracy of entries, with millions of pages on the site, that isn’t always possible. Also, sometimes the information in Wikipedia is just plain wrong. The previously cited CAPOW video gives the example of a posting from a few years back that claimed the comedian Sinbad had died, even though he is still alive. Another example, given in Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat* (2005), is of a well-known CEO who spent years trying to clear his name when incorrect information about him was posted on Wikipedia and then reposted on several other sites.

Wikipedia is a good place to go to obtain basic information or general knowledge about your subject, and you can use the references at the bottom of the page (if there are any) to look for information elsewhere. But saying to an audience, “my source for the information in this speech is Wikipedia” will probably do little to convince your audience that you are knowledgeable and have done adequate research for the speech.

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Conducting Your Own Research

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
2. Distinguish between reliable and unreliable information on the Internet.
3. Access and find reliable information on the Internet.
4. Explain basic terminology needed for Internet research.
5. Construct a short survey usable for analyzing an audience.
6. Conduct short interviews for information for speeches.
7. Recognize information that should be cited.

CONDUCTING YOUR OWN RESEARCH

Up to this point, we have discussed finding secondary sources or primary sources that are published. It is also possible for you to use some truly firsthand research in your speeches.

Surveys

The first type of primary research you can use is through surveys. Your instructor may ask you to construct a short survey to learn something about your audience before, for example, a persuasive speech. A survey can be helpful if the questions are correctly written and if the survey is not too long.

For the most part, a survey should use objective questions. That means questions with a few predetermined answers for the survey-takers to choose from, such as multiple-choice, true-false, I agree/Neutral/I disagree, or yes-no. If the researcher wants to construct a multiple choice question, he or she must try to provide all the reasonable options. For example, if the student wanted to give a speech about why consumers should not buy gas with ethanol, and used the question:

What grade of gas do you buy for your car? Regular Medium High Octane/Premium

This question left out the option of diesel. It also failed to account for students who don't own or drive a car, who are unsure what grade of gasoline they buy, or who buy more than one grade of gasoline. You also don't want to ask open-ended questions for a short survey like this. If you wanted to know what grocery stores in the area your audience patronized, this question would be a problem:

At which grocery store does your family shop? _____

The version shown below would be more useful and easy to interpret:

At which of these grocery stores does your family shop?

- Food Lion
- Food City
- Target
- Publix
- Kroger
- Save-a-Lot
- Walmart
- Shoprite
- Other: _____

Additionally, you should allow the people taking your survey to select more than one of the responses, since few people shop at just one store. Or you could phrase the question, “At which of these grocery stores does your family spend most of its grocery budget?” In that case, there would only be one answer, and it would tell you more specific information.

The criteria for what constitutes a “short” survey are fluid, but five questions would probably be enough to let you know what you need. A survey taker would probably become tired of answering a long list of questions or suspicious of too many, too vague, or too personal questions, making them less likely to give totally honest answers. Asking what brand of shampoo someone uses is less intrusive than asking how many times a week someone washes her hair.

If you want to know about attitudes of your audience, you should write questions in an unbiased way. “Do you favor raising the minimum wage in our state to \$15.00 per hour?” is more balanced than “Do you believe that business owners in our state should be required to treat their employees better by having to raise their minimum wage to a more reasonable and fair \$15.00 per hour?” You also would not want to insult your survey takers with questions such as “Do you agree that young people whose parents brought them into this country illegally should be deported?” You also want to state the issue as positively as possible. A question like “Are you against the government repealing cuts to Medicaid?” is confusing; better, “Should the government increase or decrease Medicaid spending?”

Finally, how should you administer the survey? Today there are online tools, even free ones, for surveys; probably the most popular are Survey Monkey and Google Forms. These are easy to use and helpful for short surveys; usually you need to pay a fee for extensive surveys to large numbers of people. You can also interview people orally with surveys, but that is time-consuming and often affects the anonymity that we expect with surveys. Your instructor may have you make photocopies and pass them around class. Either way, knowing your audience’s level of knowledge and their attitudes about your topic ahead of time can be a helpful source in creating an audience-centered speech.

Interviews

You may also benefit from conducting an interview with a person who is knowledgeable about your topic, such as a professional with educational and career credentials in their field. Using a first-hand interview will add a great deal of credibility to your speech, if done correctly. If you are going to give a speech about the effects of the No Child Left Behind policy or the Common Core standards, it makes sense to talk to an elementary school principal for her knowledge and expertise on the issue.

However, there are good ways to do this and bad ways. Here are some valuable strategies.

1. Do the interview **AFTER** you have read some published sources on the topic, not before. You should have a good understanding of the basic issues involved. For example, if you are giving a persuasive speech on drinking and driving and you want to interview a state trooper, you should have gathered the statistics on the problem and information on the laws in your state from published sources or the Internet before interviewing the officer. If you are interviewing a registered nurse who works in a mental health facility about the problems faced by those suffering from schizophrenia, you would want to be

sure to understand the terminology of the disease, how prevalent it is, some information on causes, and how schizophrenia presents itself in a patient. You will be far more knowledgeable and ready to ask good questions if you have a foundation.

2. Be sure you have chosen the right person. The easiest source for a speech on the topic may seem to be a professor at your college. However, the professor may think you are trying to get out of doing research in public sources, so we caution you not to go that direction. Also, your source should be an expert. Your friend may have an uncle with diabetes but that doesn't make your friend an expert on the subject.
3. Make an appointment with the interviewee, and be on time for it. Likewise, assume that the person you are interviewing is busy and cannot give you lots of time. This assumption may be wrong, but it's better to go in with the expectation of limited time than to expect the person to speak with you for an hour.
4. Prepare your questions in advance and have your questions in a logical order. Do not start with, "I have to give a speech on _____. What can you tell me about it?"
5. Ask the person for information you cannot get from other sources. For example, the interviewee will probably not know national statistics off the top of her head. She will know about her daily experience with the topic. The principal mentioned before will be able to talk about test score trends at her school, but not across the nation.
6. Be sure not to ask inappropriate, proprietary, or embarrassing questions. If you were interviewing a human resources officer about how the company trains employees to prevent safety hazards, he probably would not respond well to "How many workers' compensation claims has this company had to file this year?" You are not an investigative journalist. These folks are doing you a favor.
7. Finally, write the person a thank-you note or email afterward. He or she has helped you out, writing a thank-you note is the right thing to do, and you might need to network with that professional later.

Up to this point, we have discussed finding secondary sources or primary sources that are published. It is also possible for you to use some truly firsthand research in your speeches.

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Accessing Information Through a Library

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
2. Distinguish between reliable and unreliable information on the Internet.
3. Access and find reliable information on the Internet.
4. Explain basic terminology needed for Internet research.
5. Construct a short survey usable for analyzing an audience.
6. Conduct short interviews for information for speeches.
7. Recognize information that should be cited.

ACCESSING INFORMATION THROUGH A LIBRARY

Finding information is easy; finding reliable information that you can use confidently in a speech is more challenging. As a researcher, your responsibility is to identify useful, relevant, and understandable sources to help you decide how to approach your speech and to support your ideas. The library is a good place to start this research.

The Library Catalog

Most libraries allow users to search their collections of books, periodicals, and media using the library catalog, which is usually available online. Many libraries have a unique name for their library catalog. One helpful feature of a library's online catalog is the ability to sort and refine search results by date, format, author, and other filter options. Additionally, library catalogs allow users to link to electronic books, videos, and other resources directly from the results page. These resources can be quite helpful, since users do not need to come to the library building, nor are these resources available only during library hours.

Databases

Online databases are another 24/7 resource offered by libraries. These typically provide users with access to the full text of articles from **periodicals**, works that are published on a regular, ongoing basis, such as magazines, academic journals, and newspapers.

Access to databases is purchased by libraries. The articles and books

Periodicals

contained in databases are licensed by publishers to companies, who sell access to this content, which is not freely available on the Internet.

While databases index newspapers and popular magazines, for college-level research, they are best used for accessing academic journals. Almost all content in academic journals is **peer-reviewed**. That means that other scholars have read the articles and judged them to be accurate according to the research rules of that discipline. For example, if an article is in a biological sciences journal, other biologists have read the article and determined that the information is sound and worth contributing to their field of study. If it's a journal in psychology, the writers followed correct procedures for gathering data on human subjects and interpreting the data. Because library databases index peer-reviewed material and because much of what is there has been published in a print form, the publisher stands behind the publication and is responsible for the information's reliability.

Let's say you are researching medications prescribed to treat attention deficit disorder in children. You do not want to find information about medications used for adults. You can target your search by using a database's Advanced Search function (you can do the same thing with Internet Search Engines like Google or Yahoo!). Advanced Search lets you control where search terms appear, include multiple search parameters, exclude terms, and customize your search as desired.

An example of these techniques is shown in Figure 5.4. Notice first the words "attention deficit disorder" in quotation marks. Using the quotation marks is not always necessary, but it will work to keep those words as a unit and the search engine will not look for "attention" or "deficit" or "disorder" by themselves. Also notice that in the dropdown menu beside it, "Abstract" is highlighted. Again, this is not always necessary, but if the article is really about "attention deficit disorder," that unit of words will appear in the abstract. An abstract is a summary that accompanies most articles in the databases, and abstracts are commonly written to accompany academic articles when published.

[College of DuPage Library Cards](#)

Also note the second box of the search engine; the Advanced Search allows for more focused search in this way. In the second box, for "medication," an asterisk is placed at the end, which works as a placeholder. The search engine will look for "medication" and "medications," and since the asterisk appears after the shared letters "medicat," the word "medicated," is included too. The research could also add an asterisk at the end of "adult" in the third box to ensure that the search results include both "adult" and "adults."

You can see that the word "AND" is switched to "NOT" before the last box. This is part of Boolean search, a term that refers to a method of using search engines in databases and the Internet that allows the user to combine key terms or words with the "operators" AND, NOT, or OR to find more relevant results. By doing so, the researcher excludes any articles that have the words "adult" or "adults" in the abstracts. You can also use the word OR, which further affects your search. Boolean diagrams are shown in Figure 5.5.

In a Boolean search, if you use "AND," the search engine will only look for records that have "attention deficit disorder" AND "medicat*" in them, which will give you fewer results (but likely better ones in terms of what you are looking for). If you use the word OR, the search engine will look for articles that have "attention deficit disorder" OR "medicat*" in them—obviously not what you want because you would get articles that are about medication but have nothing to do with attention deficit disorder.

The Boolean search method comes from mathematics, and you can think of it like a Venn Diagram. If you use "AND," you get fewer results. If you use "OR," you get more, but the results may not be precise for what you are trying to find.

Figure 5.5 illustrates a Boolean search example. Using the search terms "Stimulant Drugs" OR "Treatments for ADD" will include everything in the whole diagram. "Stimulant Drugs" AND "Treatments for ADD" will only include the center portion. "Stimulant Drugs" NOT "Treatments for ADD" will give you the results shown on the left side only, while "Treatments for ADD" NOT "Stimulant Drugs" will return the search results depicted on the right side of the diagram only.

As you can see, you can control your search a great deal, even making it so specific that nothing will be found! As

works that are published on a regular, ongoing basis, such as magazines, academic journals, and newspapers

Peer-reviewed

a review process in which other scholars have read a work of scholarly writing (an article, book, etc.) and judged it to be accurate according to the research rules of that discipline

Abstract

a summary that accompanies articles in databases

Boolean search

a method of using search engines in databases and the Internet that allows the user to combine key terms or words with the "operators" AND, NOT, or OR to find more relevant results.

you begin to use the search tools in databases, you will find that you can also put other controls on what the search engine finds. You can control for the date of the publication, the language, the format, and other factors.

Other Library Services and Resources

While a library's website allows you to search their extensive holdings, it is not the only tool available to you. Remember that librarians are research experts and can help you to find information, select a topic, refine your search, cite your sources, and much more!

Conclusion

This chapter has covered a lot of information that will be useful to you in your public speaking class as well as other classes. Having a strong research foundation will give your speech interest and credibility. This chapter has shown you how to access information but also how to find reliable information and evaluate it.

Something to Think About

What do you think are the biggest obstacles to doing good research for a speech?

How would doing research for a speech, such as informative speech for this class, differ from research for a paper in a discipline class, such as psychology or history?

As you progress in your major, you may have opportunities to do undergraduate research. How do you think that will differ from the research you are doing for this course?

[PART XIV]

Chapter 14: Organizing and Outlining Your Speech



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=534>

Why We Need Organization in Speeches

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why organization is necessary and valuable to public speaking.
2. Differentiate the different types of organizational patterns.
3. Choose an organizational pattern that is most logical to the speech's specific purpose.
4. Construct an outline for an extemporaneous speech.
5. Create connective statements that will help the audience understand the logic and structure of a speech.

WHY WE NEED ORGANIZATION IN SPEECHES

Have you had this experience? You have an instructor who is easy to take notes from because he or she helps you know the main ideas and gives you cues as to what is most important to write down and study for the test. And then you might have an instructor who tells interesting stories, says provocative things, and leads engaging discussions, but you have a really hard time following where the instruction is going. If so, you already know that structure makes a difference for your own listening. In this chapter we will examine why that is true and how you can translate that type of structure to your own speeches.

Significant psychological and communication research has been done about how an audience needs and desires clear organization in a speech as they listen. Those sources are listed in the references at the end of the book, but they are summarized here.

First, as we listen, we have limits as to how many categories of information we can keep in mind. You have probably heard that this number of items or categories is seven, or as one source says, “seven plus or minus two” (Miller, 1956; Gabriel and Mayzner, 1963; Cowan, Chen, & Rouders, 2004). In public speaking, to be on the safe side, the “minus two” is advised: in other words, you should avoid having more than five main points in a speech, and that would only be for a speech of some length where you could actually support, explain, or provide sufficient evidence for five points.

For most speeches that you would give in class, where you have about 5-7 minutes, three points is probably safe territory, although there could be exceptions, of course. It is also acceptable for short speeches to just have two main points, **if doing so supports your specific purpose**. That last phrase is bolded for emphasis because ultimately, your organization is going to depend on your specific purpose.

Secondly, the categories of information should be distinct, different, and clear. You might think about organization in public speaking as having three steps. These steps are grouping, labeling, and ordering (putting into a good order). Before you can label your main points clearly or put them in the right order, you have to group your information.

Grouping

Here we might use the analogy of having a yard sale at your home, something you might have done or helped a family member to do. The first step, before putting up signs or pricing items, is to go through your closets and garage and creating “piles” of items: what you want to sell, what should probably just be discarded, what you want to keep but store elsewhere, what you might want to give away. Then you take the “sell” pile and separate it into categories such as children’s items, tools, kitchen items, furniture, etc. This second phase of sorting items is so you can put them outside on your lawn or driveway in a way people expect to see items and would be more likely to buy. You would probably not sort items by color or size, although you could. It’s just that your customers are not looking for “blue” items or “big” items as much as they are looking for kitchen items, baby clothes, or furniture.

Researchers have found that “chunking” information, that is, the way it is grouped, is vital to audience understanding, learning, and retention of information (Beighly, 1954; Bodeia, Powers, & Fitch-Hauser, 2006; Whitman & Timmis, 1975; Daniels & Whitman, 1981). How does this work in practice? When you are doing your research, you look at the articles and websites you read and say, “That information relates to what I read over here” and “That statistic fits under the idea of . . .” You are looking for similarities and patterns. That is exactly what you do when you group anything, such as the items at a yard sale, where you group according to customer interest and purpose of the items. Finally, if a piece of information you found doesn’t fit into a group as you do your research, it may just not belong in the speech. It’s what we would call “extraneous.”

A good example of this principle is if you are doing a demonstration speech. It may or may not be required in your class but is the kind of speech you may be called upon to do in your future work. For example, a nurse may be teaching patients how to do self-care for diabetes, or a computer trainer may be showing how to use software. The temptation is to treat the procedure as a list of steps, which may number as many as twenty or thirty steps.

There are very few times we can remember a list of twenty or thirty items. Yes, you learned the alphabet of 26 letters when you were a child, or all the state capitals, but you have probably forgotten how long it took. Plus, you probably learned a song to help with the alphabet, and you also did not understand the point of the alphabet; it was just something you did with other children or to please your parents. In the case of the state capitals, you probably used flashcards or memory aids.

Adult learning and listening is different. We need information “chunked” or grouped into manageable categories. So, instead of listing twenty or thirty discrete steps in the process you are demonstrating or explaining, you would want to group the steps into three to five logical categories to help the audience’s reception and retention of the message, using the separate minor steps as “subpoints.”

Finally, because your audience will understand you better and perceive you as organized, you will gain more credibility as a speaker if you are organized, assuming you also have credible information and acceptable delivery (Slagell, 2013; Sharp & McClung, 1966). Yun, Costantini, and Billingsley (2012) also found a side benefit to learning to be an organized public speaker: your writing skills will improve, specifically your organization and sentence structure. This was no surprise to one of the authors, whose students often comment that they were able to organize their essays and papers for other classes much better after learning good organization principles for speaking.

Patterns of Organization

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why organization is necessary and valuable to public speaking.
2. Differentiate the different types of organizational patterns.
3. Choose an organizational pattern that is most logical to the speech's specific purpose.
4. Construct an outline for an extemporaneous speech.
5. Create connective statements that will help the audience understand the logic and structure of a speech.

Patterns of Organization

At this point, then, you should see how much your audience needs organization. You also know that as you do research, you will group together similar pieces of information from different sources in your research. As you group your research information, you will want to make sure that your content is adhering to your specific purpose statement and will look for ways that your information can be grouped together into categories.

Interestingly, there are some standard ways of organizing these categories, which are called “patterns of organization.” In each of the examples below, you will see how the specific purpose gives shape to the organization of the speech and how each one exemplifies one of the six main organizational patterns. In each example, only the three to five main sections or “points” (Roman numerals) are given, without the other essential parts of the outline. Please note that these are simple, basic outlines for example purposes, and your instructor will of course expect much more content from the outline you submit for class.

Chronological

Specific Purpose: To describe to my classmates the four stages of rehabilitation in addiction recovery.

- I. The first stage is acknowledging the problem and entering treatment.
- II. The second stage is early abstinence, a difficult period in the rehabilitation facility.
- III. The third stage is maintaining abstinence after release from the rehab facility.
- IV. The fourth stage is advanced recovery after a period of several years.

The example above uses what is termed the **chronological pattern of organization**. Chronological always refers to time order. Since the specific purpose is about stages, it is necessary to put the four stages in the right order. It would make no sense to put the fourth stage second and the third stage first. However, chronological time can

be long or short. If you were giving a speech about the history of the Civil Rights Movement, that period would cover several decades; if you were giving a speech about the process to change the oil in your car, that process takes less than an hour. The process described in the speech example above would also be long-term, that is, one taking several years. The commonality is the order of the information.

In addition, chronological speeches that refer to processes can be given for two reasons. First, they can be for understanding. The speech about recovery is to explain what happens in the addiction recovery process, but the actual process may never really happen to the audience members. That understanding may also lead them to more empathy for someone in recovery. Second, chronological or process speeches can be for action and instruction. For a speech about changing the oil in a car, your purpose is that the audience could actually change the oil in their cars after listening to the speech.

One of the problems with chronological speeches is, as mentioned before, that you would not want just a list of activities. It is important to chunk the information into three to five groups so that the audience has a framework. For example, in a speech about the history of the Civil Rights Movement, your “grouping” or “chunking” might be:

- I. The movement saw African-Americans struggling for legal recognition before the Brown v. Board of Education decision.
- II. The movement was galvanized and motivated by the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- III. The movement saw its goals met in the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

It would be easy in the case of the Civil Rights Movement to list the many events that happened over more than two decades, but that could be overwhelming for the audience. In this outline, the audience is focused on the three events that pushed it forward, rather than the persons involved in the movement. You could give a speech with a focus on people, but it would be different and probably less chronological and more topical (see below).

We should say here that, realistically, the example given above is still too broad. It would be useful, perhaps, for an audience with almost no knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement, but too basic and not really informative for other audiences. One of the Roman numeral points would probably be a more specific focus.

Spatial

You can see that chronological is a highly-used organizational structure, since one of the ways our minds work is through time-orientation—past, present, future. Another common thought process is movement in space or direction, which is called the **spatial pattern**. For example:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the three regional cooking styles of Italy.

- I. In the mountainous region of the North, the food emphasizes cheese and meat.
- II. In the middle region of Tuscany, the cuisine emphasizes grains and olives.
- III. In the southern region and Sicily, the diet is based on fish and seafood.

In this example, the content is moving from northern to southern Italy, as the word “regional” would indicate. Here is a good place to note that grouping or “chunking” in a speech helps simplicity, and to meet the principle of KISS (Keep It Simple, Speaker). If you were to actually study Italian cooking in depth, sources will say there are twenty regions. But “covering” twenty regions in a speech is not practical, and while the regions would be distinct for a “foodie” or connoisseur of Italian cooking, for a beginner or general audience, three is a good place to start. You could at the end of the speech note that more in-depth study would show the twenty regions, but that in your speech you have used three regions to show the similarities of the twenty regions rather than the small differences.

For a more localized example:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the layout of King Tut’s pyramid.

- I. The first chamber of the tomb was antechamber.
- II. The second chamber of the tomb was the annex.

Chronological pattern

an organizational pattern for speeches in which the main points are arranged in time order

Spatial pattern

an organizational pattern for speeches in which the main points are arranged according to movement in space or direction

- III. The third chamber of the tomb was the burial chamber.
- IV. The last chamber of the tomb was the treasury. (Lucas, 2012)

For an even more localized example:

Specific Purpose: To describe to my Anatomy and Physiology class the three layers of the human skin.

- I. The outer layer is the epidermis, which is the outermost barrier of protection.
- II. The second layer beneath is the dermis.
- III. The third layer closest to the bone is the hypodermis, made of fat and connective tissue.

The key to spatial organization is to be logical in progression rather than jumping around, as in this example:

- I. The Native Americans of Middle Georgia were primarily the Creek nation.
- II. The Native Americans of North Georgia were of the Cherokee tribe nation.
- III. The Native Americans of South Georgia were mostly of the Hitchiti and Oconee tribes.

It makes more sense to start at the top (north) of the state and move down (south) or start at the bottom and move up rather than randomly discuss unconnected areas.

image

Topical/Parts of the Whole

The topical organizational pattern is probably the most all-purpose in that many speech topics could use it. Many subjects will have main points that naturally divide into “types of,” “kinds of,” “sorts of,” or “categories of.” Other subjects naturally divide into “parts of the whole.” However, as mentioned previously, you want to keep your categories simple, clear, distinct, and at five or fewer.

Specific Purpose: To explain to my freshmen students the concept of SMART goals.

- I. SMART goals are specific and clear.
- II. SMART goals are measurable.
- III. SMART goals are attainable or achievable.
- IV. SMART goals are relevant and worth doing.
- V. SMART goals are time-bound and doable within a time period.

Specific Purpose: To explain the four characteristics of quality diamonds.

- I. Valuable diamonds have the characteristic of cut.
- II. Valuable diamonds have the characteristic of carat.
- III. Valuable diamonds have the characteristic of color.
- IV. Valuable diamonds have the characteristic of clarity.

Specific Purpose: To describe to my audience the four main chambers of a human heart.

- I. The first chamber in the blood flow is the right atrium.
- II. The second chamber in the blood flow is the right ventricle.
- III. The third chamber in the blood flow is the left atrium.
- IV. The fourth chamber in the blood flow and then out to the body is the left ventricle.

At this point in discussing organizational patterns and looking at these examples, two points should be made about them and about speech organization in general.

First, you might look at the example about the chambers of the heart and say, “But couldn’t that be chronological, too, since that’s the order of the blood flow procedure?” Yes, it could. There will be times when a

specific purpose could work with two different organizational patterns. In this case, it's just a matter of emphasis. This speech is emphasizing the anatomy of the heart; if the speech's specific purpose were "To explain to my classmates the flow of blood through the chambers of the heart," the organizational pattern would be chronological but very similar (However, since the blood goes to the lungs to be oxygenated before coming back to the left atrium, that might alter the pattern some).

Another principle of organization to think about when using topical organization is "climax" organization. That means putting your strongest argument or most important point last when applicable. For example:

Specific purpose: To defend before my classmates the proposition that capital punishment should be abolished in the United States.

- I. Capital punishment does not save money for the justice system.
- II. Capital punishment does not deter crime in the United States historically.
- III. Capital punishment has resulted in many unjust executions.

In most people's minds, "unjust executions" is a bigger reason to end a practice than the cost, since an unjust execution means the loss of an innocent life and a violation of our principals. If you believe Main Point III is the strongest argument of the three, putting it last builds up to a climax.

Cause/Effect Pattern

If the specific purpose mentions words such as "causes," "origins," "roots of," "foundations," "basis," "grounds," or "source," it is a causal order; if it mentions words such as "effects," "results," "outcomes," "consequences," or "products," it is effect order. If it mentions both, it would of course be cause/effect order. This example shows a cause/effect pattern:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the causes and effects of schizophrenia.

- I. Schizophrenia has genetic, social, and environmental causes.
- II. Schizophrenia has educational, relational, and medical effects.

It should be noted, however, that a specific purpose like this example is very broad and probably not practical for your class speeches; it would be better to focus on just causes or effects, or even just one type of cause (such as genetic causes of schizophrenia) or one type of effect (relational or social). These two examples show a speech that deals with causes only and effects only, respectively.

Specific Purpose: To explain to my fellow Biology 1107 students the origin of the West Nile Virus epidemic in the U.S.

- I. The West Nile Virus came from a strain in a certain part of Africa.
- II. The West Nile Virus resulted from mosquitoes being imported through fruits.
- III. The West Nile Virus became more prominent due to floods in the Southeast.

Specific Purpose: To describe to my classmates the effects of a diagnosis of autism on a child's life.

- I. An autism diagnosis will affect the child's educational plan.
- II. An autism diagnosis will affect the child's social existence.
- III. An autism diagnosis will affect the child's family relationships.

Problem-Solution Pattern

The problem-solution pattern will be explored in more depth in the chapter on Persuasive Speaking because that is where it is used the most. Then, we will see that there are variations on it. The principle behind problem-solution pattern is that if you explain a problem to an audience, you should not leave them hanging without solutions. Problems are discussed for understanding *and* to do something about them.

Additionally, when you want to persuade someone to act, the first reason is usually that something is wrong! Even if you wanted your friends to go out to get some dinner, and they have recently eaten, you will probably be

less successful because there is no problem for them—they are not hungry. Then you would have to come up with a new problem, such as you will miss their presence, which they may or may not see as a problem for them.

In another real-life example, let's say you want the members of the school board to provide more funds for music at the three local high schools in your county. What is missing because music or arts are not funded? What is the *problem*?

Specific Purpose: To persuade the members of the school board to take action to support the music program at the school.

- I. There is a problem with eliminating extracurricular music programs in high schools.
 - A. Students who do not have extracurricular music in their lives have lower SAT scores.
 - B. Schools that do not have extracurricular music programs have more gang violence and juvenile delinquency.
- II. The solution is to provide \$200,000 in the budget to sustain extracurricular music in our high schools.
 - A. \$120,000 would go to bands.
 - B. \$80,000 would go to choral programs.

Of course, this is a simple outline and you would need to provide evidence to support the arguments, but it shows how problem-solution works. Psychologically, it makes more sense to use problem-solution rather than solution-problem. The audience will be more motivated to listen if you address needs, deficiencies, or problems in their lives rather than giving them solutions first.

Problem-Cause-Solution Pattern

A variation of the problem-solution pattern, and one that sometimes requires more in-depth exploration of an issue, is the “problem-cause-solution” pattern. If you were giving a speech on future extinction of certain animal species, it would be insufficient to just explain that numbers of species are about to become extinct. Your second point would logically have to explain the cause behind this happening. Is it due to climate change, some type of pollution, encroachment on habitats, disease, or some other reason? In many cases, you can't really solve a problem without first identifying what caused the problem. This is similar to the organizational pattern called Monroe's Motivated Sequence (German, Gronbeck, Ehninger & Monroe, 2012), which will be fully explained in Chapter 13. The Monroe's Motivated Sequence requires a discussion of cause to create a logical speech.

Specific Purpose: To persuade my audience that age to obtain a driver's license in the state of Georgia should be raised to 18.

- I. There is a problem in this country with young drivers getting into serious automobile accidents leading to many preventable deaths.
- II. One of the primary causes of this is younger drivers' inability to remain focused and make good decisions due to incomplete brain development.
- III. One solution that will help reduce the number of young drivers involved in accidents would be to raise the age for obtaining a driver's license to 18.

Some Additional Principles of Organization

It is possible that you may use more than one of these organizational patterns within a single speech. For example, the main points of your speech could be one organizational pattern and the subpoints a different one. In the spatial example above about the Native American nations of Georgia, the subpoints might be chronological (emphasizing their development over time), or they could be topical (explaining aspects of their culture).

You should also note that in all of the examples to this point (which have been kept simple for the purpose of explanation), each main point is relatively equal in emphasis; therefore, the time spent on each should be equal as well. While you are not obliged to spend exactly the same amount of time on each main point, the time spent (and the importance of the main point) should be about the same. You would not want your first Main Point to be 30 seconds long, the second one to be 90 seconds, and the third 3 minutes. For example:

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates the rules of baseball.

- I. Baseball has rules about equipment.
- II. Baseball has rules about numbers of players.
- III. Baseball has rules about play.

Main Point II is not really equal in importance to the other two. There is a great deal you could say about the equipment and even more about the rules of play, but the number of players would take you about ten seconds to say. If Main Point II were “Baseball has rules about the positions on the field,” that would make more sense and be closer in level of importance to the other two.

To give another example, let’s say you want to give a commemorative (or tribute) speech about a local veteran whom you admire.

- I. James Owens is an admirable person because he earned the Silver Star in the Korean War.
- II. James Owens is an admirable person because he served our community as a councilman for 25 years.
- III. James Owens is an admirable person because he rescued five puppies who were abandoned in his backyard.

Although Main Point III is a good thing to do, it’s really not equal to Main Points I and II in importance or in the amount of time you would need to spend on it.

Earlier in the chapter, we said that organizing a speech involves grouping, labeling, and ordering. Let’s address labeling here. You will also notice that in most of the examples so far, the main points are phrased using a similar sentence structure. For example, “The first chamber in the blood flow is...” “The second chamber in the blood flow is...” This simple repetition of sentence structure is called **parallelism**, a technique useful for speakers and helpful for the audience in remembering information. It is not absolutely necessary to use it and will not always be relevant, but parallelism should be used when appropriate and effective.

In relation to the way each main point is written, notice that they are full grammatical sentences, although sometimes short and simple. For purposes of preparation, this is a good habit, and your instructor will probably require you to write your main points in full sentences. Your instructor may also expect you to write your subpoints in complete sentences as well, but he or she will discuss that with you. There are examples of the different versions of full sentence outlines provided at the ends of some chapters.

Parallelism

the repetition of grammatical structures that correspond in sound, meter, and meaning

Finally, in the way you phrase the main points, be sure they are adequately labeled and clearly explain your content. Students are often tempted to write main points as directions to themselves, “Talking about the health department” or “Mention the solution.” This is not helpful for you, nor will your instructor be able to tell what you mean by those phrases. “The health department provides many services for low-income residents” says something we can all understand.

Connective Statements

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why organization is necessary and valuable to public speaking.
2. Differentiate the different types of organizational patterns.
3. Choose an organizational pattern that is most logical to the speech's specific purpose.
4. Construct an outline for an extemporaneous speech.
5. Create connective statements that will help the audience understand the logic and structure of a speech.

Connective Statements

At this point, you may be thinking that preparing for public speaking does not always follow a completely linear process. In writing the specific purpose statement, you might already have a predetermined structure, and if so, the central idea or thesis sentence flows simply from the specific purpose statement and structure. In other instances, the process may not be as direct and you will need to think more deeply about the best way to organize your speech and write your central idea. Some of the examples shown above, such as the one about the chambers of the heart, fall into the “easy-to-follow” category, but others, such as the development of the Civil Rights movement, would be less easy to follow.

Also at this point, we have worked on the core of the speech: the purpose, the main idea or thesis, and the key main points, also referred to as “Roman numerals” because traditional outline format uses I. through V. for them. You will notice that we have not addressed the introduction or the conclusion. You will find that information in Chapter 8. That information is in a separate chapter and placed later because it is important and needs special emphasis, not because it is unimportant. Basically, you cannot write an introduction if you do not know what you are introducing. For that reason, even if you are tempted to write your introduction first, you should probably wait until the “core” or “body” of your speech is fairly solid in your mind.

However, there is one aspect beyond the introduction and conclusion that you should prepare and not leave to chance or “ad lib” during the speech. (In fact, you really should not leave anything to chance or “ad lib” in this stage of your development as a public speaker.) That aspect is the connective statements, the subject of the next section.

Connectives or connective statements are broad terms that encompass several types of statements or phrases. They are generally designed to help “connect” parts of your speech to make it easier for audience members to follow. Connectives are tools that add to the planned redundancy, and they are methods for helping the audience listen, retain information, and follow your structure. In fact, it is one thing to have a well-organized speech. It is another for the audience to be able to “consume” or understand that organization.

Connectives in general perform a number of functions:

- Remind the audience of what has come before
- Remind the audience of the central focus or purpose of the speech
- Forecast what is coming next
- Help the audience have a sense of context in the speech—where are we? (this is especially useful in a longer speech of twenty minutes or so)
- Explain the logical connection between the previous main idea(s) and next one or previous subpoints and the next one
- Explain your own mental processes in arranging the material as you have
- Keep the audience's attention through repetition and a sense of movement

Connectives

a phrase or sentence that connects various parts of a speech and shows the relationship between them

Connectives can include “internal summaries,” “signposting,” “internal previews” or “bridging statements.” Each of these terms all help connect the main ideas of your speech for the audience, but they have different emphases and are useful for different types of speeches.

Types of connectives and examples

Internal summaries emphasize what has come before and remind the audience of what has been covered.

“So far I have shown how the designers of King Tut’s burial tomb used the antechamber to scare away intruders and the second chamber to prepare royal visitors for the experience of seeing the sarcophagus.”

Internal summaries

a type of connective that emphasizes what has come before and reminds the audience of what has been covered

Internal previews let your audience know what is coming up next in the speech and what to expect with regard to the content of your speech.

“In this next part of the presentation I will share with you what the truly secret and valuable part of the King Tut’s pyramid: his burial chamber and the treasury.”

Internal previews

a type of connective that emphasizes what is coming up next in the speech and what to expect with regard to the content

Transitions serve as bridges between seemingly disconnected (but related) material, most commonly between your main points.

“After looking at how the Cherokee Indians of the North Georgia mountain region were politically important until the 1840s and the Trail of Tears, we can compare their experience with that of the Indians of Central Georgia who did not assimilate in the same way as the Cherokee.”

Transitions

a type of connective that serves as a bridge between disconnected (but related) material in a speech

At a bare minimum your transition is saying, “Now that we have looked at (talked about, etc.) X, let’s look at Y.”

Signposts emphasize the physical movement through the speech content and let the audience know exactly where they are. Signposting can be as simple as “First,” “Next,” “Lastly” or using numbers such as “First,” “Second,” “Third,” and “Fourth.” Signposts can also be lengthier, but in general signposting is meant to be a brief way to let your audience know where they are in the speech. It may help to think of these like the mile markers you see along interstates that tell you where you are or like signs letting you know how many more miles until you reach your destination.

“The second aspect of baking chocolate chip cookies is to combine your ingredients in the recommended way.”

Signposts

a type of connective that emphasizes physical movement through the speech content and lets the audience know exactly where they are; commonly uses terms such as First, Second, Finally

Bridging statements emphasize moving the audience psychologically to the next step.

“I have mentioned two huge disadvantages to students who don’t have extracurricular music programs. Let me ask: Is that what we want for your students? If not, what can we do about it?”

Bridging statements

There is no standard format for connectives. In any speech there would be multiple ways to help the audience move with you, understand your logic, keep their attention, and remind them of where they have been and where they are going. However, there are a few pieces of advice to keep in mind about connectives.

a type of connective that emphasizes moving the audience psychologically to the next part of a speech

First, connectives are for connecting. They are not for providing evidence. Save statistics, stories, examples, or new factual information for the supporting points of the main ideas of the speech. Use the connectives for the purposes listed above (review, psychological emphasis, etc.) not to provide new examples, facts, or support.

Second, remember that connectives in writing can be relatively short—a word or phrase. In public speaking, connectives need to be a sentence or two. When you first start preparing and practicing connectives, you may feel that you are being too obvious with them and they are “clunky.” Some connectives may seem to be hitting the audience over the head with them like a hammer. While it is possible to overdo connectives, and we have heard speakers do so, it is less likely than you would think. The audience will appreciate them, and as you listen to your classmates’ speeches, you will become aware of when they are present and when they are absent. Lack of connectives results in hard-to-follow speeches where the information seems to come up unexpectedly or the speaker seems to jump to something new without warning or clarification.

The third piece of advice is that your instructor may want you to include connectives on your outlines in some way to help you start thinking about them. More experienced public speakers have developed the ability to think of transitions, internal previews and summaries, and signposts on the spot, but that talent takes many years to develop.

Fourth, you will also want to vary your connectives and not use the same one all the time. A popular transitional method is the question, such as:

“Now that you know what was in the first chamber of the King Tut’s tomb, you are probably asking, what is in the second tomb? I am glad you asked.”

While this method can occasionally be clever, usually it is not; it is just annoying. The audience didn’t ask, so you don’t want to put words in their mouths. Or this:

“The first, outer layer of the skin is the epidermis, the protection for what lies beneath. But what does lie beneath the epidermis?”

You should also want to avoid the word “so” too much or repeatedly.

Finally, up to this point we have only discussed connectives between the main points. In reality, you will want to think in terms of connectives between any list of subpoints. For example, going back to the example Problem-Solution speech about music in the high schools, you would want a shorter connecting phrase between Subpoint A and B under Main Point I.

“Not only do students without band or choir have lower standardized college test scores, they get involved in more illicit activities.”

Admittedly, preparing connectives between subpoints is more difficult, but you also want to avoid jumping to the next idea without warning.

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Outlining

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why organization is necessary and valuable to public speaking.
2. Differentiate the different types of organizational patterns.
3. Choose an organizational pattern that is most logical to the speech's specific purpose.
4. Construct an outline for an extemporaneous speech.
5. Create connective statements that will help the audience understand the logic and structure of a speech.

Outlining

For the purposes of this class, there are two primary types of outlines that we will discuss: preparation outlines and speaking outlines.

Preparation Outlines

Preparation outlines are comprehensive outlines that include all of the information in your speech. This is also most likely the outline that you will be required to turn in to your instructor on the days you give your speeches or in some cases, several days before you give the speech in class. Each instructor of public speaking has a slightly different method for approaching outlining. The examples given here are variations, so please attend to the exact specifications that your instructor may require.

Some instructors require students to label parts of the introduction, for example with “Attention getter” and “Credibility,” and some like the introduction to have Roman numeral points. Some may want the central idea statement underlined. Some versions of outlines consider the introduction Main Point I, and the conclusion the last main point. Some will expect all units to be full sentences, and some will require full sentences in the main points only. However, there are some parts of an extemporaneous speech outline that are always present: the specific purpose, the introduction, the central idea statement and preview, the speech body with clearly labeled units, the connectives, and the conclusion.

You may wonder, “What’s the deal with outlines in speech class? Why can’t I just write out my speech in essay form?” There are good reasons for your instructor’s insistence on an outline, and your instructor may respond negatively if you hand in an essay instead of an outline.

In Chapter 11, which is on delivery, we look at the concept of extemporaneous speaking versus impromptu, manuscript, and memorized speeches. Most public speaking instructors in the United States focus their classes on extemporaneous speaking. Extemporaneous speaking requires a well-prepared outline. The outline requires you to clearly designate each part of the speech and use a system where the BIG IDEAS are distinct from the

supporting or “smaller ideas.” Usually this is down with indentation to the left and certain symbols for each unit. If you have to edit the speech for time or for a particular audience, it’s much easier to subtract or add when you know the relative importance of the idea.

You should think of the outline as the blueprint for your speech. It is not the speech—that is what comes out of your mouth in front of the audience. The outline helps you prepare it just as the blueprint guides the building of the house. You do not live on a blueprint, but in a house built by a blueprint.

Speaking Outlines

It should be clear by now that the preparation outline is something you are moving away from as you practice your speech and get ready for the delivery. As mentioned before and will be mentioned later, you must give yourself adequate time to practice the delivery of your speech—which is why procrastination is one of a public speaker’s biggest enemies. As you practice, you will be able to summarize the full preparation outline down to more usable notes. You should create a set of abbreviated notes for the actual delivery. The more materials you take up with you to the lectern, the more you will be tempted to look at them rather than have eye contact with the audience, and that will affect your grade as well as your connection with the audience.

Your speaking notes should be in far fewer words than the preparation, in key phrases, and in larger letters than the preparation outline. Your speaking outline should provide cues to yourself to “slow down,” “pause,” or “change slide.” You may want to use 4X6 or 5X7 cards (3X5 might be too small) but again, keep them to a minimum. Your authors have seen many students get their multiple cards out of order and confuse themselves and the audience. Except for any quotations that you want to say exactly as the original, you will avoid long chunks of text. An example of speaking notes on 5X7 cards is found in Figure 6.2. These three note cards would be relevant to the informative speech outline on haunted places in Gettysburg found at the end of Chapter 12.

Conclusion

The organization of your speech may not be the most interesting part to think about, but without it, great ideas will seem jumbled and confusing to your audience. Even more, good connectives will ensure your audience can follow you and understand the logical connections you are making with your main ideas.

Something to Think About

Listen to a speech by a professional speaker, such as a TED Talk, and see if you can detect their structure and use of transitions. Then talk about how they help (or don’t) your understanding and retention of what they say.

[PART XV]

Chapter 15: Supporting Your Speech Ideas



Media Attributions

- [hdr-bayonne-770](#)
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Why Supporting Materials are Needed

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why supporting materials are necessary.
2. List the various types of verbal supporting materials.
3. Discuss supporting material strengths in explaining and proving ideas and arguments.
4. Incorporate supporting materials seamlessly into the speech.
5. Use supporting materials ethically through correct citation.
6. Explain how perception and attention affect the speech-giving process.

WHY SUPPORTING MATERIALS ARE NEEDED

As mentioned in previous chapters, preparing to give a presentation is not a totally linear process. It would be nice if the process was like following a recipe, but it loops back and forth as you move toward crafting something that will effectively present your ideas and research. Even as you practice, you will make small changes to your basic outline, since the way something looks on paper and the way it sounds are sometimes different. For example, long sentences may look intelligent on paper, but they are hard to say in one breath and hard for the audience to understand. You will also find it necessary to use more repetition or restatement in oral delivery.

Therefore, although this is the seventh chapter in the book, it deals with some concepts that we have already been thinking about in Chapters 2-6. Specifically, this chapter is about supporting materials: what they are, what they do, and how to use them effectively. But you have already been thinking about how to support your ideas when you were researching and crafting a central idea and main points. Supporting material also relates directly to Chapter 9, presentation aids. Whereas presentation aids are *visual* or *auditory* supporting materials, this chapter will deal with *verbal* supporting materials.

Using your supporting materials effectively is essential because we crave detail and specifics. Let's say you are discussing going out to eat with a friend. You suggest a certain restaurant, and your friend makes a comment about the restaurant you have not heard before or don't accept at face value, so you ask in some way for explanation, clarification, or proof. If she says, "Their servers are really rude," you might ask, "What did they do?" If she says, "Their food is delicious," you might ask what dish is good. Likewise, if she says, "The place is nasty," you will want to know what their health rating is or why she makes this statement. We want to know specifics and are not satisfied with vagueness.

Supporting material can be thought of as the specifics that make your ideas, arguments, assertions, points, or concepts real and concrete. Sometimes supporting materials are referred to as the "meat" on the bones of the outline, but we also like to think of them as pegs you create in the audience's mind to hang the ideas on. Another

even more useful idea is to think of them as pillars or supports for a bridge (Figure 7.1). Without these supports, the bridge would just be a piece of concrete that would not hold up once cars start to cross it. Similarly, the points and arguments you are making in your speech may not hold up without the material to “support” what you are saying.

Of course, as we will see in this chapter, all supporting materials are not considered equal. Some are better at some functions or for some speeches than others. In general, there are two basic ways to think about the role of supporting materials. Either they

1. clarify, explain, or provide specifics (and therefore understanding) for the audience, *or*
2. prove and back up arguments and therefore persuade the audience. Of course, some can do both.

You might ask, how much supporting material is enough? The time you are allowed or required to speak will largely determine that. Since the supporting materials are found in the subpoints of your outline (A, B) and sub-subpoints (1, 2, etc.), you can see clearly on the outline how much you have and can omit one if time constraints demand that. However, in our experience as public speaking instructors, we find that students often struggle with having enough supporting materials. We often comment on a student’s speech that we wanted the student to answer more of the “what, where, who, how, why, when,” questions and add more description, proof, or evidence because their ideas were vague.

Students often struggle with the difference between “main idea” and “supporting idea.” For example, in this list, you will quickly recognize a commonality.

Chocolate
Vanilla
Strawberry
Butter Pecan

Of course, they are popular flavors of ice cream. The main idea is “Popular Flavors of Ice Cream” and the individual flavors are supporting materials to clarify the main idea; they “hold” it up for understanding and clarification. If the list were:

Rocky Road
Honey Jalapeno Pickle
Banana Split
Chocolate
Wildberry Lavender

you would recognize two or three as ice cream flavors (not as popular) but #2 and #5 do not seem to fit the list (Covington, 2013). But you still recognize them as types of something and infer from the list that they have to do with ice cream flavors. “Ice cream flavors” is the general subject and the flavors are the particulars.

Those examples were easy. Let’s look at this one. One of the words in this list is the general, and the rest are the particulars.

Love
Emotion
Sadness
Disgust
Tolerance

Emotion is general category, and the list here shows specific emotions. Here is another:

- Spaying helps prevent uterine infections and breast cancer.
- Pets who live in states with high rates of spaying/neutering live longer.
- Your pet's health is positively affected by being spayed or neutered.
- Spaying lessens the increased urge to roam.
- Male pets who are neutered eliminate their chances of getting testicular and prostate cancer.

Which one is the main point (the general idea), and which are the supporting points that include evidence to prove the main point? You should see that the third bullet point (“Your pet’s health is positively affected . . .”) would be a main point or argument in a persuasive speech on spaying or neutering your pet. The basic outline for the speech might look something like this:

- I. Spaying or neutering your pet is good for public health.
- II. Spaying or neutering your pet is good for your pet’s health.
- III. Spaying or neutering your pet is good for your family’s life and budget.

Of course, each of the four supporting points in this example (“helps uterine cancer in female pets, “etc.) cannot just be made up. The speaker would need to refer to or cite reliable statistics or testimony from veterinarians, researchers, public health organizations, and humane societies. For that reason, here is the more specific support, which you would use in a speech to be ethical and credible. Notice that the italicized sections in this example Main Point use statistics and specific details to support the claims being made and provides sources.

- II. Spaying or neutering your pet is good for your pet’s health.
 - A. Spaying helps prevent uterine infections and breast cancer, *which is fatal in about 50 percent of dogs and 90 percent of cats*, as found in the online article “Top Ten Reasons to Spay or Neuter Your Pet,” written in 2015 and posted on the website for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.
 - B. The article also states that *pets who live in the states with the highest rates of spaying/neutering also live the longest*.
 1. According to Natalie DiBlasio, writing for USA Today on May 7 of 2013, in Mississippi, the lowest-ranking state for pet longevity, *44% of the dogs are not neutered or spayed*.
 2. She goes on to say that other issues *affecting pet longevity have to do with climate, heartworm, and income of owners*.
 - C. The Human Society of America’s website features the August 2014 article, “Why You Should Spay/Neuter Your Pet,” which states that spaying *lessens their urge to roam, exposure to fights with other animals, getting struck by cars, and other mishaps*.
 - D. Also according to the same article, *male pets who are neutered eliminate their chances of getting testicular and prostate cancer*.

With all the sources available to you through reliable Internet and published sources, finding information is not difficult. Recognizing supporting information from the general idea you are trying to support or prove is more difficult, as is providing adequate citation.

Along with clarifying and proving, supporting materials, especially narrative ones, also make your speech much more interesting and attention-getting. Later in the chapter we will look at the various “factors of attention” that are related to supporting material. Ultimately, you will be perceived as a more credible speaker if you provide clarifying, **probative** (proof-giving and logical), and interesting supporting material.

Probative

having the quality or function of proving or demonstrating something; affording proof or evidence

Types of Supporting Materials

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why supporting materials are necessary.
2. List the various types of verbal supporting materials.
3. Discuss supporting material strengths in explaining and proving ideas and arguments.
4. Incorporate supporting materials seamlessly into the speech.
5. Use supporting materials ethically through correct citation.
6. Explain how perception and attention affect the speech-giving process.

Types of Supporting Materials

Essentially, there are seven types of supporting materials: examples, narratives, definitions, descriptions, historical and scientific fact, statistics, and testimony. Each provides a different type of support, and you will want to choose the supporting materials that best help you make the point you want to get across to your audience.

Examples

This type of supporting material is the first and easiest to use but also easy to forget. Examples are almost always short but concrete specific instances to illuminate a concept. They are designed to give audiences a reference point. If you were describing a type of architecture, you would obviously show visual aids of it and give verbal descriptions of it, but you could say, “You pass an example of this type of architecture every time you go downtown—City Hall.” An example must be quickly understandable, something the audience can pull out of their memory or experience quickly.

The key to effectively using examples in your speeches is this: what is an example to you may not be an example to your audience, if they have a different experience. One of the authors has been teaching four decades and cannot use the same pop culture examples she used to use in class. Television shows from twenty years ago are pretty meaningless to audiences today. Time and age are not the only reasons an example may not work with the audience. If you are a huge soccer fan speaking to a group who barely knows soccer, using a well-known soccer player as an example of perseverance or overcoming discrimination in the sports world may not communicate. It may only leave the audience members scratching their heads.

Additionally, one good, appropriate example is worth several less apt ones. Keep in mind that in the distinction between supporting materials that prove, those that clarify, and those that do both, examples are used to clarify.

Narratives

Earlier in this textbook the “power of story” was mentioned. Narratives, stories, and anecdotes are useful in speeches to interest the audience and clarify, dramatize, and emphasize ideas. They have, if done well, strong emotional power. They can be used in the introduction, the body, and the conclusion of the speech. They can be short, as anecdotes usually are. Think of the stories you often see in *Readers’ Digest*, human interest stories on the local news, or what you might post on Facebook about a bad experience you had at the DMV. They could be longer, although they should not comprise large portions of the speech.

Narratives can be personal, literary, historical, or hypothetical. Personal narratives can be helpful in situations where you desire to:

- Relate to the audience on a human level, especially if they may see you as competent but not really similar or connected to them.
- Build your credibility by mentioning your experience with a topic.

Of course, personal narratives must be true. They must also not portray you as more competent, experienced, brave, intelligent, etc., than you are; in other words, along with being truthful in using personal narratives, you should be reasonably humble.

An example of a literary narrative might be one of Aesop’s fables, a short story by O’Henry, or an appropriate tale from another culture. Keep in mind that because of their power, stories tend to be remembered more than other parts of the speech. Do you want the story to overshadow your content? Scenes from films would be another example of a literary narrative, but as with examples, you must consider the audience’s frame of reference and if they will have seen the film.

Historical narratives (sometimes called documented narratives) have power because they can also prove an idea as well as clarify one. In using these, you should treat them as fact and therefore give a citation as to where you found the historical narrative. By “historical” we do not mean the story refers to something that happened many years ago, only that it has happened in the past and there were witnesses to validate the happening.

If you were trying to argue for the end to the death penalty because it leads to unjust executions, one good example of a person who was executed and then found innocent afterward would be both emotional and probative. Here, be careful of using theatrical movies as your source of historical narrative. Hollywood likes to change history to make the story they want. For example, many people think *Braveheart* is historically accurate, but it is off on many key points—even the kilts, which were not worn by the Scots until the 1600s.

Hypothetical narratives are ones that could happen but have not yet. To be effective, they should be based on reality. Here are two examples:

Picture this incident: You are standing in line at the grocery checkout, reading the headlines on the *Star* and *National Enquirer* for a laugh, checking your phone. Then, the middle-aged man in front of you grabs his shoulder and falls to the ground, unconscious. What would you do in a situation like this? While it has probably never happened to you, people have medical emergencies in public many times a day. Would you know how to respond?

Hypothetical narratives

a story of something that could happen but has not happened yet

Imagine yourself in this situation. It is 3:00 in the morning. You are awakened from a pretty good sleep by a dog barking loudly in the neighborhood. You get up and see green lights coming into your house from the back yard. You go in the direction of the lights and unlock your back door and there, right beside your deck, is an alien spaceship. The door opens and visitors from another planet come out and invite you in, and for the next hour you tour their ship. You can somehow understand them because their communication abilities are far advanced from ours. Now, back to reality. If you were in a foreign country, you would not be able to understand a foreign language unless you had studied it. That is why you should learn a foreign language in college.

Obviously, the second is so “off-the-wall” that the audience would be wondering about the connection, although it definitely does attract attention. If using a hypothetical narrative, be sure that it is clear that the narrative is hypothetical, not factual. Because of their attention-getting nature, hypothetical narratives are often used in introductions.

Definitions

First, using a dictionary definition does not really show your audience that you have researched a topic (anyone can look up a definition in a few seconds). Secondly, does the audience need a definition of a word like “love,” “bravery,” or “commitment?” They may consider it insulting for you to provide them definition of those words.

To **define** means to set limits on something; defining a word is setting limits on what it means, how the audience should think about the word, and/or how you will use it. We know there are denotative and connotative definitions or meanings for words, which we usually think of as objective and subjective responses to words. You only need to define words that would be unfamiliar to the audience or words that you want to use in a specialized way.

For example, terms used in specialized fields, often called “jargon,” (see Chapter 10) need to be defined and explained. These words may be in medicine, law, the military, technology, or the arts. Some of these words may be in foreign languages, such as Latin (*habeas corpus*, *quid pro quo*). Some of them may be acronyms; CBE is a term being used currently higher education that means “Competency Based Education.” That is part of a definition, but not a full one—what is competency based education? To answer that question, you would do best to find an officially accepted definition and cite it.

Define

to set limits on what a word or term means, how the audience should think about it, and/or how you will use it

You may want to use a **stipulated definition** early in your speech. In this case, you clearly tell the audience how you are going to use a word or phrase in your speech. “When I use the phrase ‘liberal democracy’ in this speech, I am using it in the historical sense of a constitution, representative government, and elected officials, not in the sense of any particular issues that are being debated today between progressives and conservatives.” This is a helpful technique and makes sure your audience understands you, but you would only want to do this for terms that have confusing or controversial meanings for some.

Although we tend to think of the dictionary definition as the standard, that is only one way of defining something. The dictionary tends to define with synonyms, or other words that are close in meaning. All of us have had the experience of looking up a word and finding a definition that uses another word we do not know! Synonyms are one way to define, but there are some others.

Stipulated definition

a definition with clearly defined parameters for how the word or term is being used in the context of a speech

Classification and differentiation

This is a fancy way of saying “X is a type of Y, but it is different from the other Ys in that . . .” “A bicycle is type of vehicle that has two wheels, handlebars instead of a steering wheel, and is powered by the feet of the driver.” Obviously you know what a bicycle is and it does not need defining, so here are some better examples:

Laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding (LAGB) is a (**type of**) surgical procedure that (**how different**) involves the placement of an adjustable silicone belt around the upper portion of the stomach using a laparoscope. The band can be tightened by adding saline to fill the band like blowing air into a doughnut-shaped balloon. The band is connected to a port that is placed under the skin of the abdomen. This port is used to introduce or remove saline into the band.

Gestational diabetes is a (**type of**) diabetic condition (**how different**) that appears during pregnancy and usually goes away after the birth of the baby.

Social publishing platforms are a (**type of**) social medium where (**how different**) long and short-form written content can be shared with other users.

Operational Definitions

Operational definitions give examples of an action or idea to define it. If we were to define “*quid pro quo* sexual harassment” operationally, we might use a hypothetical narrative of a female employee who is pressured by her supervisor to date him and told she must go out with him socially to get a promotion. Operational definitions do

not have to be this dramatic, but they do draw a picture and answer the question, “What does this look like in real life?” rather than using synonyms to define.

Definition by Contrast or Comparison

You can define a term or concept by telling what it is similar to or different from. This method requires the audience to have an understanding of whatever you are using as the point of contrast or comparison. When alcoholism or drug addiction is defined as a disease, that is a comparison. Although not caused by a virus or bacteria, addiction disorder has other qualities that are disease-like.

When defining by contrast, you are pointing how a concept or term is distinct from another more familiar one. For example, “pop culture” is defined as different from “high culture” in that, traditionally, popular culture has been associated with people of lower socioeconomic status (i.e. less wealth or education). *High culture*, on the other hand, is associated with as the “official” culture of the more highly educated within the upper classes. Here, the definition of popular culture is clarified by highlighting the differences between it and high culture.

A similar form of definition by contrast is defining by negation, which is stipulating what something *is not*. This famous quotation from Nelson Mandela is an example: “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” Here, Mandela is helping us draw limits around a concept by saying what it is *not*.

Descriptions

The key to description is to think in terms of the five senses: sight (visual; how does the thing look in terms of color, size, shape), hearing (auditory; volume, musical qualities), taste (gustatory; sweet, bitter, salty, sour, gritty, smooth, chewy), smell (olfactory; sweet, rancid, fragrant, aromatic, musky), and feel (tactile; rough, silky, nubby, scratchy). The words **kinesthetic** (movement of the body) and **organic** (feelings related to the inner workings of the body) can be added to those senses to describe internal physical feeling, such as straining muscles or pain (**kinesthetic**) and nausea or the feelings of heightened emotions (**organic**).

Description as a method of support also depends on details, or answering the five questions of what, where, how, who, when. To use description, you must dig deeper into your vocabulary and think concretely. This example shows that progression.

Organic

feelings or issues related to the inner workings of the body

Kinesthetic

issues related to the movement of the body or physical activity

Furniture

A chair

A recliner

A La-Z-Boy® rocker-recliner

An old green velvet La-Z-Boy® rocker recliner

An old lime green velvet La-Z-Boy® rocker recliner with a cigarette burn on the left arm

As you add more description, two things happen. The “camera focus” becomes clearer, but you also add tone, or attitude. A recliner is one thing, but who buys a lime green velvet recliner? And someone sat in it smoked and was sloppy about it. In this case, the last line is probably too much description unless you want to paint a picture of a careless person with odd taste in furniture.

Description is useful as supporting material in terms of describing processes. This topic was discussed in Chapter 6 in chronological patterns of organization. Describing processes requires detail and not taking for granted what the audience already knows. Some instructors use the “peanut butter sandwich” example to make this point: How would you describe making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to someone who had never seen a sandwich, peanut butter, or jelly? You would need to put yourself in their shoes to describe the process and not assume they know

that the peanut butter and jelly go on the inside, facing surfaces of the bread, and that two pieces of bread are involved.

Historic and Scientific Fact

This type of supporting material is useful for clarification but is especially useful for proving a point. President John Adams is quoted as saying, “Facts are stubborn things,” but that does not mean everyone accepts every fact as a fact, or that everyone is capable of distinguishing a fact from an opinion. A fact is defined by the Urban Dictionary as “The place most people in the world tend to think their opinions reside.” This is a humorous definition, but often true about how we approach facts. The meaning of “fact” is complicated by the context in which it is being used. The National Center for Science Education (2008) defines fact this way:

In science, an observation that has been repeatedly confirmed and for all practical purposes is accepted as ‘true.’ Truth in science, however, is never final and what is accepted as a fact today may be modified or even discarded tomorrow.

Another source explains fact this way:

[Fact is] a truth known by actual experience or observation. The hardness of iron, the number of ribs in a squirrel’s body, the existence of fossil trilobites, and the like are all facts. Is it a fact that electrons orbit around atomic nuclei? Is it a fact that Brutus stabbed Julius Caesar? Is it a fact that the sun will rise tomorrow? None of us has observed any of these things – the first is an inference from a variety of different observations, the second is reported by Plutarch and other historians who lived close enough in time and space to the event that we trust their report, and the third is an inductive inference after repeated observations. (“Scientific Thought: Facts, Hypotheses, Theories, and all that stuff”)

Without getting into a philosophical dissertation on the meaning of truth, for our purposes facts are pieces of information with established “backup.” You can cite who discovered the fact and how other authorities have supported it. Some facts are so common that most people don’t know where they started—who actually discovered that the water molecule is two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen (H₂O)? But we could find out if we wanted to (it was, by the way, the 18th century chemist Henry Cavendish). In using scientific and historical fact in your speech, do not take citation for granted. If it is a fact worth saying and a fact new to the audience, assume you should cite the source of the fact, getting as close to the original as possible.

Also, the difference between historical narrative (mentioned above) and historical fact has to do with length. An historical fact might just be a date, place, or action, such as “President Ronald Reagan was shot by John Hinckley on March 30, 1981, in front of Washington, D.C. Hilton Hotel.” An historical narrative would go into much more detail and add dramatic elements, such as this assassination attempt from the point of view of Secret Service agents.

Statistics

Statistics are misunderstood. First, the meaning of the term is misunderstood. **Statistics** are not just numbers or numerical facts. The essence of statistics is the collection, analysis, comparison, and interpretation of numerical data, understanding its comparison with other numerical data. For example, it is a numerical fact that the population of the U.S., according to the 2010 census, was 308,700,000. This is a 9.7% increase from the 2000 census; this comparison is a statistic. However, for the purpose of simplicity, we will deal with both numerical facts and real statistics in this section.

Statistics are also misunderstood because the science of statistics is difficult. Even terms like mean, median, and mode often confuse people, much less regression analysis, two-tailed T-tests, and margin of error. Before you can use statistics in a speech, you should have a basic understanding of them.

Statistics
the collection, analysis, comparison, and interpretation of numerical data, understanding its comparison with other numerical data

Mean is the same as mathematical average, something you learned to do early in math classes. Add up the figures and divide by the number of figures. Related to mean is the concept of standard deviation, which is the average amount each figure is different from (higher or lower) than the average or mean. Standard deviation is harder to figure (and usually done by computer!) but it does let you know if a group is more similar than alike. If the average on a test in a class is 76, but the standard deviation is 20, that tells you students tended to do really well (96) or really poorly (56) on it (we’re simplifying here, but you see the point).

The **median**, however, is the middle number in a distribution. If all salaries of ballplayers in MLB were listed from highest to lowest, the one in the exact middle of the list would be the median. You can tell from this that it probably will not be the same as the average, and it rarely is; however, the terms “median” and “mean” are often interchanged carelessly. **Mode** is the name for the most frequently occurring number in the list. As an example, Figure 7.3 is a list of grades from highest to lowest that students might make on a midterm in a class. The placement of mean, median, and mode are noted.

Mean
the mathematical average for a given set of numbers

Percentages have to do with ratios. There are many other terms you would be introduced to in

Mode
the number that is the most frequently occurring within a given set of numbers

Median
the middle number in a given set of numbers

a statistics class, but the point remains: be careful of using a statistic that sounds impressive unless you know what it represents. There is an old saying about “figures don’t lie but liars figure” and another, “There are liars, damn liars, and statisticians.” These sayings are exaggerations but they point out that we are inundated with statistical information and often do not know how to process it. Another thing to watch when using numerical facts is not to confuse your billions and your millions. There is a big difference. If you say that 43 billion people in the US are without adequate health care, you will probably confuse your audience, since the population of the planet is around 7 billion!

In using statistics, you are probably going to use them as proof more than as explanation. Statistics are considered a strong form of proof.

Use statistics as support, not as a main point. The audience may cringe or tune you out for saying, “Now I’d like to give you some statistics about the problem of gangs in our part of the state.” That sounds as exciting as reading the telephone book! Use the statistics to support an argument. “Gang activity is increasing in our region. For example, it is increasing in the three major cities. Mainsville had 450 arrests for gang activity this year alone, up 20% from all of last year.” This example ties the numerical fact (450 arrests) and the statistical comparison (up 20%) to an argument. The goal is to weave or blend the statistics seamlessly into the speech, not have them stand alone as a section of the speech.

9. Always provide the source of the statistic. In the previous example, it should read, “According to a report published on the Georgia Bureau of Investigation’s website, Mainsville had 450 arrests . . .” There are a number of “urban myth” statistics floating around that probably have a basis in some research done at some point in time, but that research was outlived by the statistic. An audience would have reason to be skeptical if you cannot provide the name of the researcher or organization that backs up the statistics and numerical data. By the way, it is common for speakers and writers to say “According to research” or “According to studies.” This tag is essentially meaningless and actually a logical fallacy. Give a real source to support your argument.
10. In regard to sources, depend on the reliable ones. Table 7.1, originally published in Wrench, Goding, Johnson, and Attias (2011), lists valid websites providing statistical information.
11. Do not overuse statistics. While there is no hard and fast rule on how many to use, there are other good supporting materials and you would not want to depend on statistics alone. You want to choose the statistics and numerical data that will strengthen your argument the most and drive your point home. Statistics can have emotional power as well as probative value if used sparingly.
12. Use graphs to display the most important statistics. If you are using presentation software such as PowerPoint, you can create your own basic pie, line, or bar graphs, or you can borrow one and put a correct citation on the slide. However, you do not need to make a graph for every single statistic. More information on these types of visual aids and what type of information they convey best can be found in Chapter 9.
13. Explain your statistics as needed, but do not make your speech a statistics lesson. Explain the context of the statistics. If you say, “My blog has 500 subscribers” to a group of people who know little about blogs, that might sound impressive, but is it? You can also provide a story of an individual, and then tie the individual into the statistic. After telling a story of the daily struggles of a young mother with multiple sclerosis, you could follow up with “This is just one story in the 400,000 people who suffer from MS in

the United States today, according to National MS Society.”

14. If you do your own survey or research and use numerical data from it, explain your methodology. “In order to understand the attitudes of freshmen at our college about the subject of open source textbooks, I polled 150 first-year students, only three of whom were close friends, asking them this question: ‘Do you agree that our college should encourage the faculty to use open source textbooks?’ Seventy-five percent of them indicated that they agreed with the statement.”
15. It goes without saying that you will use the statistic ethically, that there will be no distortion of what the statistic means. However, it is acceptable and a good idea to round up numerical data to avoid overwhelming the audience. Earlier we used the example of the U.S. census, stating the population in 2010 was 308.7 million. That is a rounded figure. The actual number was 308,745,538, but saying “almost 309 million” or “308.7 million” will serve your purposes and not be unethical.
16. Additionally, do not make statistics mean what they do not mean. Otherwise, you would be pushing the boundaries on ethics. In the example about your survey of students, if you were to say, “75% of college freshmen support . . .” That is not what the research said. Seventy-five percent of the students you surveyed indicated agreement, but since your study did not meet scientific standards regarding size of sample and how you found the sample, you can only use the information in relation to students in your college, not the whole country. One of the authors had a statistics professor who often liked to say, “Numbers will tell you whatever you want if you torture them long enough,” meaning you can always twist or manipulate statistics to meet your goals if you want to.
17. An effective technique with numerical data is to use physical comparisons. “The National Debt is 17 trillion dollars. What does that mean? It means that every American citizen owes \$55,100.” “It means that if the money were stacked as hundred dollar bills, it would go to . . .” Or another example, “There are 29 million Americans with diabetes. That is 9.3%. In terms closer to home, of the 32 people in this classroom, 3 of us would have diabetes.” Of course, in this last example, the class may not be made up of those in risk groups for diabetes, so you would not want to say, “Three of us have diabetes.” It is only a comparison for the audience to grasp the significance of the topic.
18. Finally, because statistics can be confusing, slow down when you say them, give more emphasis, gesture—small ways of helping the audience grasp them.

Testimony

Testimony is the words of others. You might think of them as quoted material. Obviously, all quoted material or testimony is not the same. Some quotations you just use because they are funny, compelling, or attention-getting. They work well as openings to introductions. Other types of testimony are more useful for proving your arguments. Testimony can also give an audience insight into the feelings or perceptions of others. Testimony is basically divided into two categories: expert and peer.

Expert Testimony

What is an expert? Here is a quotation of the humorous kind: An expert is “one who knows more and more about less and less” (Nicholas Butler). Actually, an **expert** for our purposes is someone with recognized credentials, knowledge, education, and/or experience in a subject. Experts spend time studying the facts and putting the facts together. They may not be scholars who publish original research but they have in-depth knowledge. They may have certain levels of education, or they have real-world experience in the topic.

For example, one of the authors is attending a quilt show this week to talk to experts in quilting. This expertise was gained through years of making, preserving, reading about, and showing quilts, even if they never took Quilting 101 in college. To quote an expert on expertise, “To be an expert, someone needs to have considerable knowledge on a topic or considerable skill in accomplishing something” (Weinstein, 1993). In using expert testimony, you should follow these guidelines:

Testimony

the words of others used as proof or evidence

Expert

someone with recognized credentials, knowledge, education, and/or experience in a subject

- Use the expert’s testimony in his or her relevant field, not outside of it. A person may have a Nobel Prize

in economics, but that does not make him or her an expert in biology.

- Provide at least some of the expert’s relevant credentials.
- Choose experts to quote whom your audience will respect and/or whose name or affiliations they will recognize as credible.
- Make it clear that you are quoting the expert testimony verbatim or paraphrasing it. If verbatim, say “Quote . . . end of quote” (not unquote—you cannot unquote someone).
- If you interviewed the expert yourself, make that clear in the speech also. “When I spoke with Dr. Mary Thompson, principal of Park Lake High School, on October 12, she informed me that . . .”

Expert testimony is one of your strongest supporting materials to prove your arguments, but in a sense, by clearly citing the source’s credentials, you are arguing that your source is truly an expert (if the audience is unfamiliar with him or her) in order to validate his or her information.

Peer Testimony

Any quotation from a friend, family member, or classmate about an incident or topic would be **peer testimony**. It is useful in helping the audience understand a topic from a personal point of view. For example, in the spring of 2011, a devastating tornado came through the town where one of the authors and many of their students live. One of those students gave a dramatic personal experience speech in class about surviving the tornado in a building that was destroyed and literally disappeared. They survived because she and her coworkers at their chain restaurant were able to get to safety in the freezer. While she may not have had an advanced degree in a field related to tornadoes or the destruction they can cause, this student certainly had a good deal of knowledge on the subject based on her experience of surviving a tornado. However, do not present any old testimony of a peer or friend as if it were expert or credentialed.

Peer testimony

any quotation from a friend, family member, or classmate about an incident or topic

[65]

Attention Factors and Supporting Material

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Explain why supporting materials are necessary.
2. List the various types of verbal supporting materials.
3. Discuss supporting material strengths in explaining and proving ideas and arguments.
4. Incorporate supporting materials seamlessly into the speech.
5. Use supporting materials ethically through correct citation.
6. Explain how perception and attention affect the speech-giving process.

Attention Factors and Supporting Material

In Chapter 2, we discussed how public speaking as an oral form of communication is different from written forms of communication. Therefore, as a speaker, you must work to maintain the attention of your audience. In this section, we will look more deeply at attention and how you can use supporting materials to keep the audience's attention in addition to the important functions of clarifying and proving ideas.

What is Attention?

Attention and perception are closely tied concepts, but they are not exactly the same. If you have taken an introduction to psychology course, one of the earliest chapters in the textbook was probably about perception, since our perceptual processes are so foundational to how we think and process. **Perception** deals primarily with how we organize and interpret the patterns of stimuli around us. The key words in this definition are patterns, organize, and interpret. The brain does the work of taking thousands of stimuli around us and making sense of them. Sensation is taking in the stimuli in the physical realm; perception is doing something with it psychologically. Perception is obviously influenced by memory, experiences, past learning, etc. If you taste a desert, the scent and taste are physically going to your brain, and thus you are sensing it. But if you say, "This tastes like my mother's recipe for this desert," then you are perceiving.

Attention, on the other hand, is focused perception. **Attention** is defined as focus on one stimulus while ignoring or suppressing reactions to other stimuli. It has been referred to as the "allocation of limited processing resources" (Anderson, 2005, p. 519). Although we think we can multitask and pay attention to three things at a time, we cannot.

Perception

how people organize and interpret the patterns of stimuli around them

The diagram in Figure 7.4 might help show why multitasking is a problem rather than a benefit. In the figure, two balls from the upper chutes (which represent the two sources of stimuli, such as two auditory messages) are trying to enter the central chute at the same time. For a practical example that you can probably relate to, let's say these balls represent watching TV and playing a game on your phone at the same time. Only one ball can go through the single chute at a time, which is representative of your focus (the ideas or tasks you can actually think about at a given moment). The “balls” or stimuli must take turns, therefore making your attention shift back and forth, affecting your ability to do one task versus the other.

Attention

focus on one stimulus while ignoring or suppressing reactions to other stimuli

When you try to pay attention to two things at once, you are going to let the information in but have to switch back and forth on the pathways, making your attention (listening, reading, processing) less efficient. This means that in our example above, you're either going to miss something that is being said on TV or you're going to not play the game very well because you can't divide your focus between the two activities. Multitudes of studies have been done on how inefficient multitasking behavior is, especially for students (Weimer, 2012).

When you pay attention, you focus and other stimuli become muted or nonexistent in your mind for that amount of time. We have all had experiences when we so focused on a stimulus—it could be a concert, a movie, a roller coaster ride—that we almost “wake up” to the rest of the world when it is over.

Why Do We Pay Attention?

Perception is not something we have a good deal of control over, but we do have more say in attention. There are basically five reasons we pay attention to what we do when confronted with lots of competing stimuli.

1. choose to focus on one thing over another. Plain and simple, we grit our teeth and pay attention, such as when we are making ourselves study difficult material for a test. While this is a behavior we accept as adults, as public speakers we should not expect the audience to do all the work of paying attention just because they feel a duty to do so; they probably will not. We should attempt to meet the audience half way by using our understanding of attention. We should use various techniques in our speech to help the audience pay attention.
2. Expectations. If a speaker started a lecture with “In this presentation I am going to say the word ‘serendipity,’ and when I do, the first person who jumps up and says ‘gotcha’ will get this \$100 bill.” The audience is expecting to hear something and tuning in for it. Of course, this is an extreme example (and we don't recommend it!) but when a speaker gives an introduction that sets up for the audience what to expect, attention can be helped.
3. Need states. Have you ever noticed that the hamburgers on the fast food commercials look juicier and more delicious when you are hungry? When we are in a need state, we will be focused on those items that meet the need. When your instructor begins discussing in class what you can expect on the next exam, you probably perk up a bit, since this is information students generally need to know in order to do well in the class. Because that information meets a personal need, they will be more receptive to and focused on it.
4. Past training and experiences. You will notice what you have been taught or trained, either directly or indirectly, to focus on. Sometimes you will not even be aware that you are doing so. For example, if you have a background in rodeo competition, you will see aspects and details in a rodeo scene in a movie that someone else would just take for granted.
5. All of these reasons for paying attention are relevant to the public speaker, but the last one is most directly usable and related to supporting material. There are certain qualities or characteristics of stimuli that naturally attract our attention. These have been termed the “factors of attention.” If a public speaker puts these traits into the speech and presentation aids, the audience's ability to pay attention will be bolstered. These characteristics, listed below, are generally ways to “perk up” you audience's ears and gain their attention, at least temporarily. Our attention can wane rather quickly and a speaker must work to keep the audience engaged. Incorporating attention factors can help.

Attention Factors

The list of factors that can help you get or maintain attention during your speech is rather long, and a speaker cannot, of course, use all of them in one speech, but they are useful tools in certain speech situations. As you progress as a public speaker, you can use them in an “impromptu” fashion if you think the audience needs an attention boost.

The first factor in getting or maintaining attention is *movement*. A moving object will gain more attention than a stationary one. Movement is one of the factors of attention you can use in different ways. You can use stories that have movement in plot. You can use physical movement in your delivery. Transitions give a sense of movement to a speech, as well as not dwelling on one idea too long. The animation of words and graphics in PowerPoint or other slide presentation software is another use of animation.

At the same time, because animation attracts attention and therefore distracts attention too, it should be used strategically and intentionally (for a good purpose). For example, little animated figures, pacing back and forth, and repetitive gestures are uses of movement that you would not want to use because they are annoying, they are not purposeful, and they draw the audience’s attention away from your message.

The second factor of attention is *conflict*. Showing ideas, groups, teams, etc. that are in conflict draws attention. Stories can also utilize conflict.

The third factor of attention is *novelty*. Your ideas and the way you approach them should be fresh and new to the audience. When we get to persuasion in Chapter 13, we will also see that evidence used to persuade an audience should be new to them.

The fourth factor of attention is *humor*. Humor is usually not the focus of your speech, especially in a class situation, but well-placed and intentional humor can be helpful to maintain attention of your audience. It should be appropriate to the topic and well-practiced. It is probably a good idea to “road test” your humor to be sure it is funny to other people. We all have our own sense of what is funny and have experienced those times when friends or family don’t seem to “get” what we find funny. If you want to tell a joke, be sure to tell it, not read it, and practice the delivery well.

The fifth factor of attention is *familiarity*. As mentioned already, supporting materials should be immediately accessible and draw from your audience’s experience so they can understand quickly in an oral communication setting. Familiarity is attractive because it is comfortable. Familiarity may seem in conflict with novelty, and in a sense they show both sides of how our minds work. We like new things (such as the most recent design of a sports car) but we also like comfortable, familiar things (such as our favorite movie we have seen ten times already). They function differently in a speech. Familiarity works better to explain a new concept; novelty works better to pique an audience’s interest.

The sixth factor is *contrast*. This one is particularly useful to a speaker in creating visual aids so that key words stand out, for example, on presentation slides. Contrast also applies to the variety in your voice (avoiding what we would call monotone or monorate).

The seventh factor of attention is *repetition*. We have already seen how key repetitions at points in the speech can remind the audience of your structure and main ideas.

Suspense is the eighth factor of attention. Although not as useful in public speaking as some of the factors, suspense can be useful in an introduction. You can use a series of questions asking the audience to guess your topic; however, this is a risky approach if you disappoint your audience when the “real” topic is not what they are guessing. You can also tell a story in the introduction and say you will give the outcome of the story at the end of the speech, or pose a question and promise that by the end of the speech they will know the answer. However, always be sure to deliver on the promise!

The ninth factor is *proximity*, which refers to physical closeness. While not applicable to supporting materials, proximity does relate to public speaking delivery. The more physical distance between the audience members and the speaker and the audience, the harder it will be for the audience to remain attentive. If you know that only 20 people are going to attend a presentation, it is best to have it in a 20-seat room, not an auditorium that seats 100. The audience members will spread out and feel detached from each other, and it will be harder for you to be or feel to close to them.

The tenth factor of attention is *need-oriented* subjects. We pay attention to what meets our needs. For example, when you are hungry, you probably notice fast food advertisements more on television (which advertisers recognize and use against us). If you are shopping for a car, you will be more aware of car advertisements.

The eleventh factor is *intensity*, which is also useful in the delivery aspect of public speaking. Raising your voice at key times and slowing down are useful for attention.

The last attention factor is *concreteness*, which in a sense describes all of them. All of the factors and types of supporting materials are tied to real or concrete experience. The more a speaker can attach the speech to real experience, either her own or preferably the audience's, the more effective she will be.

Conclusion

It is hard to imagine an effective speech without a variety of supporting materials. Think of it like cooking a flavorful cuisine—there will be a mixture of spices and tastes, not just one. Statistics, narratives and examples, testimony, definitions, descriptions, and facts all clarify your concepts for the audience, and statistics, testimony, facts, and historical examples also support logical arguments. In the process of composing your speech, be sure to provide sources and use varied and interesting language to express the support your speech ideas require and deserve.

Something to Think About

One type of supporting material that is commonly used but was not fully discussed in this chapter is quotations such as “The only limits to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today” (Franklin D. Roosevelt). You can go to websites to find quotable quotes on various topics. What category (testimony, narratives, statistics, examples) would quotations such as this fall into? Would they be for proof or explanation? When would they be useful? What could be some downsides to using them? (Some of these answers are discussed in Chapter 8.)

[PART XVI]

Chapter 16: Introductions and Conclusions



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General Guidelines for Introductions and Conclusions

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize the functions of introductions and conclusions.
2. Identify the primary elements of a speech introduction.
3. Identify the primary elements of a speech conclusion.
4. Construct introductions and conclusions.

General Guidelines for Introductions and Conclusions

Can you imagine how strange a speech would sound without an introduction? Or how jarring it would be if, after making a point, a speaker just walked off the podium and sat down? You would most likely be pretty confused, and the takeaway from that speech—even if the content was really good—would likely be, “I was confused” or “That was a weird speech.”

This is just one of the reasons all speeches need introductions and conclusions. Introductions and conclusions serve to frame the speech and give it a clearly defined beginning and end. They help the audience to see what is to come in the speech, and then let them mentally prepare for the end. In doing this, introductions and conclusions provide a “preview/review” of your speech as a means to reiterate to your audience what you are talking about.

If you remember back to Chapter 2, we talked about “planned redundancy” as a strategy for reminding the audience about your topic and what you are trying to accomplish with your speech. Since speeches are auditory and live, you need to make sure the audience remembers what you are saying. So one of the primary functions of an introduction is to preview what you will be covering in your speech, and one of the main roles of the conclusion is to review what you have covered. It may seem like you are repeating yourself and saying the same things over and over, but that repetition ensures that your audience understands and retains what you are saying.

The challenge, however, is that there is much more that a speaker must do in her introduction and conclusion than just preview or review her topic and main points. The roles that introductions and conclusions fulfill are numerous, and, when done correctly, can make your speech stronger. The challenge with all this, though, is that the introduction and conclusion aren’t what your audience wants or needs to hear; that is primarily contained in the body section where the bulk of your research and information will be housed. So to that end, the introduction and conclusion need to be relatively short and to the point.

The general rule is that the introduction and conclusion should each be about 10% of your total speech, leaving 80% for the body section. You can extend the introduction to 15% if there is good reason to, so 10-15% of the speech time is a good guideline. Let’s say that your informative speech has a time limit of 5-7 minutes: if we average that out to 6 minutes that gives us 360 seconds. Ten to fifteen percent of 360 is 36-54, meaning your full introduction—which includes the thesis and preview—should come in at about a minute. That isn’t to say that your speech instructor will be timing you and penalize you for hitting the 60 second mark, but rather to highlight

the fact that you need to be economical with your time. An introduction or conclusion of a 6-minute speech that lasts 90 seconds is taking up 25% of your speech, leaving much less time for the body.

Consequently, there are some common errors to avoid in introductions:

- rambling and meandering, not getting to the point;
- speaking to become comfortable;
- saying the specific purpose statement, especially as first words;
- choosing a technique that hurts credibility, such as pedantic (defining words like “love”) or a method that is not audience-centered;
- beginning to talk as you approach the platform or lectern—reach your destination, pause, smile, and begin;
- reading your introduction from your notes; it is vital to establish eye contact in the introduction, so knowing it very well is important;
- talking too fast; let your audience get used to your voice by speaking emphatically and clearly.

As we have mentioned before, it is best to write your introduction after you have a clear sense of the body of your presentation. The challenge to introductions is that there is a lot you need to get done in that 10%-15%, and all of it is vital to establishing yourself as a knowledgeable and credible speaker.

In terms of the conclusions, be careful NOT to:

- signal the end multiple times. In other words, no “multiple conclusions” or saying “As I close” more than once;
- rambling; if you signal the end, end;
- talking as you leave the platform or lectern
- indicating with facial expression or body language that you were not happy with the speech.

In the following sections, we will discuss specifically what you should include in the introduction and conclusion, and offer a number of options for accomplishing each.

Structuring the Introduction and Examples

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize the functions of introductions and conclusions.
2. Identify the primary elements of a speech introduction.
3. Identify the primary elements of a speech conclusion.
4. Construct introductions and conclusions.

Structuring the Introduction

A common concern many students have as the date of their first major speech approaches is “I don’t know how I should start my speech.” What they are really saying is they aren’t sure what words will be memorable, attention-capturing, and clever enough to get their audience interested or, on a more basic level, sound good. This is a problem most speakers have, since the first words you say, in many ways, set the tone for the rest of your speech. There may not be any one “best” way to start a speech, but we can provide some helpful guidelines that will make starting a speech much easier.

With that in mind, there are five basic elements that you will want to incorporate into your introduction. And while you have some leeway to structure your introduction in a way that best fits with your speech and you wouldn’t necessarily do all of these in the order below, the following order of these five elements is fairly standard. Unless you have a specific reason to do otherwise, it is probably a pretty good order for you to use.

Element 1: Get the Audience’s 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. 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.

That’s why every speech should start with an **attention getter**, or some sort of statement or question that piques the audience’s interest in what you have to say at the very start of a speech. Sometime these are called “grabbers.” The first words out of your mouth should be something that will perk up the audience’s ears. Starting a speech with “Hey everybody. I’m going to talk to you today about soccer” already sounds boring and has not tried to engage the individuals in the audience who don’t care about soccer. Once your audience has deemed your speech to be boring, trying to inform, persuade, or entertain them becomes exponentially more difficult. So let’s briefly discuss what you can do to capture your audience’s attention from the onset.

First, when selecting an attention-getting device, you want to make sure that the option you choose is actually appropriate and relevant to your specific audience. Different audiences will have different backgrounds and knowledge, so you should use your audience analysis to determine whether specific information you plan on using would be appropriate for a specific audience. For example, if you're giving a speech on family units to a group of individuals over the age of sixty-five, starting your speech with a reference to the television show *Gossip Girl* may not be the best idea because the audience may be unfamiliar with that show.

Attention getter

the statement or question that piques the audience's interest in what you have to say at the very beginning of a speech

You will also want to choose an attention-getting device appropriate for your speech topic. Ideally, your attention-getting device should have a relevant connection to your speech. Imagine if a speaker pulled condoms out of his pocket, yelled "Free sex!" and threw the condoms at the audience in the beginning of a speech about the economy. While this may clearly get the audience's attention, this isn't really a good way to prepare an audience for a speech about the stock market. To help you out, below we have listed a number of different attention getters that you may find useful for opening your speech.

Anecdotes and Narratives

An **anecdote** is a brief account or story of an interesting or humorous event. Notice the emphasis here is on the word "brief." A common mistake speakers make when telling an anecdote is to make the anecdote too long. An example of an anecdote used in a speech about the pervasiveness of technology might look something like this:

In July 2009, a high school girl named Miranda Becker was walking along a main boulevard near her home on Staten Island, New York, typing in a message on her cell phone. Not paying attention to the world around her, she took a step and fell right into an open manhole.

Anecdote

a brief account or story of an interesting or humorous event

Notice that the anecdote is short and has a clear point. From here the speaker can begin to make his or her point about how technology is controlling our lives.

A second type of anecdote is a parable or fable. A parable or fable is an allegorical anecdote designed to teach general life lessons. The most widely known parables for most Americans are those given in the Bible and the best-known fables are Aesop's Fables (<http://www.umass.edu/aesop/index.php>). So if you decide your speech will focus on the benefits of remaining in college for more than four years in order to obtain multiple degrees, you may want to adapt some version of "The Tortoise and The Hare" as your attention getter.

It is sometimes helpful to begin your speech in a way that your audience finds familiar, since this can make them feel more connected to your speech. This may be particularly helpful for topics with which your audience is unfamiliar. One of the best and easiest ways to do this is to begin with a story that your audience is likely to have heard before. These types of stories come in a number of forms, but the most common ones include fables, tall tales, ghost stories, parables, fairy tales, myths, and legends.

Two primary issues that you should be aware of often arise with using stories as attention getters. First, you shouldn't let your story go on for too long. If you are going to use a story to begin your speech, you need to think of it more in terms of summarizing the story rather than actually reciting the entire thing. Even a relatively simple story like "The Tortoise and the Hare" can take a couple of minutes to get through in its entirety, so you'll need to cut it down to the main points or highlights. The second issue with using stories as attention getters is that the story must in some way relate to your speech. If you begin your speech by recounting the events in "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," your speech will in some way need to deal finding balance or coming to a compromise about a matter. If your story doesn't relate to your topic, you will likely confuse your audience and they may spend the remainder of your speech trying to figure out the connection rather than listening to what you have to say.

A personal story is another option here. You may consider starting your speech with a story about yourself that is relevant to your topic. Some of the best speeches are ones that come from personal knowledge and experience. If you are an expert or have firsthand experience related to your topic, sharing this information with the audience is a great way to show that you are credible during your attention getter. For example, if you had a gastric bypass surgery and you wanted to give an informative speech about the procedure, you could introduce your speech in this way:

In the fall of 2015, I decided that it was time that I took my life into my own hands. After suffering for years with the disease of obesity, I decided to take a leap of faith and get a gastric bypass in an attempt to finally beat the disease.

If you use a personal example, don't get carried away with the focus on yourself and your own life. Your speech topic is the purpose of the attention getter, not the other way around. Another pitfall in using a personal example is that it may be too personal for you to maintain your composure. For example, a student once started a speech about her grandmother by stating, "My grandmother died of cancer at 3:30 this morning." The student then proceeded to cry nonstop for five minutes. While this is an extreme example, we strongly recommend that you avoid any material that could get you upset while speaking. When speakers have an emotional breakdown during their speech, audience members stop listening to the message and become very uncomfortable. They may empathize with the distraught speaker, but the effectiveness has been diminished in other ways.

Startling Statement/Statistic/Fact

Another way to start your speech is to surprise your audience with startling information about your topic. Often, startling statements come in the form of statistics and strange facts. The goal of a good startling statistic is that it surprises the audience and gets them engaged in your topic. For example, if you're giving a speech about oil conservation, you could start by saying, "A Boeing 747 airliner holds 57,285 gallons of fuel." You could start a speech on the psychology of dreams by noting, "The average person has over 1,460 dreams a year."

A strange fact, on the other hand, is a statement that does not involve numbers but is equally surprising to most audiences. For example, you could start a speech on the gambling industry by saying, "There are no clocks in any casinos in Las Vegas." You could start a speech on the Harlem Globetrotters by saying, "In 2000, Pope John Paul II became the most famous honorary member of the Harlem Globetrotters." All four of these examples came from a great website for strange facts (<http://www.strangefacts.com>).

Although startling statements are fun, it is important to use them ethically. First, make sure that your startling statement is factual. The Internet is full of startling statements and claims that are simply not factual, so when you find a statement you'd like to use, you have an ethical duty to ascertain its truth before you use it and to provide a reliable citation. Second, make sure that your startling statement is relevant to your speech and not just thrown in for shock value. We've all heard startling claims made in the media that are clearly made for purposes of shock or fear mongering, such as "Do you know what common household appliance could kill you? We'll tell you at 11:00." As speakers, we have an ethical obligation to avoid playing on people's emotions in this way.

A Rhetorical Question

A **rhetorical question** is a question to which no actual reply is expected. For example, a speaker talking about the history of Mother's Day could start by asking the audience, "Do you remember the last time you told your mom you loved her?" In this case, the speaker does not expect the audience to shout out an answer, but rather to think about the questions as the speech goes on.

Rhetorical Question

A question to which no actual reply is expected

Immediate Reference to Subject

The most direct (but probably the least interesting of the possible attention getters) is to tell your audience the subject of your speech. Here's an example:

We are surrounded by statistical information in today's world, so understanding statistics is becoming paramount to citizenship in the twenty-first century.

This sentence explicitly tells an audience that the speech they are about to hear is about the importance of understanding statistics. While this isn't the most entertaining or interesting attention getter, it is very clear and direct. And note that it justifies the importance of the audience paying attention while avoiding being completely snooze-inducing, as it would have been if it were reworded as, "I want to talk to you about statistics."

Reference to Audience or Appeal to Self-Interest

As we have tried to emphasize throughout this book, your audience is the single most important factor in crafting your speech, so it makes sense that one approach to opening your speech is to make a direct reference to the audience. In this case, the speaker has a clear understanding of the audience and points out that there is something unique about the audience that should make them interested in the speech's content. Here's an example:

As students at Dalton State, you and I know the importance of selecting a major that will benefit you in the future. In today's competitive world, we need to study a topic that will help us be desirable to employers and provide us with lucrative and fulfilling careers. That's why I want you all to consider majoring in communication.

In this example, the speaker reminds the audience of their shared status as Dalton State students and uses the common ground to acknowledge the importance of selecting a major that will benefit them in the future. Earlier in the textbook we used the expression **WIIFM** ("What's in it for me?") to remind you that your topic and approach should appeal to the self-interests and needs of the audience members.

Quotation

Another way to capture your listeners' attention is to use the words of another person that relate directly to your topic. Maybe you've found a really great quotation in one of the articles or books you read while researching your speech. If not, you can also use a number of Internet or library sources that compile useful quotations from noted individuals. Quotations are a great way to start a speech, so let's look at an example that could be used during the opening of a commencement address (a type of special occasion speech discussed later in Chapter 15):

The late actress, fashion icon, and social activist Audrey Hepburn once noted that, "Nothing is impossible. The word itself says 'I'm possible!'"

If you use a quotation as your attention getter, be sure to give the source first (as in this example) so that it isn't mistaken as your own wording.

Reference to Current Events

Referring to a current news event that relates to your topic is often an effective way to capture attention, as it immediately makes the audience aware of how relevant the topic is in today's world. For example, consider this attention getter for a persuasive speech on frivolous lawsuits:

On January 10 of this year, Scott Anthony Gomez, Jr., and a fellow inmate escaped from a Pueblo, Colorado, jail. During their escape the duo attempted to rappel from the roof of the jail using a makeshift ladder of bed sheets. During Gomez's attempt to scale the building, he slipped, fell forty feet, and injured his back. After being quickly apprehended, Gomez filed a lawsuit against the jail for making it too easy for him to escape.

In this case, the speaker is highlighting a news event that illustrates what a frivolous lawsuit is, setting up the speech topic of a need for change in how such lawsuits are handled.

Historical Reference

You may also capture your listeners' attention by referring to an historical event related to your topic. Obviously, this strategy is closely related to the previous one, except that instead of a recent news event you are reaching further back in history to find a relevant reference. For example, if you are giving a speech on the perception of modern music as crass or having no redeeming values, you could refer back to Elvis Presley and his musical breakout in the 1950s as a way of making a comparison:

During the mid-1950s, Elvis Presley introduced the United States to a new genre of music: rock and roll. Initially viewed as distasteful, and Presley was himself chastised for his gyrating dance moves and flashy style. Today he is revered as "The King of Rock 'n Roll." So when we criticize modern artists for being flamboyant or over the top, we may be ridiculing some of the most important musical innovators we will know in our lifetimes.

In this example, the speaker is evoking the audience's knowledge of the Elvis to raise awareness of similarities to current artists that may be viewed today as he was in the 1950s.

Humor

Humor is another effective method for gaining an audience's attention. Humor is an amazing tool when used properly. We cannot begin to explain all the facets of humor within this chapter, but we can say that humor is a great way of focusing an audience on what you are saying. However, humor is a double-edged sword. If you do not wield the sword carefully, you can turn your audience against you very quickly.

When using humor, you really need to know your audience and understand what they will find humorous.

One of the biggest mistakes a speaker can make is to use some form of humor that the audience either doesn't find funny or, worse, finds offensive. Think about how incompetent the character of Michael Scott seems on the television program *The Office*, in large part because of his ineffective use of humor. We always recommend that you test out humor of any kind on a sample of potential audience members prior to actually using it during a speech. If you do use a typical narrative "joke," don't say it happened to you. Anyone who heard the joke before will think you are less than truthful!

Now that we've warned you about the perils of using humor, let's talk about how to use humor as an attention getter. Humor can be incorporated into several of the attention-getting devices mentioned. You could use a humorous anecdote, quotation, or current event. As with other attention-getting devices, you need to make sure your humor is relevant to your topic, as one of the biggest mistakes some novices make when using humor is to add humor that really doesn't support the overall goal of the speech. So when looking for humorous attention getters, you want to make sure that the humor is not going to be offensive to your audience and relevant to your speech.

For example, here's a humorous quotation from Nicolas Chamfort, a French author during the sixteenth century: "The only thing that stops God from sending another flood is that the first one was useless." While this quotation could be effective for some audiences, other audiences may find this humorous quotation offensive. The Chamfort quotation could be appropriate for a speech on the ills of modern society, but probably not for a speech on the state of modern religious conflict. It also would not be appropriate in an area that had just experienced damaging floods. You want to make sure that the leap from your attention getter to your topic isn't too complicated for your audience, or the attention getter will backfire.

This list of attention-getting devices represents a thorough, but not necessarily exhaustive, range of ways that you can begin your speech. Certainly these would be the more common attention getters that most people employ. Again, as mentioned earlier, your selection of attention getter is not only dependent on your audience, your topic, and the occasion, but also on your preferences and skills as a speaker. If you know that you are a bad storyteller, you might elect not to start your speech with a story. If you tend to tell jokes that no one laughs at, avoid starting your speech off with humor.

To review, think back to the factors of attention in Chapter 7. The best attention getters are

- concrete (they bring up or refer to real experiences);
- novel (they use material that is new or that the audience is unlikely to have heard before);
- movement-oriented (don't spend too long in the introduction because the audience will wonder where you are headed);
- need-oriented (your attention getter and introduction in general should relate to the needs or interests of the audience).

Other factors like suspense (introduce a story and finish it at the end) or conflict (telling a story with strong opposing forces and tension) can also be used.

Element 2: Establish or Enhance Your Credibility

Whether you are informing, persuading, or entertaining an audience, one of the things they will be expecting is for you to know what you are talking about. So the second element of an introduction is to let your audience know that you are a knowledgeable and credible source for this information. To do this, you will need to explain how you know what you know about your topic.

For some people, this will be simple. If you are informing your audience how a baseball is thrown, and you have played baseball since you were eight years old, that makes you a fairly credible source. You probably know what you are talking about. So let us know that by saying something like, "Having played baseball for over ten years, including two years as the starting pitcher on my high school's varsity team, I can tell you about the ways that pitchers use to throw different kind of balls in a baseball game." With regard to persuasive speaking, if you are trying to convince your audience to join Big Brothers Big Sisters and you have been volunteering for years, let them know: "I've been serving with Big Brothers Big Sisters for the last two years, and I can tell you that the experience is very rewarding." By telling your audience you volunteer, you are saying to them "I'm not asking

you to do anything I wouldn't do myself." If you do it (and have done it for two years) then it must be a good experience.

However, you may be speaking on a subject with which you have no history of credibility. If you are just curious about when streetlights were installed at intersections and why they are red, yellow, and green, you can do that. But you will still need to give your audience some sort of reason to trust your knowledge. Since you were required to do research, you are at least more knowledgeable on the subject than anyone else in the class. In this case you might say, "After doing some research and reading several books on the subject, I want to share what I've learned about the history and evolution of traffic lights in America."

Element 3: Establish Rapport

The next element of your introduction will be to establish rapport with your audience. **Rapport** is basically a relationship or connection you make with your audience. In everyday life, we say that two people have a rapport when they get along really well and are good friends. In your introduction, you will want to explain to your audience why you are giving them this information and why it is important to them (answering the WIIFM question). You will be making a connection through this shared information and explaining to them how it will benefit them. One of the best examples of rapport we have seen came from an informative speech on the poet Lord Byron:

You may be asking yourselves why you need to know about Lord Byron. If you take Humanities 1202 as I did last semester, you will be discussing his life and works, so after this speech you will have a good basis for the class material.

Rapport
a relationship or connection a speaker makes with the audience

What is important here is that this speaker used the audience analysis techniques discussed in Chapter 2 to determine the demographic make-up of her audience and determine what would motivate them to listen. Knowing that they are all college students, she enticed them to listen with the suggestion that this information would benefit them in a future class they might take.

Another important thing to note here is that there is not necessarily a right or wrong way to establish rapport with your audience. You as the speaker must determine what you think will work best and help make a connection. Take for example an informative speech on "how to throw a baseball." How would you establish rapport with your audience on that topic? Maybe you choose to focus on the age of your audience, and noting that they are all relatively young and that some of them are already parents, you might say, "A lot of people in this room have or may have children someday, and if you decide you want to throw a ball with them or help them with sports, here are three steps you can use to teach them how to throw a baseball." Will everyone in the class have kids someday? Probably not, but it is reasonable to guess that most about your audience will relate to this approach based on a demographic analysis.

Element 4: Preview Your Topic/Purpose/Central Idea

The fourth major function of an introduction after getting the audience's attention is to reveal the purpose of your speech to your audience. Have you ever sat through a speech wondering what the basic point was? Have you ever come away after a speech and had no idea what the speaker was talking about? An introduction should make the topic, purpose, and central idea clear.

When previewing your topic in the introduction, be explicit with regard to exactly what your topic is. Spell it out for them if you have to. While it may not be great writing, the sentence "I'd like to tell you about how to properly change your car's oil" is clear and leaves no doubt what your speech will be about. This might be a good place for you to review the material in Chapter 4 about writing central idea statements and specific purposes.

While not a hard and fast rule, you will probably also want to avoid having the audience "guess" what your topic is through clues. Consider the following topic reveal:

Today I'd like to talk to you about a man who overcame great adversity to become the President of the United States. During his time in office he faced increasing opposition from conservative voices in government, as well as some dissension among his own party, all while being thrust into a war he didn't want.

As an attention getter, this may not be bad, but what it doesn't do is reveal the topic. The speaker at this point might assume the audience has clearly figured out who this speech is about and moved on. Unfortunately, the above

passage could refer to either Abraham Lincoln or Barack Obama, and members of the audience might either be confused or disappointed when they figure out the speech isn't covering what they thought it was.

It should also be noted here that at no point in your introduction do you ever want to read your specific purpose statement as a way of revealing your topic. Your specific purpose is included on your outline for your instructor's sake and to keep you on track during preparation. The language used in the specific purpose ("To inform my audience...") is too awkward to be actually read aloud.

Element 5: Preview Your Main Points

Just like previewing your topic, previewing your main points helps your audience know what to expect throughout the course of your speech and prepares them for what you are going to speak on. Your preview of main points should be clear and easy to follow so that there is no question in your audience's minds what they are. Long, complicated, or verbose main points can get confusing. Be succinct and simple: "Today, in our discussion of Abraham Lincoln's life, we will look at his birth, his role a president, and his assassination." From that there is little question as to what specific aspects of Lincoln's life the speech will cover. However, if you want to be extra sure they get it, you can always enumerate them by using signposts (as we discussed in Chapter 6): "In discussing how to make chocolate chip cookies, first we will cover what ingredients you need, second we will talk about how to mix them, and third we will look at baking them."

What these five elements do is prepare your audience for the bulk of the speech (i.e. the body section) by letting them know what they can expect, why they should listen, and why they can trust you as a speaker. Having all five elements starts your speech off on much more solid ground that you would get without having them.

Examples of Introductions

Below you will find examples of informative and persuasive introductions. Notice that each contains the five elements necessary for a good intro: an attention getter, the establishment of rapport with the audience, the speaker's credibility, a clear topic reveal, and clearly articulated main points. An important point to mention about the introduction is that the parts should flow or "bridge" into each other. You do not want to have a disconnect between the attention-getter, the credibility enhancer, the rapport, and the reveal. You also can switch the rapport and credibility sections if it makes more sense, but definitely start with the attention-getter and end with the preview.

Informative Speech Introductions

Topic: Allergies

My parents knew that something was really wrong when my mom received a call from my home economics teacher saying that she needed to get to the school immediately and pick me up. This was all because of an allergy, something that everyone in this room is either vaguely or extremely familiar with. Allergies affect a large number of people, and three very common allergies include pet and animal allergies, seasonal allergies, and food allergies. All three of these allergies take control over certain areas of my life, as all three types affect me, starting when I was just a kid and continuing today [attention-getter]. Because of this, I have done extensive research on the subject,[credibility] and would like to share some of what I've learned with all of you today. Whether you just finished your freshman year of college, you are a new parent, or you have kids that are grown and out of the house, allergies will most likely affect everyone in this room at some point, [rapport] so it will benefit you all to know more about them, specifically the three most common sources of allergies and the most recent approaches to treating them [purpose and preview].

Topic: Seasonal Affective Disorder (See if you can identify the parts on this one.)

When winter is approaching and the days are getting darker and shorter, do you feel a dramatic reduction in energy or do you sleep longer than usual during the fall or winter months? If you answered yes to either of these questions, you may be one of the millions of people who suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD. For most people these problems do not cause great suffering in their life, but for an estimated six percent of the United States population these problems can result in major suffering. As a student in the registered nursing program here at Dalton State, I became interested in SAD after learning more about it and want to share this information with all of you in case you recognize some of these symptoms in yourself or someone you love. In order to fully

understand SAD, it is important to look at the medical definition of SAD, the symptoms of this disorder, and the measures that are commonly used to ease symptoms.

Persuasive Speech Introduction

Topic: Term Life Insurance

You have cried silent tears and uttered desperate prayers, but as you watch the medical team unhook the tubes, turn off the heart monitor and shoot furtive, helpless glances your way, you face the unmistakable reality that cancer has won and you are left with unimaginable grief, despair and yes, financial burden. Most of us would not choose to cause our loved ones financial pain on top of the emotional pain of our deaths, but by failing to plan for their financial needs, that is exactly what we do. I have learned a lot about life insurance in my research for this presentation, from taking a thirteen-week course about financial matters, and from the experience of purchasing a term life insurance policy just last year. I know most of you probably have not thought much about life insurance, but someday each and every one of us in this room will pass away and somebody is going to have to pay for our funerals. Term life insurance is affordable, protects those you love from the financial devastation of your uninsured death, and reinforces your commitment to their financial and emotional well-being while you are living. Let's examine the definition of term life insurance and then its benefits.

Structuring the Conclusion and Examples

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize the functions of introductions and conclusions.
2. Identify the primary elements of a speech introduction.
3. Identify the primary elements of a speech conclusion.
4. Construct introductions and conclusions.

Structuring the Conclusion

Similar to the introduction, the conclusion has three specific elements that you will want to incorporate in order to make it as strong as possible. Given the nature of these elements and what they do, these should generally be incorporated into your conclusion in the order they are presented below.

Element 1: Signal the End

The first thing a good conclusion should do is to signal the end of a speech. You may be thinking that telling an audience that you're about to stop speaking is a "no brainer," but many speakers really don't prepare their audience for the end. When a speaker just suddenly stops speaking, the audience is left confused and disappointed. Instead, you want to make sure that audiences are left knowledgeable and satisfied with your speech. In a way, it gives them time to begin mentally organizing and cataloging all the points you have made for further consideration later.

Generally, the easiest way to signal that it is the end of your speech is to begin your conclusion with the words, "In conclusion." Similarly, "In summary" or "To conclude" work just as well. While these may seem very blunt ways of communicating the end of your speech to the audience, you want it to be extremely clear to everyone that you are wrapping things up. Certainly you can choose to employ more elegant, interesting, or creative language here, but you then run the risk of the audience not catching on to the fact that your speech is ending.

On the other hand, saying "In conclusion" (and definitely saying it more than once) can have an unintended negative effect. The audience may figure you are finished and turn you off, sort of like how we get up and leave during the credits in a movie. Therefore, you can also go straight to the summary, which is Element 2.

Element 2: Restate Main Points

In the introduction of a speech you delivered a preview of your main points; now in the conclusion you will deliver a review. One of the biggest differences between written and oral communication is the necessity of repetition in oral communication (the issue of "planned redundancy" again). When you preview your main points in the introduction, effectively discuss and make transitions to your main points during the body of the speech, and finally, review the main points in the conclusion, you increase the likelihood that the audience will understand

and retain your main points after the speech is over. Remember, your English instructor can re-read your essays as many times as he or she wants, but your audience – and your instructor – only have one opportunity to catch and remember the points you are trying to get across in your speech.

Because you are trying to remind the audience of your main points, you want to be sure not to bring up any new material or ideas. For example, if you said, “There are several other issues related to this topic, such as...but I don’t have time for them,” that would make the audience confused and perhaps wonder why you did not address those in the body section. Or if you were giving a persuasive speech on wind energy and you ended with, “Wind energy is the energy of the future, but there are still a few problems with it, such as noise and killing lots of birds,” you are bringing up a counter-argument that should have been dealt with in the body of the speech.

This is a good place to remind you that the introduction, preview, transitions, and conclusion are for helping the audience be interested and prepared to listen, to retain, and to follow your speech. The conclusion is too late for that. The hard core facts and content are in the body. If you are tempted to cram lots of material into the conclusion, that is not the place for it, nor is it the place to provide the important steps to a solution.

As you progress as a public speaker, you will want to work on rephrasing your summary statement so that it does not sound like an exact repeat of the preview. For example, if your preview was:

The three arguments in favor of medical marijuana that I will present are that it would make necessary treatments available to all, it would cut down on the costs to law enforcement, and it would bring revenue to state budgets.

Your summary might be:

In the minutes we’ve had together, I have shown you that approving medical marijuana in our state will greatly help persons with a variety of chronic and severe conditions. Also, funds spent on law enforcement to find and convict legitimate marijuana users would go down as revenues from medical marijuana to the state budget would go up.

Element 3: Clincher

The third element of your conclusion is the **clincher**, or something memorable with which to conclude your speech. The clincher is sometimes referred to as a Concluding Device. These are the very last words you will say in your speech, so you need to make them count. This is the last thing your audience will hear, so you want to make it good. In a certain way, you might think of your speech as a nice dinner at a fancy restaurant: the introduction is the appetizer that gets everyone ready for the main course, the body section is the “meat and vegetables,” and the conclusion is like dessert. But have you ever had a nice meal that ended with a dessert that didn’t really taste good? Regardless of how good the rest of the meal was, you probably walked away thinking, *It was okay, but I just remember not liking it at the end.* A good clincher prevents your audience from thinking that way, and in fact can even make an audience remember a speech more favorably.

In many ways the clincher is like the inverse of the attention-getter. You want to start the speech off with something strong, and you want to end the speech with something strong. To that end, similar to what we discussed above with attention getters, there are a number of ways you can make your clincher strong and memorable.

Clincher

something memorable with which to conclude your speech

Conclude with a Challenge

One way you can end your speech is with a challenge. A challenge is a call to engage in some kind of activity that requires a special effort. In a speech on the necessity of fund-raising, a speaker could conclude by challenging the audience to raise 10 percent more than their original projections. In a speech on eating more vegetables, you could challenge your audience to increase their current intake of vegetables by two portions daily. In both of these challenges, audience members are being asked to go out of their way to do something different that involves effort on their part.

In a challenge, try to make it aspirational but reasonable. The challenge should be something they can strive for but not see as something impossible. Two or three more servings a day of fruits and vegetables is reasonable, but six probably would be seen as too much.

In the same category as a challenge, probably the most common persuasive concluding device is the appeal for action or the call to action. In essence, the appeal for action occurs when a speaker asks her or his audience to engage in a specific behavior. When a speaker concludes by asking the audience “to do” something, the speaker

wants to see an actual change. Whether the speaker appeals for people to eat more fruit, buy a car, vote for a candidate, oppose the death penalty, get more sleep, or sing more in the shower, the speaker is asking the audience to engage in action.

One specific type of appeal for action is the immediate call to action. Whereas some appeals ask for people to engage in behavior in the future, the immediate call to action asks people to engage in behavior right now. If a speaker wants to see a new traffic light placed at a dangerous intersection, he or she may conclude by asking all the audience members to sign a digital petition right then and there, using a computer the speaker has made available. For a speech on eating more vegetables, pass out raw veggies and dip at the conclusion of the speech; someone giving a speech on petitioning a lawmaker for a new law could provide audience members with a prewritten e-mail they can send to the lawmaker.

If you are giving a persuasive speech about a solution to a problem, you should not relegate the call to action to the very end of the speech. It should probably be a main point where you can deal with the steps and specifics of the solution in more detail. For example, perhaps a speaker has been discussing the problems associated with the disappearance of art education in the United States. The speaker could then propose a solution of creating more community-based art experiences for school children as a way to fill this gap. Although this can be an effective conclusion, a speaker must ask herself or himself whether the solution should be discussed in more depth as a stand-alone main point within the body of the speech so that audience concerns about the proposed solution may be addressed.

Conclude with a Quotation

Another way you can conclude a speech is by providing a quotation relevant to the speech topic. When using a quotation, you need to think about whether your goal is to end on a persuasive note or an informative note. Some quotations will have a clear call to action, while other quotations summarize or provoke thought. For example, let's say you are delivering an informative speech about dissident writers in the former Soviet Union. You could end by citing this quotation from Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "A great writer is, so to speak, a second government in his country. And for that reason no regime has ever loved great writers."

Notice that this quotation underscores the idea of writers as dissidents, but it doesn't ask listeners to put forth effort to engage in any specific thought process or behavior. If, on the other hand, you were delivering a persuasive speech urging your audience to sponsor a child in a developing country for \$40 per month, you might use this quotation by Forest Witcraft:

"A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove. But the world may be different, because I was important in the life of a child."

In this case, the quotation leaves the audience with the message that monetary sacrifices are worth taking, that they make our lives worthwhile, and that the right thing to do is to go ahead and make that sacrifice.

Conclude by Visualizing the Future

The purpose of a conclusion that refers to the future is to help your audience imagine the future you believe can occur. If you are giving a speech on the development of video games for learning, you could conclude by depicting the classroom of the future where video games are perceived as true learning tools. More often, speakers use visualization of the future to depict how society or how individual listeners' lives would be different, if the speaker's persuasive attempt worked. For example, if a speaker proposes that a solution to illiteracy is hiring more reading specialists in public schools, the speaker could ask her or his audience to imagine a world without illiteracy. In this use of visualization, the goal is to persuade the audience to adopt the speaker's point of view. By showing that the speaker's vision of the future is a positive one, the conclusion should help to persuade the audience to help create this future.

Conclude by Inspiration

By definition, the word **inspire** means to affect or arouse someone. Both affect and arouse have strong emotional connotations. The ultimate goal of an inspirational concluding device is similar to an "appeal for action" but the ultimate goal is more lofty or ambiguous; the goal is to stir someone's emotions in a specific manner. This is done by sharing a story, poem, or quotation that appeals to the audience basic values and therefore appeals to emotions. Stories or allusions to "underdogs" who overcame obstacles to achieve something worthwhile or those who make

sacrifices for the good of others can help inspire. You probably know of such stories (Olympic athletes and a well-known figure such as Captain Sullenberg are examples) that would be of value, as long as they are relevant to your topic and purpose. Poetry is sometimes used to inspire, but you want to use a short passage (eight lines or less) of poetry that is clear to the audience.

Conclude with a Question

Another way you can end a speech is to ask a rhetorical question that forces the audience to ponder an idea. Maybe you are giving a speech on the importance of the environment, so you end the speech by saying, “Think about your children’s future. What kind of world do you want them raised in? A world that is clean, vibrant, and beautiful—or one that is filled with smog, pollution, filth, and disease?” Notice that you aren’t actually asking the audience to verbally or nonverbally answer the question; the goal of this question is to force the audience into thinking about what kind of world they want for their children.

Inspire

to affect or arouse someone’s emotions in a specific, positive manner

Refer Back to the Introduction

This method provides a good sense of closure to the speech and can be one of the most effective methods. If you started the speech with a startling statistic or fact, such as “Last year, according to the official website of the American Humane Society, four million pets were euthanized in shelters in the United States,” in the end you could say, “Remember that shocking number of four million euthanized pets? With your donation of time or money to the Northwest Georgia Rescue Shelter, you can help lower that number in our region.”

Conclude with an Anecdote or Personal Story

As with your attention getter, a brief story can be a strong way to conclude. However, it must be relevant and not go on too long. Combining this method and the previous one, you might finish telling a story that you started in the introduction as your clincher. This method is probably better with persuasive speeches where you want to end with a strong emotional appeal.

Conclude with a Reference to Audience or Audience Self-Interest

The last concluding device involves a direct reference to your audience. This concluding device is used when a speaker attempts to answer the basic audience question, “What’s in it for me?” (the WIIFM question). The goal of this concluding device is to spell out the direct benefits a behavior or thought change has for audience members. For example, a speaker talking about stress reduction techniques could conclude by clearly listing all the physical health benefits stress reduction offers (e.g., improved reflexes, improved immune system, improved hearing, reduction in blood pressure). In this case, the speaker is clearly spelling out why audience members should care about the topic and what’s in it for them.

Informative versus Persuasive Conclusions

As you read through the above possible ways to conclude a speech, hopefully you noticed that some of the methods are more appropriate for persuasive speeches and others are more appropriate for informative speeches. An appeal to action, for example, may not be appropriate for an informative speech since asking your audience to do something often borders on persuasion, which isn’t what an informative speech is intended to do. Similarly, if your persuasive speech is on the importance of voting in the next local election, an appeal to action clincher would probably be one of your stronger options.

8.5 – Examples of Conclusions

Here are two examples of conclusions. More examples can be found on the outlines at the ends of Chapters 12, 13, and 15.

Informative Speech Conclusion

Topic: Anxiety

Anxiety is a complex emotion that afflicts people of all ages and social backgrounds and is experienced uniquely by each individual. We have seen that there are multiple symptoms, causes, and remedies, all of which can often be related either directly or indirectly to cognitive behaviors. While most people do not enjoy anxiety, it seems to be part of the universal human experience, so realize that you are not alone, but also realize that you are not powerless against it. With that said, the following quote, attributed to an anonymous source, could not be more true, “Worry does not relieve tomorrow of its stress; it merely empties today of its strength.”

Persuasive Speech Conclusion

Topic: Adopting a Rescue Animal

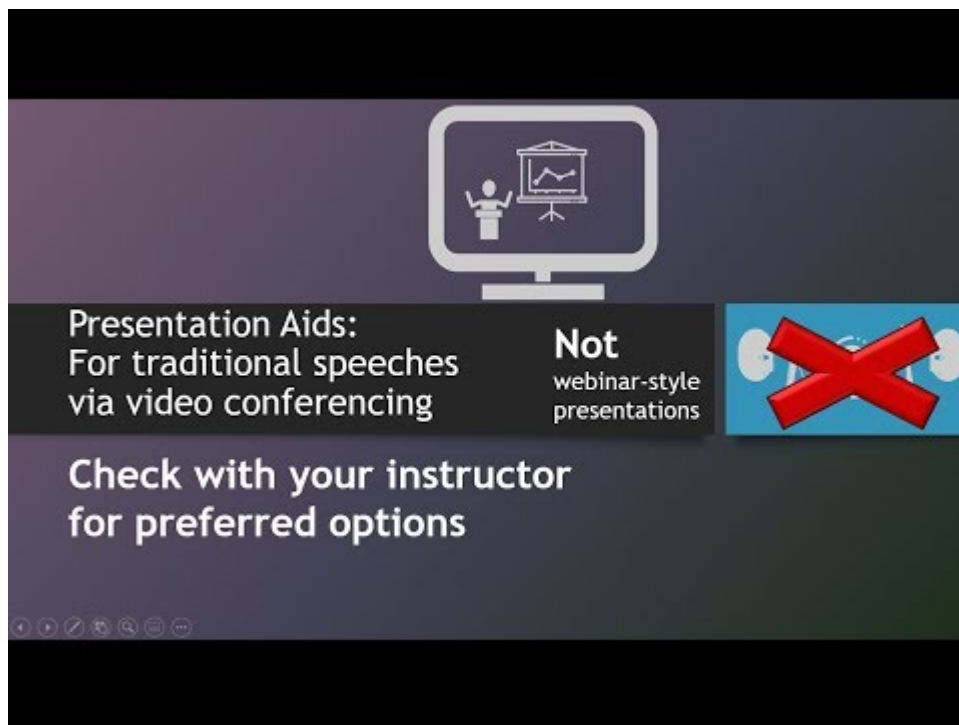
I believe you should adopt a rescue animal because it helps stop forms of animal cruelty, you can add a healthy companion to your home, and it is a relatively simple process that can save a life. Each and every one of you should go to your nearest animal shelter, which may include the Catoosa Citizens for Animal Care, the Humane Society of NWGA in Dalton, the Murray County Humane Society, or the multiple other shelters in the area to bring a new animal companion into your life. I'll leave you with a paraphrased quote from Deborah Jacobs's article “Westminster Dog Show Junkie” on Forbes.com: “You may start out thinking that you are rescuing the animal, and ultimately find that the animal rescues you right back.”

Something to Think About

Read out loud one of the example introductions earlier in the chapter, and time your reading. If an introduction should not be longer than about 10%-15% of the total speech time, how long would the speech attached to this introduction be? (You'll have to do the math!) If you had to give a shorter speech using this introduction, how would you edit it to make it for the time limit but still be an effective introduction?

Final Note: If you are wondering about the photo at the beginning of this chapter, it is of the headstone of poet Emily Dickinson in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her parting words, as shown on the marker, were “Called Back.” That was her “life” conclusion. One of the authors is a huge Emily Dickinson fan, took the photo on a trip to New England, and loves to include quotations from her poetry.

Chapter 17: Presentation Aids in Speaking



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=589>

What Are Presentation Aids?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. List and explain reasons why presentation aids are important in public speaking and how they function.
2. Describe the various computer-based and non-computer-based types of presentation aids available to the students.
3. Explain the correct use of various types of presentation aids.
4. Design professional-looking slides using presentation software.

WHAT ARE PRESENTATION AIDS?

When you give a speech, you are presenting much more than just a collection of words and ideas. Because you are speaking “live and in person,” your audience members will experience your speech through all five of their senses: hearing, vision, smell, taste, and touch. In some speaking situations, the speaker appeals only to the sense of hearing, more or less ignoring the other senses except to avoid visual distractions by dressing and presenting himself or herself in an appropriate manner. But the speaking event can be greatly enriched by appeals to the other senses. This is the role of presentation aids.

Presentation aids are the resources beyond the speech itself that a speaker uses to enhance the message conveyed to the audience. The type of presentation aids that speakers most typically make use of are visual aids: pictures, diagrams, charts and graphs, maps, and the like. Audible aids include musical excerpts, audio speech excerpts, and sound effects. A speaker may also use fragrance samples or food samples as **olfactory** (sense of smell) or **gustatory** (sense of taste) aids. Finally, presentation aids can be three-dimensional objects, animals, and people; they can change over a period of time, as in the case of a how-to demonstration.

As you can see, the range of possible presentation aids is almost infinite. However, all presentation aids have one thing in common: To be effective,

Olfactory
of or relating to the sense of smell

Gustatory
of or relating to the sense of taste

Presentation aids
the resources beyond the speech itself that a speaker uses to enhance the message conveyed to the audience

each presentation aid a speaker uses must be a direct, uncluttered example of a specific element of the speech. It is understandable that someone presenting a speech about Abraham Lincoln might want to include a photograph of him, but because everyone already knows what Lincoln looked like, the picture would not contribute much to the message unless, perhaps, the message was specifically about the changes in Lincoln’s appearance during his time in office.

Other visual artifacts are more likely to deliver information more directly relevant to the speech—a diagram of the interior of Ford’s Theater where Lincoln was assassinated, a facsimile of the messy and much-edited

Gettysburg Address, or a photograph of the Lincoln family, for example. The key is that each presentation aid must directly express an idea in your speech.

Moreover, presentation aids must be used at the time when you are presenting the specific ideas related to the aid. For example, if you are speaking about coral reefs and one of your supporting points is about the location of the world's major reefs, it would make sense to display a map of these reefs while you're talking about location. If you display it while you are explaining what coral actually is, or describing the kinds of fish that feed on a reef, the map will not serve as a useful visual aid—in fact, it's likely to be a distraction.

Presentation aids must also be easy to use. At a conference on organic farming, one of the authors watched as the facilitator opened the orientation session by creating a conceptual map (or “mind map”) of our concerns using a large newsprint pad on an easel. In his shirt pocket were wide-tipped felt markers in several colors. As he was using the black marker to write the word “pollution,” he dropped the cap on the floor, and it rolled a few inches under the easel. When he bent over to pick up the cap, all the other markers fell out of his pocket. They rolled about too, and when he tried to retrieve them, he bumped the easel, causing the easel and newsprint pad to tumble over on top of him. The audience responded with amusement and thundering applause, but the serious tone of his speech was ruined. The next two days of the conference were punctuated with allusions to the unforgettable orientation speech. This is not how you will want your speech to be remembered.

To be effective, presentation aids must also be easy for the listeners to see and understand. In this chapter, we will present some principles and strategies to help you incorporate effective presentation aids into your speech. We will begin by discussing the functions that good presentation aids fulfill. Next, we will explore some of the many types of presentation aids and how best to design and utilize them. We will also describe various media that can be used for presentation aids. We will conclude with tips for successful preparation and use of presentation aids in a speech.

Functions of Presentation Aids

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. List and explain reasons why presentation aids are important in public speaking and how they function.
2. Describe the various computer-based and non-computer-based types of presentation aids available to the students.
3. Explain the correct use of various types of presentation aids.
4. Design professional-looking slides using presentation software.

FUNCTIONS OF PRESENTATION AIDS

Why should you use presentation aids? If you have prepared and rehearsed your speech adequately, shouldn't a good speech with a good delivery be enough to stand on its own? While it is true that impressive presentation aids will not rescue a poor speech, it is also important to recognize that a good speech can often be made even better by the strategic use of presentation aids. Presentation aids can fulfill several functions: they can serve to improve your audience's understanding of the information you are conveying, enhance audience memory and retention of the message, add variety and interest to your speech, and enhance your credibility as a speaker. Let's examine each of these functions.

Improving Audience Understanding

Human communication is a complex process that often leads to misunderstandings. If you are like most people, you can easily remember incidents when you misunderstood a message or when someone else misunderstood what you said to them. Misunderstandings happen in public speaking just as they do in everyday conversations.

One reason for misunderstandings is the fact that perception and interpretation are highly complex individual processes. Most of us have seen the image in which, depending on your perception, you see either the outline of a vase or the facial profiles of two people facing each other. Or perhaps you have seen the image of the woman who may or may not be young, depending on your frame of reference at the time. This shows how interpretations can differ, and it means that your presentations must be based on careful thought and preparation to maximize the likelihood that your listeners will understand your presentations as you intend them to do so.

As a speaker, one of your basic goals is to help your audience understand your message. To reduce misunderstanding, presentation aids can be used to clarify or to emphasize.

Clarifying

Clarification is important in a speech because if some of the information you convey is unclear, your listeners will come away puzzled or possibly even misled. Presentation aids can help clarify a message if the information is complex or if the point being made is a visual one.

If your speech is about the impact of the Coriolis Effect on tropical storms, for instance, you will have great difficulty clarifying it without a diagram because the process is a complex one. The diagram in Figure 9.1 (“Coriolis Effect”) would be effective because it shows the audience the interaction between equatorial wind patterns and wind patterns moving in other directions. The diagram allows the audience to process the information in two ways: through your verbal explanation and through the visual elements of the diagram. Figure 9.2 (“Model of Communication”) is another example of a diagram that maps out the process of human communication. In this image you clearly have a speaker and an audience with the labels of source, channel, message, receivers, and feedback to illustrate a basic model of human communication. As with most models, it is simplified.

Another aspect of clarifying occurs when a speaker wants to help audience members understand a visual concept. For example, if a speaker is talking about the importance of petroglyphs in Native American culture, just describing the petroglyphs won’t completely help your audience to visualize what they look like. Instead, showing an example of a petroglyph, as in Figure 9.3 (“Petroglyph”) can more easily help your audience form a clear mental image of your intended meaning.

Emphasizing

When you use a presentational aid for emphasis, you impress your listeners with the importance of an idea. In a speech on water conservation, you might try to show the environmental proportions of the resource. When you use a conceptual drawing like the one in Figure 9.4 (“Planetary Water Supply”), you show that if the world water supply were equal to ten gallons, only ten drops would be available and drinkable for human or household consumption. This drawing is effective because it emphasizes the scarcity of useful water and thus draws attention to this important information in your speech.

Another way of emphasizing that can be done visually is to zoom in on a specific aspect of interest within your speech. In Figure 9.5 (“Chinese Lettering Amplified”), we see a visual aid used in a speech on the importance of various parts of Chinese characters. On the left side of the visual aid, we see how the characters all fit together, with an emphasized version of a single character on the right.

So, **clarifying** and **emphasizing** are two roles that support the “Improving Audience Understanding” purpose of presentation aids. What are other purposes?

Aiding Retention and Recall

The second function that presentation aids can serve is to increase the audience’s chances of remembering your speech. An article by the U.S. Department of Labor (1996) summarized research on how people learn and remember. The authors found that “83% of human learning occurs visually, and the remaining 17% through the other senses—11% through hearing, 3.5% through smell, 1% through taste, and 1.5% through touch.”

For this reason, exposure to an image can serve as a memory aid to your listeners. When your graphic images deliver information effectively and when your listeners understand them clearly, audience members are likely to remember your message long after your speech is over. Moreover, people often are able to remember information that is presented in sequential steps more easily than if that information is presented in an unorganized pattern. When you use a presentation aid to display the organization of your speech (such as can be done with PowerPoint slides), you will help your listeners to observe, follow, and remember the sequence of information you conveyed to them. This is why some instructors display a lecture outline for their students to follow during class and why a slide with a preview of your main points can be helpful as you move into the body of your speech.

An added plus of using presentation aids is that they can boost *your* memory while you are speaking. Using your presentation aids while you rehearse your speech will familiarize you with the association between a given place in your speech and the presentation aid that accompanies that material.

Adding Variety and Interest

A third function of presentation aids is simply to make your speech more interesting. For example, wouldn’t a speech on varieties of roses have greater impact if you accompanied your remarks with a picture of each rose? You can imagine that your audience would be even more enthralled if you had the ability to display an actual flower of each variety in a bud vase. Similarly, if you were speaking to a group of gourmet cooks about Indian spices, you might want to provide tiny samples of spices that they could smell and taste during your speech.

Enhancing a Speaker's Credibility

Presentation aids alone will not be enough to create a professional image. As we mentioned earlier, impressive presentation aids will not rescue a poor speech. Even if you give a good speech, you run the risk of appearing unprofessional if your presentation aids are poorly executed. Conversely, a high quality presentation will contribute to your professional image. This means that in addition to containing important information, your presentation aids must be clear, clean, uncluttered, organized, and large enough for the audience to see and interpret correctly. Misspellings and poorly designed presentation aids can damage your credibility as a speaker.

In addition, make sure that you give proper credit to the source of any presentation aids that you take from other sources. Using a statistical chart or a map without proper credit will detract from your credibility, just as using a quotation in your speech without credit would. This situation will usually take place with digital aids such as PowerPoint slides. The source of a chart or the data shown in a chart form should be cited at the bottom the slide.

If you focus your efforts on producing presentation aids that contribute effectively to your meaning, that look professional, and that are handled well, your audience will most likely appreciate your efforts and pay close attention to your message. That attention will help them learn or understand your topic in a new way and will thus help the audience see you as a knowledgeable, competent, and credible speaker. With the prevalence of digital communication, the audience expectation of quality visual aids has increased.

Avoiding Problems with Presentation Aids

Using presentation aids can come with some risks. However, with a little forethought and adequate practice, you can choose presentation aids that enhance your message and boost your professional appearance in front of an audience. One principle to keep in mind is to use only as many presentation aids as necessary to present your message or to fulfill your classroom assignment. 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? Or the Internet connection is down for a YouTube video you plan to show?

You must be prepared to adapt to an uncomfortable and scary situation. This is why we urge students to go to the classroom well ahead of time to test the equipment and ascertain the condition of items 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. Have your slides on a flash drive AND send it to yourself as an attachment or post to a Cloud service. Have an alternative plan prepared in case there is some glitch that prevents your computer-based presentation aids from being usable. And of course, you must know how to use the technology.

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—but probably beforehand, so you are not speaking over the video. At the same time, a visual aid should be quickly accessible to the audience. This is where simplicity comes in. Just as in organization of a speech you would not want to use 20 main points, but you should limit categories of information on a visual aid.

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Types of Presentation Aids

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. List and explain reasons why presentation aids are important in public speaking and how they function.
2. Describe the various computer-based and non-computer-based types of presentation aids available to the students.
3. Explain the correct use of various types of presentation aids.
4. Design professional-looking slides using presentation software.

TYPES OF PRESENTATION AIDS

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. Although both charts are good, they are not equal. One chart might be useful in a speech about the history and development of acupuncture while the other chart would be more useful for showing the locations of meridians (the lines along which energy is thought to flow) and the acupuncture points.

The rest of this section will explore three common types of charts: statistical charts, sequence-of-steps chart, and decision trees.

Chart

graphical representation of data (often numerical) or a sketch representing an ordered process

Statistical Charts

For most audiences, statistical presentations must be kept as simple as possible, and they must be explained. The statistical chart shown in Figure 9.7 ("Birth Weight Chi-Square") is from a study examining the effects of maternal smoking on a range of congenital birth defects. Unless you are familiar with statistics, this chart 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. On the other hand, if you are presenting to an upper level or graduate class in health sciences or to professionals in health occupations, this chart would be appropriate. As with all other principles of public speaking, **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.**

Sequence-of-Steps Charts

Charts are also useful when you are trying to explain a process that involves several steps.

Decision Trees

Decision trees are useful for showing the relationships between ideas.

Graphs

Strictly speaking, a **graph** may be considered a type of chart, but graphs are so widely used that we will discuss them separately. A graph is a pictorial representation of the relationships of quantitative data using dots, lines, bars, pie slices, and the like. Graphs show how one factor (such as size, weight, number of items) varies in comparison to other items. Whereas a statistical chart may report the mean ages of individuals entering college, a graph would show how the mean age changes over time. A statistical chart may report the amount of computers sold in the United States, while a graph will use bars or lines to show the breakdown of those computers by operating systems such as Windows, Macintosh, and Linux.

Public speakers can show graphs using a range of different formats. Some of those formats are specialized for various professional fields. Very complex graphs often contain too much information that is not related to the purpose of a student's speech. If the graph is cluttered, it becomes difficult to comprehend. In this section, we're going to analyze the common graphs speakers utilize in their speeches: line graphs, bar graphs, pie graphs, and pictographs.

Line Graph

A **line graph** is designed to show trends over time. In Figure 9.10 ("Enron's Stock Price"), we see a line graph depicting the fall of Enron's stock price from August 2000 to January 2002. Notice that although it has some steep rises, the line has an overall downward trend clearly depicting the plummeting of Enron's stock price. This is far more effective in showing the relationship of numbers than a chart (as in Figure 9.7) or reading the numbers aloud.

Graph

a pictorial representation of the relationships of quantitative data using dots, lines, bars, pie slices, and the like

Bar Graph

Bar graphs are useful for showing the differences between quantities.

They can be used for population demographics, fuel costs, math ability in different grades, and many other kinds of data. The graph in Figure 9.11 ("Suicide vs. Homicide") is well designed. It is relatively simple and is carefully labeled, making it easy for you to guide your audience through the recorded numbers of each type of death. The bar graph is designed to show the difference between rates of suicides and homicides across various age groups. When you look at the data, the first grouping clearly shows that eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds are more likely to die because of a homicide than any of the other age groups.

Line graph

a graph designed to show trends over time

Pie Graph

Pie graphs are usually depicted as circles and are designed to show proportional relationships within sets of data; in other words, they show parts of or percentages of a whole. They should be simplified as much as possible without eliminating important information. As with other graphs, the sections of the pie need to be plotted proportionally. In the pie graph shown in Figure 9.13 ("Causes of Concussions in Children") we see a clear and proportional chart that has been color-coded. Color-coding is useful when it's difficult to fit the explanations in the actual sections of the graph; in that case, you need to include a legend, or key, to indicate what the colors in the graph mean. In this graph, audience members can see very quickly that falls are the primary reason children receive concussions. However, the pie graph in Figure 9.14 ("World Populations") is jumbled, illegible, confusing, and overwhelming in every way. The use of color coding doesn't help. Overall, this graph simply contains too much information and is more likely to confuse an audience than help them understand something.

Bar graph

a graph designed to show the differences between quantities

Pictograph

Similar to bar graphs, **pictographs** use numbers and/or sizes of iconic

Pie graph

a graph designed to show proportional relationships within sets of data

symbols to dramatize differences in amounts. An example is found in Figure 9.15. Pictographs, although interesting, do not allow for depiction of specific statistical data. If you were trying to show the output of oil from various countries through oil wells, each oil well representing a ten million barrels a day, it might be hard for the audience to see the difference between a third of an oil well and a fourth of one, but that is a significant difference in amounts (3.3 million versus 2.5 million).

Graphs can present challenges in being effective but also in being ethical. To be both ethical and effective, you need a good understanding of what statistics mean, and you need to create or use graphs that show amounts clearly. If you were showing GPAs of freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior students at your college, and the bottom number on the graph was 2.25 rather than 0.0, that would result in a visually bigger difference than what really exists (see Figure 9.16).

Pictograph

a graph using iconic symbols to dramatize differences in amounts

Diagrams

Diagrams are drawings or sketches that outline and explain the parts of an object, process, or phenomenon that cannot be readily seen. Like graphs, diagrams can be considered a type of chart, as in the case of organizational charts and process-flow charts.

When you use a diagram, be sure to explain each part of the phenomenon, paying special attention to elements that are complicated or prone to misunderstanding. In the example shown in Figure 9.17 (“The Human Eye”), you might wish to highlight that the light stimulus is reversed when it is processed through the brain or that the optic nerve is not a single stalk as many people think.

Diagrams

drawings or sketches that outline and explain the parts of an object, process, or phenomenon that cannot be readily seen

Maps

Maps are extremely useful if the information is clear and limited. There are all kinds of maps, including population, weather, ocean current, political, and economic maps, so you should find the right kind for the purpose of your speech. Choose a map that emphasizes the information you need to deliver.

Photographs and Drawings

Sometimes a photograph or a drawing is the best way to show an unfamiliar but important detail. Audiences expect high quality in photographs now, and as with all presentation aids they should enhance the speech and not just “be there.” It is common to put photographs on PowerPoint slides as “clip art,” but they should be relevant and not detract from the message of the slide.

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 a forty-three second video available on YouTube to demonstrate the part of the surgery. Maybe you could include a recording of a real patient explaining why he or she decided to get the Lap-Band.

There is one major warning to using audio and video clips during a speech: do not forget that they are supposed to be aids to your speech, not the speech itself! In addition, be sure to avoid these five mistakes that speakers often make when using audio and video clips:

- Avoid choosing clips that are too long for the overall length of the speech. Your instructor can give you some guidelines for how long video and audio clips should be for the speeches in your class, if they are allowed (and make sure they are).
- 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. It also wastes valuable time. Also be sure that the speakers on the computer are on and at the right volume level.

- Cue the clip to the appropriate place prior to beginning your speech. 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. Later in this chapter we will look at using video links in slides.
- In addition to cuing the clip to the appropriate place, the browser window should be open and ready to go. If there are advertisements before the video, be sure to have the video cued to play after the ad. The audience should not have to sit through a commercial. There is a website called TubeChop that can allow you to cut a segment out of a YouTube video, then creating a new link. It has limitations but can be useful.
- The audience must be given context before the video or audio clip is played, specifically what the clip is and why it relates to the speech. At the same time, the video should not repeat what you have already said, but add to it.

Objects 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.

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. As will be discussed in the section on handouts below, a speaker should not pass an object or model around during a speech. It is highly distracting.

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 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 or to the cleanliness of the physical environment. Additionally, the animal's behavior may not only affect audience attention during your speech, but potentially during your classmates' speeches as well.

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. One of the authors had an experience where a student brought his six-foot yellow python to class for a speech. As a result, one of the other students refused to stay in the room because of her snake phobia (the instructor was not too comfortable either).

The third risk is that some locations may have regulations about bringing non-service 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 some cases, such as for a demonstration speech, you might want 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 the break.

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. In short, make sure your helper will know what is expected of him or her and consents to it.

Using Presentation Slides

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. List and explain reasons why presentation aids are important in public speaking and how they function.
2. Describe the various computer-based and non-computer-based types of presentation aids available to the students.
3. Explain the correct use of various types of presentation aids.
4. Design professional-looking slides using presentation software.

USING PRESENTATION SLIDES

Ever since the 1990s and the mainstreaming of personal computer technology, speakers have had the option of using slide presentation software to accompany their speeches and presentations. The most commonly known one is PowerPoint, although there are several others:

- Prezi, available at www.prezi.com
- Slide Rocket, available at www.sliderocket.com
- Google Slides, available in Google Drive and useful for collaborative assignments
- Keynote, the Apple presentation slide software on MACs
- Impress, an Open Office product (<http://www.openoffice.org/product/impress.html>)
- PrezentIt
- Adobe Acrobat Presenter
- ThinkFree

These products, some of which are offered free for trial or basic subscriptions (called a “freemium”), allow you to present professional-looking slides. Each one is “robust,” a word used to mean it has a large number of functions and features, some of which are helpful and some of which are distracting. For example, you can use the full range of fonts, although many of them are not appropriate for presentations because they are hard to read. In this section we will discuss the proper use of presentation slides, with the assumption that you understand the basics of cutting, pasting, inserting, etc. involved in these products. You may have taken a class in high school where you learned to use the technology, but that is not the same as learning to use them for actual presentations. Your professor may not allow you to use this type of presentation aid in class (so you can focus on the actual speech), but you will likely give a presentation at some point in your college career where you are required or permitted to use this type of presentation aid.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Presentation Slides

In some industries and businesses, there is an assumption that speakers will use presentation slides. They allow visualization of concepts, they are easily portable, they can be embedded with videos and audio, words can dance around the screen—why wouldn't a speaker use them? You will probably also be expected to have slide presentations in future assignments in college. Knowing how to use them, beyond the basic technology, is vital to being a proficient presenter.

But why not use them? Franck Frommer, a French journalist and communication expert, published the book *How PowerPoint Makes You Stupid* (2012), whose title says it all. He criticizes the “linearity” of PowerPoint and similar presentation software, meaning that audiences are not encouraged to see the relationship of ideas and that PowerPoint hurts critical thinking in the audience. Slide follows slide of bulleted information without one slide being more important.

As recently as the mid-2000s, critics such as well-known graphic expert and NASA consultant Edward Tufte (2005) charged that PowerPoint's tendency to force the user to put a certain number of bullet points on each slide in a certain format was a serious threat to the accurate presentation of data. As Tufte put it, “the rigid slide-by-slide hierarchies, indifferent to content, slice and dice the evidence into arbitrary compartments, producing an anti-narrative with choppy continuity.”

Tufte argues that poor decision making, such as was involved with the 2003 space shuttle *Columbia* disaster, may have been related to the shortcomings of such presentation aids in NASA meetings. While more recent versions of PowerPoint and similar programs allow much more creative freedom in designing slides, this freedom comes with a responsibility—the user needs to take responsibility for using the technology to support the speech and not get carried away with the many special effects the software is capable of producing.

It should be mentioned here that Prezi helps address one of the major criticisms of PowerPoint. Because Prezi, in its design stage, looks something like a mind map on a very large canvas with grid lines, it allows you to show the relationship and hierarchy of ideas better. For example, you can see and design the slides so that the “Big Ideas” are in big circles and the subordinate ideas are in smaller ones.

In addition to recognizing the truth behind Frommer's and Tufte's critiques, we have all sat through a presenter who committed the errors of putting far too much text on the slide. When a speaker does this, the audience is confused—do they read the text or listen to the speaker? **An audience member cannot do both.** (Remember the pipeline graphic in Chapter 7.) Then, the speaker feels the need to read the slides rather than use PowerPoint for what it does best, visual reinforcement and clarification. We have also seen many poorly designed PowerPoint slides, either through haste or lack of knowledge: slides where the graphics are distorted (elongated or squatty), words and graphics not balanced, text too small, words printed over photographs, garish or nauseating colors, or animated figures left up on the screen for too long and distracting the audience. What about you? Can you think about PowerPoint “don'ts” that have hurt your reception of a presentation or lecture?

Creating Quality Slide Shows

Slides should show the principles of good design, which include unity, emphasis or focal point, scale and proportion, balance, and rhythm (Lauer & Pentak, 2000). Presenters should also pay attention to tone and usability. With those principles in mind, here are some tips for creating and then using presentation software.

Unity and Consistency

Generally it is best to use a single font for the text on your visuals so that they look like a unified set. Or you can use two different fonts in consistent ways, such as having all headers in the same font and all bullet points in the same font. Additionally, the background should probably remain consistent, whether you choose one of the many design templates or if you just opt for a background color.

In terms of unity, the adage, “Keep It Simple, Speaker” definitely applies to presentation slides. Each slide should have one message, one photo, one graphic. The audience members should know what they are supposed to look at on the slide. A phrase to remember about presentation slides and the wide range of design elements available is “Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.”

Another area related to unity and consistency, as well as audience response, is the use of animation or movement. There are three types of animation in slideshows. First, you can embed little characters or icons that have

movement. These may seem like fun, but they have limited use and should not stay on the screen very long—you can use the second type of animation to take them off the screen.

That second type is the designed movement of text or objects on and off the screen. Although using this function takes up time in preparing your slides, especially if you want to do it well and be creative with it, it is very useful. You can control what your audience is seeing. It also avoids bringing up all the text and material on a slide at one time, which tempts the audience again to pay more attention to the screen than to you. Movement on the screen attracts attention (see Factors of Attention in Chapter 7), for better or worse. PowerPoint, for example, allows bouncing words, pulsating text, swirling phrases, even *Star Wars* scroll, which may or may not serve your purpose.

The third type of animation is called slide transitions, which is the design of how the next slide appears. In PowerPoint you can have the slides appear automatically or as blinds, as little checkerboards, from different sides of the screen, in opening circles, etc. (You can also use sound effects, but that is strongly discouraged.) In Prezi, the slides transition by zooming in and out, which is a clever effect but does make some audience members experience motion sickness. In general, you want to use a consistent and efficient pattern of movement with the second and third types of animation.

Emphasis, Focal Point, and Visibility

Several points should be made about how to make sure the audience sees what they need to see on the slides.

1. It is essential to make sure the information is large enough for the audience to see; and since the display size may vary according to the projector you are using, this is another reason for practicing in advance with the equipment you intend to use.
2. The standard rule is for text is 7 X 7, or sometimes (if the screen is smaller) 6 X 6. Does this mean 49 or 36 words on the slide? No. It means, in the case of 7 X 7, that you should have no more than seven horizontal lines of text (this does not mean bullet points, but lines of text, including the heading) and the longest line should not exceed seven words.
3. Following the 7 X 7 rule will keep you from putting too much information on a slide, and you should also avoid too many slides. Less sometimes really is more. Again, there is no hard and fast rule, but a ten-minute speech probably needs fewer than ten slides, unless you can make a good argument for more based on the content of the speech. If, however, the slides are just text, more than ten is too many.
4. Do not assume that all the templates feature visible text. Text should not be smaller than 22 point font for best visibility, and some of the templates have much smaller sized fonts. This is especially important in those situations where the speaker creates handouts. Text smaller than 22 is very difficult to see on handouts of your slides. (However, handouts are not recommended for most situations.)
5. High contrast between the text and slides is extremely important. White fonts against very dark backgrounds and black fonts against very light backgrounds are probably your safest bet here. Remember that the way it looks on your computer screen is not the exactly how it will look when projected—the light is coming from a different place. Avoid words on photos. Figure 9.21 shows a photo with the words placed across the center of the image. Not only does this obviously obscure some of the picture, it also makes the words difficult to read. Figure 9.22, by contrast, has the accompanying text placed just below the image, making both much easier to see, and a citation is provided.
6. Also in terms of visibility, most experts say that sans serif fonts such as Arial, Tahoma, and Verdana are better for reading from screens than serif fonts such as Times New Roman, Bookface, Georgia, or Garamond. Serifs are additions to the letters on different fonts that give them a different appearance and help the flow of eye when reading. Merriam-Webster (2018) defines them as “any of the short lines stemming from and at an angle to the upper and lower ends of the strokes of a letter.”

How does the slide in Figure 9.23 stack up beside these rules for visibility? You probably noticed that slide is a “fail” in terms of high contrast between the font and background and the use of a block of text not broken up for easy reading. The audience would feel like they are supposed to read it but not be able to. Also, since the text is a quotation from John Dewey, the text should have quotation marks around it.

Tone

Fonts, color, clip art, photographs, and templates all contribute to **tone**, which is the attitude being conveyed in the slides. If you want a light tone, such as for a speech about cruises, some colors (springtime, pastel, cool, warm, or primary colors) and fonts (such as Comic Sans) and lots of photographs will be more appropriate. For a speech about the Holocaust, more somber colors and design elements would be more fitting, whereas clip art would not be.

Scale and Proportion

Although there are several ways to think about scale and proportion, we will discuss three here. First, bullet points. Bullet points infer that the items in the bulleted list are equal and the sequence doesn't matter. If you want to communicate order or sequence or priority, use numbers. Do not mix outline points or numerical points with bullet points. Also, you should not put your outline (Roman numerals, etc.) on the slide.

Bullet points should be short—not long, full sentences—but at the same time should be long enough to mean something. In a speech on spaying and neutering pets, the bullet point “pain” may be better replaced with “Pet feels little pain.” Second, when you are designing your slides, it is best to choose a template and stick with it. If you input all your graphics and material and then change the template, the format of the slide will change, in some cases dramatically, and you will have distorted graphics and words covered up. You will then have to redesign each slide, which can be unnecessarily time-consuming.

The third aspect of scale and proportion is the relationship between the graphics and text in terms of size. This aspect is discussed below in the next section on “Balance.” Also, a graphic should be surrounded by some empty space and not just take up the whole slide.

Balance

In general you want symmetrical slides. Below are four examples of slides that are unbalanced (Figures 9.24-9.27); the last one (Figure 9. 28) achieves a better symmetry and design.

Rhythm in Presenting

The rhythm of your slide display should be reasonably consistent—you would not want to display a dozen different slides in the first minute of a five-minute presentation and then display only one slide per minute for the rest of the speech. Timing them so that the audience can actually take them in is important. Presenters often overdo the number of slides, thinking they will get a better grade, but too many slides just causes overkill.

If you can obtain a remote mouse to change slides, that can help you feel independent of the mouse attached to the computer. However, you have to practice with the remote “clicker.” But if you have to use the mouse to change slide, keep your hands off of it between clicks. We have seen students wiggle the little arrow all over the screen. It is extremely annoying.

Whether using a “clicker” or the attached mouse, you must attend to the connection between what is on the screen and what you are actually talking about at the moment. Put reminders in your notes about when you need to change slides during your speech.

For better or worse, we have become very screen-oriented in our communication, largely because screens change often and that changing teaches us to expect new stimuli, which we crave. If the screen is up but you are not talking about what is on the screen, it is very confusing to the audience.

If you are using PowerPoint and if you are not talking about something on a slide, hit the “B” key or the blank screen button on the remote mouse. This action will turn the screen to black. You can also hit the “W” key, which turns the screen to white, but that will make the audience think something is coming. Unfortunately, the downside of the “B” key action is that it will return you to the previous screen. To avoid this, some presenters put a black slide between slides in the presentation so that hitting the forward key gives the same effect, but hitting it again takes them to a new screen. (Other programs have similar functions; for example, if using Prezi, the “B” key also shows a black screen.)

Other Practical Considerations

1. Be sure the file is saved in a format that will be “readable” on the computer where you are presenting. A

Tone

the attitude of a given artifact (humorous, serious, light-hearted, etc.)

common example is that a Keynote presentation (Apple) does not open on all PCs. You can save Keynote as a .ppt file for use on a PC. Likewise, if you chose to use Prezi or other web-based presentation software, you will need a strong, reliable Internet connection to show the slides.

2. Any borrowed graphic must be cited on the slide where it is used; the same would be true of borrowed textual material. Putting your sources only on the last slide is insufficient.
3. A very strong temptation for speakers is to look at the projected image rather than the audience during the speech. This practice cuts down on eye contact, of course, and is distracting for the audience. Two solutions for that are to print your notes from the presentation slides and/or use the slides as your note structure. Also remember that if the image is on the computer monitor in front of you, it is on the screen behind you.
4. Always remember—and this cannot be emphasized enough—is that the technology works for you, not you for the technology. The presentation aids are aids, not the speech itself.
5. As mentioned before, sometimes life happens—technology does not work. It could be that the projector bulb goes out or the Internet connection is down. The show must go on.
6. If you are using a video or audio clip from an Internet source, it is probably best to hyperlink the URL on one of the slides rather than minimize the program and change to the Internet site. You can do this by highlighting a key word on the slide, right clicking to find “hyperlink,” and then pasting the URL there. Although you can also embed video in a PowerPoint, it makes the file extremely large and that may cause problems of its own.
7. Finally, it is common for speakers to think “the slide changes, so the audience know there is a change, so I don’t need a verbal transition.” Please do not fall into this trap. Verbal transitions are just as, maybe more, necessary for a speech using slides.

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Low-Tech Presentation Aids

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. List and explain reasons why presentation aids are important in public speaking and how they function.
2. Describe the various computer-based and non-computer-based types of presentation aids available to the students.
3. Explain the correct use of various types of presentation aids.
4. Design professional-looking slides using presentation software.

Low-Tech Presentation Aids

One reason for using digital media is that they can't be prone to physical damage in the form of smudges, scratches, dents, and rips. Unlike posters and objects, presentation software can be kept professional looking if you have to carry them through a rainstorm or blizzard. However, there are times when it makes sense to use "low-tech" media for presentations. Here are some directions for those times.

Dry-Erase Board

If you use a chalkboard or dry-erase board, you are not using a prepared presentation aid. Your failure to prepare visuals ahead of time can be interpreted in several ways, mostly negative. If other speakers carefully design, produce, and use attractive visual aids, yours will stand out by contrast. You will be seen as the speaker who does not take the time to prepare even a simple aid. Do not use a chalkboard or dry-erase board and pretend it's a prepared presentation aid.

However, numerous speakers do utilize chalk and dry-erase boards effectively. Typically, these speakers use the chalk or dry-erase board for interactive components of a speech. For example, maybe you're giving a speech in front of a group of executives. You may have a PowerPoint all prepared, but at various points in your speech you want to get your audience's responses. (More recent technologies, such as on iPads, allow you to do the interaction on the screen, but this would have to be supported by the environment.) Chalk or dry-erase boards are very useful when you want to visually show information that you are receiving from your audience. If you ever use a chalk or dry-erase board, follow these four simple rules:

1. Write large enough so that everyone in the room can see (which is harder than it sounds; it is also hard to write and talk at the same time!).
2. Print legibly; don't write in cursive script.
3. Write short phrases; don't take time to write complete sentences.
4. Be sure you have markers that will not go dry, and clean the board afterward.

Flipchart

A flipchart is useful for situations when you want to save what you have written for future reference or to distribute to the audience after the presentation. As with whiteboards, you will need good markers and readable handwriting, as well as a strong easel to keep the flipchart upright.

Posters

You may have the opportunity in your college years to attend or participate in a “poster session.” These are times during an academic conference where visitors can view a well-designed poster depicting a research project and discuss it one-on-one with the researcher. These kinds of posters are quite large and involve a great deal of work. They can be generated from PowerPoint but often require a special printer. Otherwise, posters are probably not the best way to approach presentation aids in a speech. There are problems with visibility as well as portability. Avoid producing a presentation aid that looks like you simply cut pictures out of magazines and pasted them on. Slapping some text and images on a board looks unprofessional and will not be viewed as credible or effective.

Handouts

Handouts are appropriate for delivering information that audience members can take away with them. As we will see, handouts require a great deal of management if they are to contribute to your credibility as a speaker.

First, make sure the handout is worth the trouble of making, copying, and distributing it. Does the audience really need the handout? Second, make sure to bring enough copies of the handout for each audience member to get one. Having to share or look on with one’s neighbor does not contribute to a professional image. Under no circumstances should you ever provide a single copy of a handout to pass around. It is distracting and everyone will see it at different times in the speech (this is also true about passing any object around the room) and lose the point of the handout or object.

There are three possible times to distribute handouts: before you begin your speech, during the speech, and after your speech is over. Naturally, if you need your listeners to follow along in a handout, you will need to distribute it before your speech begins. If you have access to the room ahead of time, place a copy of the handout at or on each seat in the audience. If not, ask a volunteer to distribute them as quickly as possible while you prepare to begin speaking. If the handout is a “takeaway,” leave it on a table near the door so that those audience members who are interested can take one on their way out; in this case, don’t forget to tell them to do so as you conclude your speech. It is almost never appropriate to distribute handouts during your speech, as it is distracting, takes up time, and interrupts the pace of your presentation.

Conclusion

To finish this chapter, we will recap and remind you about the principles of effective presentation aids. Whether your aid is a slide show, object, a person, or dry erase board, these standards are essential:

Presentation aids must be easily seen or heard by your audience. Squinting and head-cocking are not good reactions. Neither should they look at the screen the whole time and ignore the speaker.

Presentation aids must be portable, easily handled, and efficient. They should disappear when not in use.

Presentation aids should be aesthetically pleasing, which includes in good taste. Avoid shock value just for shock value. You might want to show pictures of diseased organs and teeth, deformities, or corpses for your speech to make a point, but context is everything. Will your audience react so strongly that the overall point is missed? Additionally, electronic media today allows you to create very “busy” slides with varieties of fonts, colors, collages of photos, etc. Keep in mind the principles of unity and focal point.

Color is another aesthetic aspect. Some colors are just more soothing, readable, and appropriate than others. Also, the color on your slides may be different when projected from what is on your computer. Finally, presentation aids must support your speech and have high relevance to your content.

This chapter has covered a wide range of information about all kinds of audio and visual aids, but audiences today expect and appreciate professionally designed and handled presentation aids. The stakes are higher now, but the tools are many.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

What are some attention problems caused by using projection equipment during a speech?

Chapter 18: Informative Speaking

Chapter 18: Informative Speaking

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize opinion versus factual information.
2. Recognize the different types of informative speeches.
3. Decide on the best organizational approach for types of informative speeches.
4. Follow proven guidelines for preparing an informative speech.
5. Construct an informative speech.

Chapter Preview

18.1 – What is an Informative Speech?

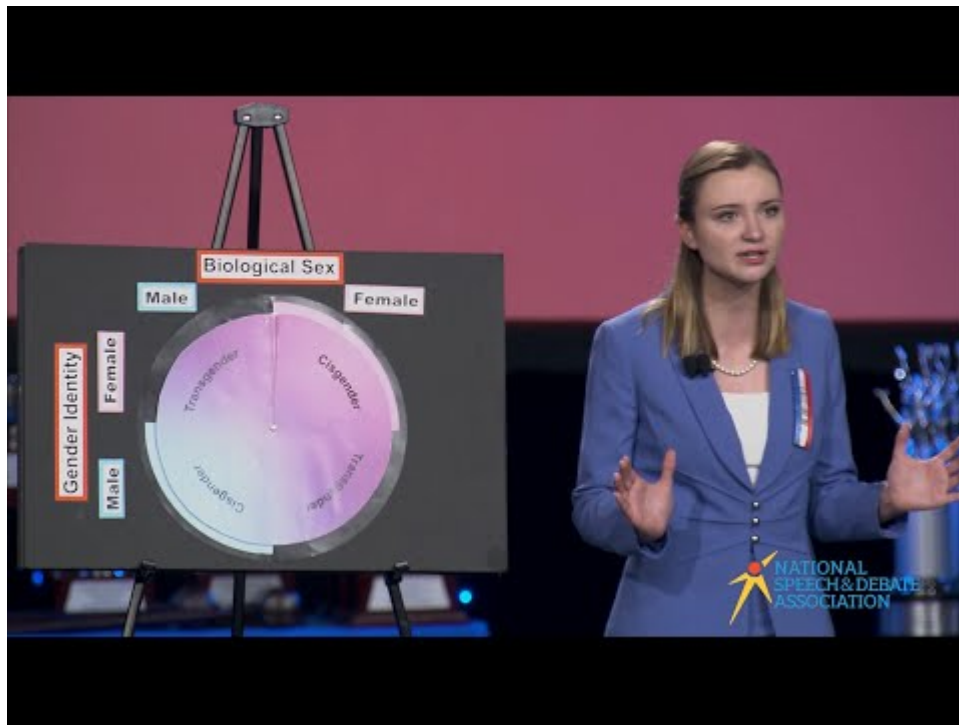
18.2 – Types of Informative Speeches

18.3 – Guidelines for Selecting an Informative Speech Topic

18.4 – Guidelines for Preparing an Informative Speech

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What is an Informative Speech?



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=649>

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Types of Informative Speeches

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize opinion versus factual information;
2. Recognize the different types of informative speeches;
3. Decide on the best organizational approach for types of informative speeches;
4. Follow proven guidelines for preparing an informative speech;
5. Construct an informative speech.

Types of Informative Speeches

While the topics to choose from for informative speeches are nearly limitless, they can generally be pared down into five broad categories. Understanding the type of informative speech that you will be giving can help you to figure out the best way to organize, research, and prepare for it, as will be discussed below.

Type 1: History

A common approach to selecting an informative speech topic is to discuss the history or development of something. With so much of human knowledge available via the Internet, finding information about the origins and evolution of almost anything is much easier than it has ever been (with the disclaimer that there are quite a few websites out there with false information). With that in mind, some of the areas that a historical informative speech could cover would include:

Objects

(Example: the baseball; the saxophone). Someone at some point in history was the first to develop what is considered the modern baseball. Who was it? What was it originally made of? How did it evolve into the baseball that is used by Major League Baseball today?

Places

(Example: your college; DisneyWorld). There is a specific year that Dalton State College opened (1967), a specific number of students who were initially enrolled in the college (524), and it wasn't until 1998 that the school's name was officially changed to Dalton State College ("Dalton State College Timeline of Major Events," 2014). All of these facts can be used to provide an overall understanding of the college and its history.

Ideas

(Example: democracy; freedom of speech). It is possible to provide facts on an idea, although in some cases the information may be less precise. For example, while no one can definitively point to a specific date or individual who first developed the concept of democracy, it is known to have been conceived in ancient Greece (Raaflaub, Ober, & Wallace, 2007). By looking at the civilizations and cultures that adopted forms of democracy throughout history, it is possible to provide an audience with a better understanding of how the idea has been shaped into what it has become today.

Type 2: Biography

A biography is similar to a history, but in this case the subject is specifically a person, whether living or deceased. For the purposes of this class, biographies should focus on people of some note or fame, since doing research on people who are not at least mildly well-known could be difficult. But again, as with histories, there are specific and irrefutable facts that can help provide an overview of someone's life, such as dates that President Lincoln was born (February 12, 1809) and died (April 15, 1865) and the years he was in office as president (1861-1865).

This might be a good place to address research and support. The basic dates of Abraham Lincoln's life could be found in multiple sources and you would not have to cite the source in that case. But if you use the work of a specific historian to explain how Lincoln was able to win the presidency in the tumultuous years before the Civil War, that would need a citation of that author and the publication.

Type 3: Processes

Examples of process speech topics would be how to bake chocolate chip cookies; how to throw a baseball; how a nuclear reactor works; how a bill works its way through Congress.

Process speeches are sometimes referred to as demonstration or "how to" speeches because they often entail demonstrating something. These speeches require you to provide steps that will help your audience understand how to accomplish a specific task or process. However, How To speeches can be tricky in that there are rarely universally agreed upon (i.e. irrefutable) ways to do anything. If your professor asked the students in his or her public speaking class to each bring in a recipe for baking chocolate chip cookies, would all of them be the exact same recipe?

Probably not, but they would all be similar and, most importantly, they would all give you chocolate chip cookies as the end result. Students giving a demonstration speech will want to avoid saying "You *should* bake the cookies for 12 minutes" since that is not how everyone does it. Instead, the student should say something like:

"You can bake the cookies for 10 minutes."

"One option is to bake the cookies for 10 minutes."

"This particular recipe calls for the cookies to be baked for 10 minutes."

Each of the previous three statements is absolutely a fact that no one can argue or disagree with. While some people may say 12 minutes is too long or too short (depending on how soft or hard they like their cookies), no one can reasonably argue that these statements are not true.

On the other hand, there is a second type of process speech that focuses not on how the audience can achieve a result, such as changing oil in their cars or cooking something, but on how a process is achieved. The goal is understanding and not performance. After a speech on how to change a car tire, the audience members could probably do it (they might not want to, but they would know the steps). However, after a speech on how a bill goes through Congress, the audience would understand this important part of democracy but not be ready to serve in Congress.

Type 4: Ideas and Concepts

Sometimes an informative speech is designed to explain an idea or concept. What does democracy mean? What is justice? In this case, you will want to do two things. First, use the definition methods listed in Chapter 6, such as classification and differentiation. The second is to make your concept concrete, real, and specific for your audience with examples.

Type 5: Categories or divisions

Sometimes an informative speech topic doesn't lend itself to a specific type of approach, and in those cases the topics tend to fall into a "general" category of informative speeches. For example, if a student wanted to give an informative speech on the four "C's" of diamonds (cut, carat, color, and clarity), they certainly wouldn't approach it as if they were providing the history of diamonds, nor would they necessarily be informing anyone on "how to" shop for or buy diamonds or how diamonds are mined. The approach in this case would simply be to inform an audience on the four "C's" and what they mean. Other examples of this type of informative speech would be positions in playing volleyball or the customs to know when traveling in China.

As stated above, identifying the type of informative speech being given can help in several ways (conducting research, writing the introduction and conclusion), but perhaps the biggest benefit is that the type of informative speech being given will help determine, to some degree, the organizational pattern that will need to be used (see Chapter 6). For example, a How To speech must be in chronological order. There really isn't a way (or reason) to present a How To speech other than how the process is done in a time sequence. That is to say, for a speech on how to bake chocolate chip cookies, getting the ingredients (Main Point 1) must come before mixing the ingredients (Main Point 2), which must come before baking them (Main Point 3). Putting them in any other order will only confuse the audience.

Similarly, most Histories and Biographies will be organized chronologically, but not always. It makes sense to explain the history of the baseball from when it was first developed to where it is today, but certain approaches to Histories and Biographies can make that irrelevant. For an informative speech on Benjamin Franklin, a student might choose as his or her three main points: 1) His time as a printer, 2) His time as an inventor, 3) His time as a diplomat. These main points are not in chronological order, because Franklin was a printer his whole life, but this example would still be one way to inform an audience about him without using the chronological organizational pattern.

As for General informative speeches, since the topics that can be included in here are very diverse and cover a range of subject matter, the way they are organized will be varied as well. However, if the topic is "types of" something or "kinds of" something, the organizational pattern would be topical; if it were the layout of a location, such as the White House, it would be spatial (see Chapter 6 on Organization).

Guidelines for Selecting an Informative Speech Topic

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize opinion versus factual information.
2. Recognize the different types of informative speeches.
3. Decide on the best organizational approach for types of informative speeches.
4. Follow proven guidelines for preparing an informative speech.
5. Construct an informative speech.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH TOPIC

While some of the guidelines for selecting a topic were discussed in Chapters 2, 4, and 5, this section will more specifically focus on informative speech topics and problems that can arise when choosing them.

Pick a specific or focused topic

Perhaps one of the biggest and most common misconceptions students have about informative speech topics is that the topic needs to be broad in order to fill the time requirements for the speech. It is not uncommon for a student to propose an informative speech topic such as “To inform my audience about the history of music.” How is that topic even possible? When does the history of music even begin? The thinking here is that this speech will be easy to research and write since there is so much information available. But the opposite is actually true. A topic this broad makes doing research even harder.

Let’s consider the example of a student who proposes the topic “To inform my audience about the Civil War.” The Civil War was, conservatively speaking, four years long, resulted in over 750,000 casualties, and arguably changed the course of human history. So to think that it is possible to cover all of that in five to seven minutes is unrealistic. Also, a typical college library has hundreds of books dealing with the Civil War. How will you choose which ones are best suited to use for your speech?

The better approach in this case is to be as specific as possible. A revised specific purpose for this speech might be something like “To inform my audience about the Gettysburg Address.” This topic is much more compact (the Gettysburg Address is only a few minutes long), and doing research will now be exponentially easier—although you will still find hundreds of sources on it. Or, an even more specific topic would be like the one in the outline at the end of this chapter: “To inform my classmates of the specific places in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, that are considered haunted.”

Instead of looking through all the books in your campus library on the Civil War, searching through the library’s databases and catalog for material on the Gettysburg Address will yield a much more manageable number of books and articles. It may sound counterintuitive, but selecting a speech topic that is very specifically focused will make the research and writing phases of the informative speech much easier.

Avoid *faux* or fake informative speech topics

Sometimes students think that because something sounds like an informative speech topic, it is one. This happens a lot with political issues that are usually partisan in nature. Some students may feel that the speech topic “To inform my audience why William Henry Harrison was a bad president” sounds factual, but really this is an opinion. Similarly, a number of topics that include conspiracy and paranormal subject matter are usually mistaken for good informative topics as well.

It is not uncommon for a student to propose the topic “To inform my audience about the existence of extraterrestrials,” thinking it is a good topic. After all, there is plenty of evidence to support the claim, right? There are pictures of unidentified objects in the sky that people claim are from outer space, there are people who claim to have seen extraterrestrials, and most powerful of all, there are people who say that they have been abducted by aliens and taken into space!

The problem here, as you have probably already guessed, is that these facts are not irrefutable. Not every single person who sees something unknown in the sky will agree it is an alien spacecraft, and there can be little doubt that not everyone who claims to have been abducted by a UFO is telling the truth. This isn’t to say that you can’t still do an informative speech on alien sites. For example, two viable options are “To inform my audience about the SETI Project” or “To inform my audience of the origin of the Area 51 conspiracy.” However, these types of speeches can quickly devolve into opinion if you aren’t careful, which would then make them persuasive speeches. Even if you start by trying to be objective, unless you can present each side equally, it will end up becoming a persuasive speech. Additionally, when a speaker picks such a topic, it is often because of a latent desire to persuade the audience about them.

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Guidelines for Preparing an Informative Speech

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Recognize opinion versus factual information.
2. Recognize the different types of informative speeches.
3. Decide on the best organizational approach for types of informative speeches.
4. Follow proven guidelines for preparing an informative speech.
5. Construct an informative speech.

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING AN INFORMATIVE SPEECH

Don't Be Too Broad

In preparing and writing an informative speech, one of the most common mistakes students make is to think that they must be comprehensive in covering their topic, which isn't realistic. Take for example an informative speech on Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was 56 years old when he died, so to think that it is possible to cover his entire life's story in 5 to 7 minutes is un-realistic. As discussed in Chapter 4, the better option is to select three aspects of his life and focus on those as a way to provide an overall picture of who he was. So a proposed speech on Lincoln might have the specific purpose: "To inform my audience about Abraham Lincoln's administration of the Civil War." This is still a huge topic in that massive books have been written about it, but it could be addressed in three or four main points such as:

- I. The Civil War began in the aftermath of Lincoln's Election and Inauguration
- II. Finding the right military leaders for the Union was his major challenge at the beginning.
- III. The Emancipation Proclamation changed the nature of the War.
- IV. Lincoln adopted a policy that led to the North's victory.

Regardless of the topic, you will never be able to cover everything that is known about your topic, so don't try. Select the things that will best help the audience gain a general understanding of the topic, that will interest them, and that they hopefully will find valuable. Providing too much detail on a topic will only serve to dilute the really important points being made and give you less time to expand on what the audience might find the most interesting.

Be Accurate, Clear, and Interesting

A good informative speech conveys accurate information to the audience in a way that is clear and that keeps

the listener interested in the topic. Achieving all three of these goals—accuracy, clarity, and interest—is the key to being an effective speaker. If information is inaccurate, incomplete, or unclear, it will be of limited usefulness to the audience.

Part of being accurate is making sure that your information is current. Even if you know a great deal about your topic or wrote a good paper on the topic in a high school course, you will need to verify the accuracy and completeness of what you know, especially if it is medical or scientific information. Most people understand that technology changes rapidly, so you need to update your information almost constantly. The same is true for topics that, on the surface, may seem to require less updating. For example, the Civil War occurred over 150 years ago, but contemporary research still offers new and emerging theories about the causes of the war and its long-term effects. So even with a topic that seems to be unchanging, carefully check the information to be sure it's accurate and up to date.

What defines “interesting?” In approaching the informative speech, you should keep in mind the good overall principle that the audience is asking, “what’s in it for me?” The audience is either consciously or unconsciously wondering “What in this topic for me? How can I use this information? Of what value is this speech content to me? Why should I listen to it?” One reason this textbook uses examples of the Civil War is that the authors’ college is located by several Civil War sites and even a major battlefield. Students see reminders of the Civil War on a regular basis.

You might consider it one of the jobs of the introduction to directly or indirectly answer these questions. If you can’t, then you need to think about your topic and why you are addressing it. If it’s only because the topic is interesting to you, you are missing the point. For example, why should we know about Abraham Lincoln’s administration of the Civil War? Obviously, because it had significant, long-term consequences to us as Americans, and you should articulate that in terms the audience can understand.

Keep in Mind Audience Diversity

Finally, remember that not everyone in your audience is the same, so an informative speech should be prepared with audience diversity in mind. If the information in a speech is too complex or too simplistic, it will not hold the interest of the listeners. Determining the right level of complexity can be hard. Audience analysis is one important way to do this (see Chapter 2). Do the members of your audience belong to different age groups? Did they all go to public schools in the United States, or are some them international students? Are they all students majoring in the same subject, or is there a mixture of majors? Never assume that just because an audience is made up of students, they all share a knowledge set.

Conclusion

Learning how to give informative speeches will serve you well in your college career and your future work. Keep in mind the principles in this chapter but also those of the previous chapters: relating to the informational needs of the audience, using clear structure, and incorporating interesting and attention-getting supporting evidence.

Something to Think About

Here are three general topics for informative speeches. Write specific purposes for them and explain how you would answer the WIIFM question.

1. Type 1 diabetes
2. The psychological effects of using social media
3. Guitars

Two outlines for informative speeches are provided on the following pages. They utilize slightly different formats; other outline formats are included in one of the appendices. Your instructor will let you know which one he or she prefers or will provide another format.

Sample Outline: Informative Speech on Lord Byron

By Shannon Stanley

Specific Purpose: To inform my audience about the life of George Gordon, Lord Byron.

Central Idea: George Gordon, Lord Byron overcame physical hardships, was a world-renowned poet, and an advocate for the Greek's war for freedom.

Introduction

- I. Imagine an eleven year old boy who has been beaten and sexually abused repeatedly by the very person who is supposed to take care of him.
 - A. This is one of the many hurdles that George Gordon, better known as Lord Byron, overcame during his childhood.
 - B. Lord Byron was also a talented poet with the ability to transform his life into the words of his poetry.
 - C. Byron became a serious poet by the age of fifteen and he was first published in 1807 at the age of nineteen.
 - D. Lord Byron was a staunch believer in freedom and equality, so he gave most of his fortune, and in the end, his very life, supporting the Greek's war for independence.
 - E. While many of you have probably never heard of Lord Byron, his life and written work will become more familiar to you when you take Humanities 1201, as I learned when I took it last semester.

Body

- II. Lord Byron was born on January 22, 1788 to Captain John Byron and Catherine Gordon Byron.
 - A. According to Paul Trueblood, the author of Lord Byron, Lord Byron's father only married Catherine for her dowry, which he quickly went through, leaving his wife and child nearly penniless.
 - B. By the age of two, Lord Byron and his mother had moved to Aberdeen in Scotland and shortly thereafter, his father died in France at the age of thirty-six.
 - C. Lord Byron was born with a clubbed right foot, which is a deformity that caused his foot to turn sideways instead of remaining straight, and his mother had no money to seek treatment for this painful and embarrassing condition.
 1. He would become very upset and fight anyone who even spoke of his lameness.
 2. Despite his handicap, Lord Byron was very active and liked competing with the other boys.
 - D. At the age of ten, his grand-uncle died leaving him the title as the sixth Baron Byron of Rochdale.
 1. With this title, he also inherited Newstead Abbey, a dilapidated estate that was in great need of repair.
 2. Because the Abbey was in Nottinghamshire England, he and his mother moved there and stayed at the abbey until it was rented out to pay for the necessary repairs.
 3. During this time, May Gray, Byron's nurse had already begun physically and sexually abusing him.
 4. A year passed before he finally told his guardian, John Hanson, about May's abuse; she was fired immediately.
 5. Unfortunately the damage had already been done.
 6. In the book Lord Byron, it is stated that years later he wrote "My passions were developed very early- so early, that few would believe me if I were to state the period, and the facts which accompanied it."
 - E. Although Lord Byron had many obstacles to overcome during his childhood, he became a

world renowned poet by the age of 24.

III. Lord Byron experienced the same emotions we all do, but he was able to express those emotions in the form of his poetry and share them with the world.

- A. According to Horace Gregory, The author of Poems of George Gordon, Lord Byron, the years from 1816 through 1824 is when Lord Byron was most known throughout Europe.
- B. But according to Paul Trueblood, Childe Harold was published in 1812 and became one of the best-selling works of literature in the 19th century.
 - 1. Childe Harold was written while Lord Byron was traveling through Europe after graduating from Trinity College.
 - 2. Many authors such as Trueblood, and Garrett, the author of George Gordon, Lord Byron, express their opinion that Childe Harold is an autobiography about Byron and his travels.
- C. Lord Byron often wrote about the ones he loved the most, such as the poem "She Walks in Beauty" written about his cousin Anne Wilmont, and "Stanzas for Music" written for his half-sister, Augusta Leigh.
- D. He was also an avid reader of the Old Testament and would write poetry about stories from the Bible that he loved.
 - 1. One such story was about the last king of Babylon.
 - 2. This poem was called the "Vision of Belshazzar," and is very much like the bible version in the book of Daniel.
- E. Although Lord Byron is mostly known for his talents as a poet, he was also an advocate for the Greek's war for independence.

IV. Lord Byron, after his self-imposed exile from England, took the side of the Greek's in their war for freedom from Turkish rule.

- A. Byron arrived in Greece in 1823 during a civil war.
 - 1. The Greek's were too busy fighting amongst themselves to come together to form a formidable army against the Turks.
 - 2. According to Martin Garrett, Lord Byron donated money to refit the Greek's fleet of ships, but did not immediately get involved in the situation.
 - 3. He had doubts as to if or when the Greek's would ever come together and agree long enough to make any kind of a difference in their war effort.
 - 4. Eventually the Greek's united and began their campaign for the Greek War of Independence.
 - 5. He began pouring more and more of his fortune into the Greek army and finally accepted a position to oversee a small group of men sailing to Missolonghi.
- B. Lord Byron set sail for Missolonghi in Western Greece in 1824. 1. He took a commanding position over a small number of the Greek army despite his lack of military training. 2. He had also made plans to attack a Turkish held fortress but became very ill before the plans were ever carried through.
- C. Lord Byron died on April 19, 1824 at the age of 36 due to the inexperienced doctors who continued to bleed him while he suffered from a severe fever.
 - 1. After Lord Byron's death, the Greek War of Independence, due to his support, received more foreign aid which led to their eventual victory in 1832.
 - 2. Lord Byron is hailed as a national hero by the Greek nation.
 - 3. Many tributes such as statues and road-names have been devoted to Lord Byron since the time of his death.

Conclusion

- V. In conclusion, Lord Byron overcame great physical hardships to become a world-renowned poet, and is seen as a hero to the Greek nation and is mourned by them still today.
 - A. I have chosen not to focus on Lord Byron's more liberal way of life, but rather to focus on his accomplishments in life.
 - B. He was a man who owed no loyalty to Greece, yet gave his life to support their cause.
 - C. Most of the world will remember Lord Byron primarily through his written attributes, but Greece will always remember him as the "Trumpet Voice of Liberty."

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Sample Outline: Informative Speech on Haunted Places in Gettysburg

By Leslie Dean

Specific Purpose: To inform my classmates of specific places in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, that are considered to be haunted.

Introduction: Do you believe in paranormal activity? Have you ever been to a place that is haunted? My personal opinion on this subject matter is open to question; however, there are a lot of people that have had firsthand encounters with the paranormal. Throughout the world there are countless places that are considered to be haunted by tormented souls that still lurk among us in search of a way to free their souls. Most places that claim to be haunted are intertwined with tales of battles and as a result many fatalities. Tragic times in history make for the perfect breeding grounds for the haunted places that exist today.

Thesis/Preview: Gettysburg is a city that is plagued by historical events that play a role in the manifestations that haunt Gettysburg today. These include locations at The Devil's Den, Little Round Top, and the Hummelbaugh House.

- I. The Devil's Den is considered a site for paranormal activity.
 - A. The Devil's Den has historical significance retained during the American Civil War.
 - 1. Location held heavy fighting during battle that took place on July 2, of 1863.
 - 2. The total death toll estimated during battle consisted of 800 for the Union and more than 1,800 for the Confederates.
 - B. Some reported paranormal activity at the Devil's Den.
 - 1. According to author, consultant, and lecturer Dennis William Hauck, he states in his book *Haunted Places* that if you stand outside at the Devil's Den there can be the sounds of drum rolls and gunshots heard.
 - 2. According to many visitors there have been many people that claim to have seen and/or taken pictures of and had conversations with a friendly soldier who either disappears or doesn't show up in photographs.

Transition: Spooky, unexplainable things happen at the Devil's Den but there is also paranormal activity in another area of Gettysburg, Little Round Top.

- II. Another location said to be haunted is Little Round Top.
 - A. Little Round Top's historical significance.
 - 1. A site where Union soldiers held up to maintain an advantage over the Confederate soldiers.
 - 2. According to James Brann, an author from *Civil War Magazine*, this was a site Union

Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain led his 20th Maine Regiment in perhaps the most famous counterattack of the Civil War.

B. Manifestations at Little Round Top.

1. During filming of the movie Gettysburg (1993), extras portraying Union soldiers were greeted by a man in the uniform of a Union private.
 - a. Handed them musket rounds.
 - b. Actual rounds that dated back to the Civil War.
2. Ghostly soldiers can still be seen marching in formation and riding horses in the fight against their enemy.

Transition: It seems that a lot of landmarks are haunted but there are also structures known to be stricken with paranormal activity.

III. Hummelbaugh House is a non-battlefield place for ghost-sightings.

A. Historical significance of Hummelbaugh House.

1. The house is located on the east side of the city and was just behind the Union lines.
2. It was used for a hospital and because of the times amputated limbs would be thrown out the windows resulting in a huge pile of body parts.

B. Paranormal activity at the house.

1. The windows in the house often startle people with loud vibrations.
2. The calls for help from soldiers can still be heard in and around the house.

Conclusion: In closing, according to History.com the Battle of Gettysburg was one of the biggest in the Civil War, resulting in over 150,000 casualties. With these statistics it is no surprise that lost souls still lurk the eerie grounds of this historical place. Whether it is vibrating windows or actual encounters with soldiers from 1863, Gettysburg has more than enough encounters with the paranormal to convince the biggest of doubters. Going to Gettysburg would guarantee a chance to literally step back in time and encounter something that is only remembered in history books. So believer in the paranormal or not, Gettysburg is a place to go to experience a part of history whether it be historical sites or a random run in with a ghostly soldier.

[PART XIX]

Chapter 19: Persuasive Speaking



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=660>

Why Persuade?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define persuasion.
2. Define ethos, logos, and pathos.
3. Explain the barriers to persuading an audience.
4. Construct a clear, reasonable proposition for a short classroom speech.
5. Compose an outline for a well-supported persuasive speech.
6. Analyze the audience to determine appropriate emotional and personal appeals.

When your instructor announced on the syllabus or in class that you would be required to give a persuasive speech for this class, what was your reaction? “Oh, good, I’ve got a great idea,” or, “Oh, no!”? For many people, there is something a little uncomfortable about the word “persuasion.” It often gets paired with ideas of seduction, manipulation, force, lack of choice, or inducement as well as more positive concepts such as encouragement, influence, urging, or logical arguments. You might get suspicious if you think someone is trying to persuade you. You might not appreciate someone telling you to change your viewpoints. On the other hand, you might not think you have any beliefs, attitudes, values, or positions that are worth sharing with others.

However, if you think of persuasion simply as a formal speech with a purpose of getting people to do something they do not want to do, then you will miss the value of learning persuasion and its accompanying skills of appeal, argument, and logic. Persuasion is something you do every day, in various forms. Convincing a friend to go see the latest movie instead of staying in to watch TV; giving your instructor a reason to give you an extension on an assignment (do not try that for this speech, though!); writing a cover letter and resume and going through an interview for a job—all of these and so many more are examples of persuasion. In fact, it is hard to think of life without the everyday give-and-take of persuasion.

You may also be thinking, “I’ve given an informative speech. What’s the difference?” While this chapter will refer to all of the content of the preceding chapters as it walks you through the steps of composing your persuasive speech, there is a difference. Although your persuasive speech will involve information—probably even as much as in your informative speech—the key difference is the word “change.” Think of it like this:

INFORMATION + CHANGE = PERSUASION

You will be using the information for the purpose of changing something about the audience members and possibly the environment, based on their responses. In the next section we will nail down an understanding of the persuasive act and then move on to the barriers to persuasion.



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[79]

A Definition of Persuasion

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define persuasion.
2. Define ethos, logos, and pathos.
3. Explain the barriers to persuading an audience.
4. Construct a clear, reasonable proposition for a short classroom speech.
5. Compose an outline for a well-supported persuasive speech.
6. Analyze the audience to determine appropriate emotional and personal appeals.

A Definition of Persuasion

Persuasion can be defined in two ways, for two purposes. The first (Lucas, 2015) is “the process of creating, reinforcing, or changing people’s beliefs or actions” (p. 306). This is a good, simple straightforward one to start with, although it does not encompass the complexity of persuasion. This definition does introduce us to what could be called a “scaled” way of thinking about persuasion and change.



Think of persuasion as a continuum or line going both directions (see Figure 13.1). Your audience members, either as a group or individually, are sitting somewhere on that line in reference to your central idea statement, or what we are going to call a **proposition** in this chapter. In your speech you are proposing the truth or validity of an idea, one which the audience may not find true or acceptable, to be valid. Sometimes the word “claim” is used for proposition or central idea statement in a persuasive speech, because you are claiming an idea is true or an action is valuable.

For example, your proposition might be, “The main cause of climate change is human activity.” In this case you are not denying that natural forces, such as volcanoes, can affect the climate, but you are claiming that climate change is mainly due to pollution and other harmful things humans have done to the environment. To be an effective persuasive speaker, one of your first jobs after coming up with this topic would be to determine where your audience “sits” on the continuum in Figure 13.1.

Proposition

The central idea statement in a persuasive speech; a statement made advancing a judgment or opinion

+3 means strongly agree to the point of making lifestyle choices to lessen climate change (such as riding a bike instead of driving a car, recycling, eating certain kinds of foods).

+2 means agree but not to the point of acting upon it.

+1 as mildly in favor of your proposition; that is, they think it's probably true but the issue doesn't affect them personally.

0 means neutral, no opinion, or feeling uninformed to make a decision.

-1 means mildly opposed to the proposition but willing to listen to those with whom they disagree.

-2 means disagreement to the point of dismissing the idea pretty quickly.

-3 means strong opposition to the point that the concept of climate change itself is not even listened to or acknowledged as a valid subject.

Since everyone in the audience is somewhere on this line or continuum, persuasion in this case means moving them to the right, somewhere closer to +3. Thinking about persuasion this way has three values:

- You can visualize and quantify where your audience “sits.”
- You can accept the fact that any movement toward +3 or to the right is a win.
- You can see that trying to change an audience from -3 to +3 in one speech is just about impossible. Therefore, you will be able to take a reasonable approach. In this case, if you knew most of the audience was at -2 or -3, your speech would be about the science behind climate change in order to open their minds to its possible existence. However, that audience is not ready to hear about its being caused mainly by humans or what action should be taken to reverse it.

Your instructor may have the class engage in some activity about your proposed topics in order for you to write your proposition in a way that it is more applicable to your audience. For example, you might have a group discussion on the topics or administer surveys to your fellow students. Some topics are so controversial and divisive that trying to persuade about them in class is inappropriate. Your instructor may forbid some topics or steer you in the direction of others.

You might also ask if it is possible to persuade to the negative, for example, to argue against something or try to move the audience to be opposed to something. In this case you would be trying to move your audience to the left on the continuum rather than to the right. Yes, it is possible to do so, but it might confuse the audience. Also, you might want to think in terms of phrasing your proposition so that it is favorable as well as reasonable. For example, “Elderly people should not be licensed to drive” could be replaced with “Drivers over the age of 75 in our state of should be required to pass a vision and health test every two years to renew their drivers’ licenses.” The first one is not clear (what is “elderly?”), reasonable (no license at all?), or positive (based on restriction) in approach. The second is specific, reasonable, doable, and positive.

It should also be added that the proposition is assumed to be controversial. By that is meant that some people in the audience disagree with your proposition or at least have no opinion; they are not “on your side.” It would be foolish to give a speech when everyone in the audience totally agrees with you at the beginning of the speech. For example, trying to convince your classroom audience that attending college is a good idea is a waste of everyone’s time since, for one reason or another, everyone in your audience has already made that decision. That is not persuasive.

Those who disagree with your proposition but are willing to listen could be called the **target audience**. These are the members of your audience on whom you are truly focusing your persuasion. At the same time, another cluster of your audience that is not part of your target audience are those who are extremely opposed to your position to the point that they probably will not give you a fair hearing. Finally, some members of your audience may already agree with you, although they don’t know why.

To go back to our original definition, “the process of creating, reinforcing, or changing people’s beliefs or actions,” and each of these purposes implies a different approach. You can think of *creating* as moving an audience from 0 to +1, +2, or +3. You only really “create” something when it does not already exist, meaning the audience’s

Target audience

the members of an audience the speaker most wants to persuade and who are likely to be receptive to persuasive messages

attitude will be a 0 since they have no opinion. In creating, you have to first engage the audience that there is a vital issue at stake. Then you must provide arguments in favor of your claim to give the audience a basis for belief.

Reinforcing is moving the audience from +1 toward +3 in the hope that they take action (since the real test of belief is whether people act on it). In reinforcing, the audience already agrees with you but need steps and pushes (nudges) to make it action. *Changing* is moving from -1 or -2 to +1 or higher. In changing, you must first be credible, provide evidence for your side but also show why the audience's current beliefs are mistaken or wrong in some way.

However, this simple definition from Lucas, while it gets to the core of “change” that is inherent in persuasion, could be improved with some attention to the ethical component and the “how” of persuasion. For that purpose, let's look at Perloff's (2003) definition of **persuasion**:

A symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice. (p. 8)

There are several important factors about this definition. First, notice that persuasion is symbolic, that is, uses language or other symbols (even graphics can be symbols), rather than force or other means. Second, notice that it is an attempt, not always fully successful. Third, there is an “atmosphere of free choice,” in that the persons being persuaded can choose not to believe or act. And fourth, notice that the persuader is “trying to convince others to change.” Modern psychological research has confirmed that the persuader does not change the audience directly. The processes that the human mind goes through while it listens to a persuasive message is like a silent, **mental dialogue** the audience is having with the speaker's ideas. The audience members as individuals eventually convince themselves to change based on the “symbols” used by the speaker.

Persuasion

A symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice

Some of this may sound like splitting hairs, but these are important points. The fact that an audience has free choice means that they are active participants in their own persuasion and that they can choose whether the speaker is successful. This factor calls on the student speaker to be ethical and truthful. Sometimes students will say, “It is just a class assignment, I can lie in this speech,” but that is not a fair way to treat your classmates.

Mental dialogue

an imagined conversation the speaker has with a given audience in which the speaker tries to anticipate what questions, concerns, or issues the audience may have to the subject under discussion

Further, the basis of your persuasion is language; even though “a picture is worth a thousand words” and can help add emotional appeal to your speech, you want to focus on communicating through words. Also, Perloff's definition distinguishes between “attitude” and “behavior,” meaning that an audience may be persuaded to think, to feel, or to act. Finally, persuasion is a process. Successful persuasion actually takes a while. One speech can be effective, but usually other messages influence the listener in the long run.

Media Attributions

- imager1-2

[80]

Why is Persuasion Hard?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define persuasion.
2. Define ethos, logos, and pathos.
3. Explain the barriers to persuading an audience.
4. Construct a clear, reasonable proposition for a short classroom speech.
5. Compose an outline for a well-supported persuasive speech.
6. Analyze the audience to determine appropriate emotional and personal appeals.

Why is Persuasion Hard?

Persuasion is hard mainly because we have a bias against change. As much as we hear statements like “The only constant is change” or “Variety is the spice of life,” the evidence from research and from our personal experience shows that, in reality, we do not like change. Recent research, for example, in risk aversion, points to how we are more concerned about keeping from losing something than with gaining something. Change is often seen as a loss of something rather than a gain of something else. Change is a step into the unknown, a gamble (Vedantam & Greene, 2013).

In the 1960s psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe wanted to investigate the effect of stress on life and health. As explained on the Mindtools website:

They surveyed more than 5,000 medical patients and asked them to say whether they had experience any of a series of 43 life events in the previous two years. Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different “weight” for stress. The more events the patient added up, the higher the score. The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient was to become ill. (The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, 2015)

You can find the Holmes-Rahe stress scale on many websites. What you will find is that the stressful events almost all have to do with change in some life situations—death of a close family member (which might rate 100 LCUs), loss of a job, even some good changes like the Christmas holidays (12 LCUs). Change is stressful. We do not generally embrace things that bring us stress.

Additionally, psychologists have pointed to how we go out of our way to protect our beliefs, attitudes, and values. First, we selectively expose ourselves to messages that we already agree with, rather than those that confront or challenge us. This **selective exposure** is especially seen in choices of mass media that individuals listen to and read, whether TV, radio, or Internet sites. Not only do we selectively expose ourselves to information, we selectively attend to, perceive, and recall information that supports our existing viewpoints (referred to as selective attention, selective perception, and selective recall).

This principle led Leon Festinger (1957) to form the theory of **cognitive dissonance**, which states, among other ideas, that when we are confronted with conflicting information or viewpoints, we reach a state of dissonance. This state can be very uncomfortable, and we will do things to get rid of the dissonance and maintain “consonance.”

Ideally, at least for a public speaker, the dissonance is relieved or resolved by being persuaded (changed) to a new belief, attitude, or behavior. However, the easiest way to do so is to not expose oneself to conflicting messages in the first place.

Additionally, as mentioned before, during a persuasive speech the audience members are holding a mental dialogue with the speaker or at least the speaker’s content. They are putting up rebuttals or counter-arguments. These have been called *reservations* (as in the audience member would like to believe the speaker but has reservations about doing so). They could be called the “yeah-buts”—the audience members are saying in their minds, “Yeah, I see what you are arguing, but—”. Reservations can be very strong, since, again, the bias is to be loss averse and *not* to change our actions or beliefs.

In a sense, the reasons *not* to change can be stronger than even very logical reasons *to* change. For example, you probably know a friend who will not wear a seatbelt in a car. You can say to your friend, “Don’t you know that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2009) says, and I quote, ‘1,652 lives could be saved and 22,372 serious injuries avoided each year on America’s roadways if seat belt use rates rose to 90 percent in every state?’” What will your friend probably say, even though you have cited a credible source?

He or she will come up with some reason for not wearing it, even something as dramatic as “I knew a guy who had a cousin who was in an accident and the cop said he died because he was wearing his seatbelt.” You may have had this conversation, or one like it. His or her argument may be less dramatic, such as “I don’t like how it feels” or “I don’t like the government telling me what to do in my car.” For your friend, the argument for wearing a seat belt is not as strong as the argument against it, at least at this moment. If he or she is open-minded and can listen to evidence, he or she might experience cognitive dissonance and then be persuaded.

Selective exposure

the decision to expose ourselves to messages that we already agree with, rather than those that confront or challenge us

Cognitive dissonance

a psychological phenomenon where people confronted with conflicting information or viewpoints reach a state of dissonance (generally the disagreement between conflicting thoughts and/or actions), which can be very uncomfortable, and results in actions to get rid of the dissonance and maintain consonance

Solutions to the Difficulty of Persuasion

With these reasons for the resistance audience members would have to persuasion, what is a speaker to do? Here are some strategies.

Since change is resisted, we do not make many large or major changes in our lives. We do, however, make smaller, concrete, step-by-step or incremental changes in our lives every day. Going back to our scale in Figure 13.1, trying to move an audience from -3 to +2 or +3 is too big a move. Having reasonable persuasive goals is the first way to meet resistance. Even moving someone from -3 to -2 is progress, and over time these small shifts can eventually result in a significant amount of persuasion.

Secondly, a speaker must “deal with the reservations.” First, the speaker must acknowledge they exist, which shows audience awareness, but then the speaker must attempt to rebut or refute them. In reality, since persuasion involves a mental dialogue, your audience is more than likely thinking of counter-arguments in their minds. Therefore, including a refutation section in your speech, usually after your presentation of arguments in favor of your proposition, is a required and important strategy.

However, there are some techniques for rebuttal or refutation that work better than others. You would not want to say, “One argument against my proposition is . . . , and that is wrong” or “If you are one of the people who believe this about my proposition, you are wrong.” On the other hand, you could say that the reservations are “misconceptions,” “myths,” or “mistaken ideas” that are commonly held about the proposition.

Generally, strong persuasive speeches offer the audience what are called **two-tailed arguments**, which bring up a valid issue against your argument which you, as the speaker, must then refute. After acknowledging them and seeking to refute or rebut the reservations, you must also provide evidence for your refutation. Ultimately, this will show your audience that you are aware of both sides of the issue you are presenting and make you a more credible speaker. However, you cannot just say something like this:

One common misconception about wearing seatbelts is that if the car goes off a bridge and is sinking in water, you would not be able to release the belt and get out. First, that rarely happens. Second, if it did, getting the seat belt unbuckled would be the least of your worries. You would have to know how to get out of the car, not just the seat belt. Third, the seat belt would have protected you from any head injuries in such a crash, therefore keeping you conscious and able to help anyone else in the car.

Two-tailed arguments

a persuasive technique in which a speaker brings up a counter-argument to their own topic and then directly refutes the claim

This is a good start, but there are some assertions in here that would need support from a reliable source, such as the argument that the “submerging in water” scenario is rare. If it has happened to someone you know, you probably would not think it is rare!

The third strategy is to keep in mind that since you are asking the audience to change something, they must view the benefits of the change as worth the stress of the change. If you do good audience analysis, you know they are asking, “What’s in it for me?” What benefit or advantage or improvement would happen for the audience members? It could be the benefit of being logical, having consonance rather than dissonance, being consistent with the evidence and authorities on a subject. Best, there should be some benefit from changing behavior (always remember the WIIFM question).

If the audience is being persuaded to sign an organ donor card, which is an altruistic action that cannot benefit them in any way because they will be dead, what would be the benefit? Knowing others would have better lives, feeling a sense of contribution to the good of humanity, and helping medical science might be examples. The point is that a speaker should be able to engage the audience at the level of needs, wants, and values as well as logic and evidence.

Traditional Views of Persuasion

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define persuasion.
2. Define ethos, logos, and pathos.
3. Explain the barriers to persuading an audience.
4. Construct a clear, reasonable proposition for a short classroom speech.
5. Compose an outline for a well-supported persuasive speech.
6. Analyze the audience to determine appropriate emotional and personal appeals.

Traditional Views of Persuasion

In the fourth century BCE, Aristotle took upon the study of the public speaking practices of the ruling class in Athenian society. For two years he observed the rhetoric of the men who spoke in the assembly and the courts. In the end, he wrote *Rhetoric* to explain his theories about what he saw. Among his many conclusions, which have formed the basis of communication study for centuries, was the classification of persuasive appeals into *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. Over the years, Aristotle's original understanding and definition of these terms have been refined as more psychological research has been done.

Ethos

Ethos has come to mean the influence of speaker credentials and character in a speech. Ethos is one of the more studied aspects of public speaking, and it was discussed earlier in Chapter 3. During the speech, a speaker should seek to utilize his or her existing credibility, based on the favorable things an audience already knows or believes about the speaker, such as education, expertise, background, and good character. The speaker should also improve or enhance credibility through citing reliable, authoritative sources, strong arguments, showing awareness of the audience, and effective delivery.

The word “ethos” looks very much like the word “ethics,” and there are many close parallels to the trust an audience has in a speaker and his or her honesty and ethical stance. In terms of ethics, it goes without saying that your speech will be truthful. Another matter to consider is your own personal involvement in the topic. Ideally you have chosen the topic because it means a great deal to you personally.

Ethos
the influence of speaker credentials and character in a speech; arguments based on credibility

For example, perhaps your speech is designed to motivate audience members to take action against bullying in schools, and it is important to you because you work with the Boys and Girls Club organization and have seen how anti-bullying programs can have positive results. Sharing your own involvement and commitment is key to

the credibility and emotional appeal (ethos and pathos) of the speech, added to the logos (evidence showing the success of the programs and the damage caused by bullying that goes unchecked). However, it would be wrong to manufacture stories of personal involvement that are untrue, even if the proposition is a socially valuable one.

Logos

Aristotle's original meaning for **logos** had philosophical meanings tied to the Greek worldview that the universe is a place ruled by logic and reason. Logos in a speech was related to standard forms of arguments that the audience would find acceptable. Today we think of logos as both logical and organized arguments and the credible evidence to support the arguments. Chapter 14 will deal with logic and avoiding logical fallacies more specifically.

Pathos

In words like “empathy,” “sympathy,” and “compassion” we see the root word behind pathos. **Pathos**, to Aristotle, was using the emotions such as anger, joy, hate, desire for community, and love to persuade the audience of the rightness of a proposition. One example of emotional appeals is using strong visual aids and engaging stories to get the attention of the audience. Someone asking you to donate money to help homeless pets may not have a strong effect, but seeing the ASPCA's commercials that feature emaciated and mistreated animals is probably much more likely to persuade you to donate (add the music for full emotional effect).

Emotions are also engaged by showing the audience that the proposition relates to their needs. However, we recognize that emotions are complex and that they also can be used to create a smokescreen to logic. Emotional appeals that use inflammatory language—name-calling—are often unethical or at least counterproductive. Some emotions are more appropriate for persuasive speeches than others. Anger and guilt, for example, do have effectiveness but they can backfire. Positive emotions such as pride, sympathy, and contentment are usually more productive.

One negative emotion that is useful and that can be used ethically is fear. When you think about it, we do a number of things in life to avoid negative consequences, and thus, out of fear. Why don't we drive 100 miles an hour on the interstate? Fear of getting a ticket, fear of paying more for insurance, fear of a crash, fear of hurting ourselves or others. Fear is not always applicable to a specific topic, but research shows that mild fear appeals, under certain circumstances, are very useful. When using fear appeals, the speaker must:

- Prove the fear appeal is valid.
- Prove that it applies to the audience
- Prove that the solution can work
- Prove the solution is available to the audience

Without these “proofs,” the audience may dismiss the fear appeal as not being real or not applying to them (O'Keefe, 2002). Mild and reasonable are the keys here. Intense, over-the-top fear appeals, especially showing gory photos, are often dismissed by the audience.

For example, a student gave a speech in one of our classes about flossing teeth. This may seem like an overdone subject, but in this case it wasn't. He used dramatic and disturbing photos of dental and gum problems but also proved that these photos of gum disease really did come from lack of flossing. He also showed the link between lack of flossing and heart disease. The solution to avoid the gum disease and other effects was readily available, and the student proved through his evidence that the solution of flossing regularly did work to avoid the disease. Fear appeals can be overdone, but mild ones supported by evidence are very useful.

Because we feel positive emotions when our needs are met and negative ones when our needs are not met, aligning your proposition with strong audience needs is part of pathos. Earlier in this book (Chapter 2) we examined the well-known Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Students are often so familiar with it that they do not see its connection to real-life experiences. For example, safety and security needs, the second level on the hierarchy, is much broader than what many of us initially think. It includes:

Logos

logical and organized arguments and the credible evidence to support the arguments within a speech; arguments based on logic

Pathos

the use of emotions such as anger, joy, hate, desire for community, and love to persuade the audience of the rightness of a proposition; arguments based on emotion

- supporting the military and homeland security;
- buying insurance for oneself and one's family;
- having investments and a will;
- personal protection such as taking self-defense classes;
- policies on crime and criminal justice in our communities;
- buying a security system for your car or home; seat belts and automotive safety; or even
- having the right kind of tires on one's car (which is actually a viable topic for a speech).

The third level up in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, love and belongingness, deals with a whole range of human experiences, such as connection with others and friendship; involvement in communities, groups, and clubs; prioritizing family time; worship and connection to a faith community; being involved in children's lives; patriotism; loyalty; and fulfilling personal commitments.

In the speech outline at the end of the chapter about eliminating Facebook time, the speaker appeals to the three central levels of the hierarchy in her three points: safety and security from online threats, spending more time with family and friends in real time rather than online (love and belonging), and having more time to devote to schoolwork rather than on Facebook (esteem and achievement). Therefore, utilizing Maslow's hierarchy of needs works as a guide for finding those key needs that relate to your proposition, and by doing so, allows you to incorporate emotional appeals based on needs.

Up to this point in the chapter, we have looked at the goals of persuasion, why it is hard, and how to think about the traditional modes of persuasion based on Aristotle's theories. In the last section of this chapter, we will look at generating an overall organizational approach to your speech based on your persuasive goals.

Constructing a Persuasive Speech

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define persuasion.
2. Define ethos, logos, and pathos.
3. Explain the barriers to persuading an audience.
4. Construct a clear, reasonable proposition for a short classroom speech.
5. Compose an outline for a well-supported persuasive speech.
6. Analyze the audience to determine appropriate emotional and personal appeals.

Constructing a Persuasive Speech

In a sense, constructing your persuasive speech is the culmination of the skills you have learned already. In another sense, you are challenged to think somewhat differently. While the steps of analyzing your audience, formulating your purpose and central idea, applying evidence, considering ethics, framing the ideas in appropriate language, and then practicing delivery will of course apply, you will need to consider some expanded options about each of these steps.

Formulating a Proposition

As mentioned before, when thinking about a central idea statement in a persuasive speech, we use the terms “proposition” or claim. Persuasive speeches have one of four types of propositions or claims, which determine your overall approach. Before you move on, you need to determine what type of proposition you should have (based on the audience, context, issues involved in the topic, and assignment for the class).

Proposition of Fact

Speeches with this type of proposition attempt to establish the truth of a statement. There is not a sense of what is morally right and wrong or what should be done about the issue, only that a statement is supported by evidence or not. These propositions are not facts such as “the chemical symbol for water is H₂O” or “Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008 with 53% of the vote.” Propositions or claims of fact are statements over which persons disagree and there is evidence on both sides, although probably more on one than the other. Some examples of propositions of fact are:

Converting to solar energy can save homeowners money.

John F. Kennedy was assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald working alone.

Experiments using animals are essential to the development of many life-saving medical procedures.

Climate change has been caused by human activity.

Granting tuition tax credits to the parents of children who attend private schools will perpetuate educational inequity.

Watching violence on television causes violent behavior in children.

William Shakespeare did not write most of the plays attributed to him.

John Doe committed the crime of which he is accused.

Notice that in none of these are any values—good or bad—mentioned. Perpetuating segregation is not portrayed as good or bad, only as an effect of a policy. Of course, most people view educational inequality as a bad thing negatively, just as they view life-saving medical procedures positively. But the point of these propositions is to prove with evidence the truth of a statement, not its inherent value or what the audience should do about it. In fact, in some propositions of fact no action response would even be possible, such as the proposition listed above that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in the assassination of President Kennedy.

Propositions of Definition

This is probably not one that you will use in your class, but it bears mentioning here because it is used in legal and scholarly arguments. Propositions of definitions argue that a word, phrase, or concept has a particular meaning. Remembering back to Chapter 7 on supporting materials, we saw that there are various ways to define words, such as by negation, operationalizing, and classification and division. It may be important for you to define your terms, especially if you have a value proposition. Lawyers, legislators, and scholars often write briefs, present speeches, or compose articles to define terms that are vital to defendants, citizens, or disciplines. We saw a proposition of definition defended in the Supreme Court's 2015 decision to redefine marriage laws as applying to same-sex couples, based on arguments presented in court. Other examples might be:

The Second Amendment to the Constitution does not include possession of automatic weapons for private use.

Alcoholism should be considered a disease because...

A given crime did not meet the standard for first-degree murder.

Thomas Jefferson's definition of inalienable rights did not include a right to privacy.

In each of these examples, the proposition is that the definition of these things (the Second Amendment, alcoholism, crime, and inalienable rights) needs to be changed or viewed differently, but the audience is not asked to change an attitude or action.

Propositions of Value

It is likely that you or some of your classmates will give speeches with propositions of value. When the proposition has a word such as good, bad, best, worst, just, unjust, ethical, unethical, moral, immoral, advantageous or disadvantageous, it is a proposition of value. Some examples include:

Hybrid cars are the best form of automobile transportation available today.

Homeschooling is more beneficial for children than traditional schooling.

The War in Iraq was not justified.

Capital punishment is morally wrong.

Mascots that involve Native American names, characters, and symbols are demeaning.

A vegan diet is the healthiest one for adults.

Propositions of value require a first step: defining the “value” word. If a war is unjustified, what makes a war “just” or “justified” in the first place? That is a fairly philosophical question. What makes a form of transportation “best”

or “better” than another? Isn’t that a matter of personal approach? For different people, “best” might mean “safest,” “least expensive,” “most environmentally responsible,” “stylish,” “powerful,” or “prestigious.” Obviously, in the case of the first proposition above, it means “environmentally responsible.” It would be the first job of the speaker, after introducing the speech and stating the proposition, to explain what “best form of automobile transportation” means. Then the proposition would be defended with separate arguments.

Propositions of Policy

These propositions are easy to identify because they almost always have the word “should” in them. These propositions call for a change in policy or practice (including those in a government, community, or school), or they can call for the audience to adopt a certain behavior. Speeches with propositions of policy can be those that call for passive acceptance and agreement from the audience and those that try to instigate the audience to action, to actually do something immediately or in the long-term.

Our state should require mandatory recertification of lawyers every ten years.

The federal government should act to ensure clean water standards for all citizens.

The federal government should not allow the use of technology to choose the sex of an unborn child.

The state of Georgia should require drivers over the age of 75 to take a vision test and present a certificate of good health from a doctor before renewing their licenses.

Wyeth Daniels should be the next governor of the state.

Young people should monitor their blood pressure regularly to avoid health problems later in life.

As mentioned before, the proposition determines the approach to the speech, especially the organization. Also as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the exact phrasing of the proposition should be carefully done to be reasonable, positive, and appropriate for the context and audience. In the next section we will examine organizational factors for speeches with propositions of fact, value, and policy.

Organization Based on Type of Proposition

Organization for a proposition of fact

If your proposition is one of fact, you will do best to use a topical organization. Essentially that means that you will have two to four discrete, separate arguments in support of the proposition. For example:

Proposition: Converting to solar energy can save homeowners money.

- I. Solar energy can be economical to install.
 - A. The government awards grants.
 - B. The government gives tax credits.
- II. Solar energy reduces power bills.
- III. Solar energy requires less money for maintenance.
- IV. Solar energy works when the power grid goes down.

Here is a first draft of another outline for a proposition of fact:

Proposition: Experiments using animals are essential to the development of many life-saving medical procedures.

- I. Research of the past shows many successes from animal experimentation.
- II. Research on humans is limited for ethical and legal reasons.
- III. Computer models for research have limitations.

However, these outlines are just preliminary drafts because preparing a speech of fact requires a great deal of research and understanding of the issues. A speech with a proposition of fact will almost always need an argument

or section related to the “reservations,” refuting the arguments that the audience may be preparing in their minds, their mental dialogue. So the second example needs revision, such as:

- I. The first argument in favor of animal experimentation is the record of successful discoveries from animal research.
- II. A second reason to support animal experimentation is that research on humans is limited for ethical and legal reasons.
- III. Thirdly, animal experimentation is needed because computer models for research have limitations.
- IV. Many people today have concerns about animal experimentation.
 - A. Some believe that all experimentation is equal.
 1. There is experimentation for legitimate medical research.
 2. There is experimentation for cosmetics or shampoos.
 - B. Others argue that the animals are mistreated.
 1. There are protocols for the treatment of animals in experimentation.
 2. Legitimate medical experimentation follows the protocols.
 - C. Some believe the persuasion of certain advocacy groups like PETA.
 1. Many of the groups that protest animal experimentation have extreme views.
 2. Some give untrue representations.

To complete this outline, along with introduction and conclusion, there would need to be quotations, statistics, and facts with sources provided to support both the pro-arguments in Main Points I-III and the refutation to the misconceptions about animal experimentation in Subpoints A-C under Point IV.

Organization for a proposition of value

A persuasive speech that incorporates a proposition of value will have a slightly different structure. As mentioned earlier, a proposition of value must first define the “value” word for clarity and provide a basis for the other arguments of the speech. The second or middle section would present the defense or “pro” arguments for the proposition based on the definition. The third section would include refutation of the counter arguments. The following outline draft shows a student trying to structure a speech with a value proposition. Keep in mind it is abbreviated for illustrative purposes, and thus incomplete as an example of what you would submit to your instructor, who will expect more detailed outlines for your speeches.

Proposition: Hybrid cars are the best form of automotive transportation available today.

- I. Automotive transportation that is best meets three standards. **(Definition)**
 - A. It is reliable and durable.
 - B. It is fuel efficient and thus cost efficient.
 - C. It is therefore environmentally responsible.
- II. Studies show that hybrid cars are durable and reliable. **(Pro-Argument 1)**
 - A. Hybrid cars have 99 problems per 100 cars versus 133 problem per 100 conventional cars, according to TrueDelta, a car analysis website much like Consumer Reports.
 - B. J.D. Powers reports hybrids also experience 11 fewer engine and transmission issues than gas-powered vehicles, per 100 vehicles.
- III. Hybrid cars are fuel-efficient. **(Pro-Argument 2)**
 - A. The Toyota Prius gets 48 mpg on the highway and 51 mpg in the city.
 - B. The Ford Fusion hybrid gets 47 mpg in the city and in the country.
- IV. Hybrid cars are environmentally responsible. **(Pro-Argument 3)**

- A. They only emit 51.6 gallons of carbon dioxide every 100 miles.
 - B. Conventional cars emit 74.9 gallons of carbon dioxide every 100 miles.
 - C. The hybrid produces 69% of the harmful gas exhaust that a conventional car does.
- V. Of course, hybrid cars are relatively new to the market and some have questions about them.
(Reservations)

- A. Don't the batteries wear out and aren't they expensive to replace?
 - 1. Evidence to address this misconception.
 - 2. Evidence to address this misconception.
- B. Aren't hybrid cars only good for certain types of driving and drivers?
 - 1. Evidence to address this misconception.
 - 2. Evidence to address this misconception.
- C. Aren't electrical cars better?
 - 1. Evidence to address this misconception.
 - 2. Evidence to address this misconception.

Organization for a propositions of policy

The most common type of outline organizations for speeches with propositions of policy is problem-solution or problem-cause-solution. Typically we do not feel any motivation to change unless we are convinced that some harm, problem, need, or deficiency exists, and even more, that it affects us personally. As the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, why fix it?" As mentioned before, some policy speeches look for passive agreement or acceptance of the proposition. Some instructors call this type of policy speech a "think" speech since the persuasion is just about changing the way your audience thinks.

On the other hand, other policy speeches seek to move the audience to do something to change a situation or to get involved in a cause, and these are sometimes called a "do" speech since the audience is asked to do something. This second type of policy speech (the "do" speech) is sometimes called a "speech to actuate." Although a simple problem-solution organization with only two main points is permissible for a speech of actuation, you will probably do well to utilize the more detailed format called Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

This format, designed by Alan Monroe (1951), who wrote a popular speaking textbook for many years, is based on John Dewey's reflective thinking process. It seeks to go in-depth with the many questions an audience would have in the process of listening to a persuasive speech. Monroe's Motivated Sequence involves five steps, which should not be confused with the main points of the outline. Some steps in Monroe's Motivated Sequence may take two points.

1. **Attention.** This is the introduction, where the speaker brings attention to the importance of the topic as well as his or her own credibility and connection to the topic.
2. **Need.** Here the problem is defined and defended. This step may be divided into two main points, such as the problem and the causes of it, since logically a solution should address the underlying causes as well as the external effects of a problem. It is important to make the audience see the severity of the problem, and how it affects them, their family, or their community. The harm or need can be physical, financial, emotional, educational, or social. It will have to be supported by evidence.
3. **Satisfaction.** A need calls for satisfaction in the same way a problem requires a solution. This step could also, in some cases, take up two main points. Not only does the speaker present the solution and describe it, but she must also defend that it works and will address the causes of the problem as well as the symptoms.
4. **Visualization.** This step looks to the future either positively or negatively. If positive, the benefits from enacting or choosing the solution are shown. If negative, the disadvantages of not doing anything to solve the problem are shown. There may be times when it is acceptable to skip this step, especially if time is limited. The purpose of visualization is to motivate the audience with the benefits or through

fear appeals.

5. **Action.** This can be the conclusion, although if the speaker really wants to spend time on moving the audience to action, the action step should be a full main point and the conclusion saved for summary and a dramatic ending. In the action step, the goal is to give specific steps for the audience to take as soon as possible to move toward solving the problem. Whereas the satisfaction step explains the solution overall, the action step gives concrete ways to begin making the solution happen.

The more concrete you can make the action step, the better. Research shows that people are more likely to act if they know how accessible the action can be. For example, if you want students to be vaccinated against the chicken pox virus (which can cause a serious disease called shingles in adults), you can give them directions to and hours for a clinic or health center where vaccinations at a free or discounted price can be obtained.

In some cases for speeches of policy, no huge problem needs solving. Or, there is a problem, but the audience already knows about it and is convinced that the problem exists and is important. In those cases, a format called “comparative advantages” is used, which focuses on how one possible solution is better than other possible ones. The organizational pattern for this kind of proposition might be topical:

- I. This policy is better because...
- II. This policy is better because...
- III. This policy is better because...

If this sounds a little like a commercial that is because advertisements often use comparative advantages to show that one product is better than another. Here is an example:

Proposition: Owning the Barnes and Noble Nook is more advantageous than owning the Amazon Kindle.

- I. The Nook allows owners to trade and loan books to other owners or people who have downloaded the Nook software, while the Kindle does not.
- II. The Nook has a color-touch screen, while the Kindle’s screen is black and grey and non-interactive.
- III. The Nook’s memory can be expanded through microSD, while the Kindle’s memory cannot be upgraded.

Building Upon Your Persuasive Speech’s Arguments

Once you have constructed the key arguments and order of points (remembering that if you use topical order, to put your strongest or most persuasive point last), it is time to move to being sure your points are well supported. In a persuasive speech, there are some things to consider about evidence.

First, your evidence should be from sources that the audience will find credible. If you can find the same essential information from two sources but know that the audience will find the information more credible from one source than another, use and cite the information from the more credible one. For example, if you find the same statistical data on Wikipedia and the U.S. Department of Labor’s website, cite the U.S. Department of Labor (your instructor will probably not accept the Wikipedia site anyway). Audiences also accept information from sources they consider unbiased or indifferent. Gallup polls, for example, have been considered reliable sources of survey data because unlike some organizations, Gallup does not have a cause (political or otherwise) it is supporting.

Secondly, your evidence should be new to the audience. In other words, the best evidence is that which is from credible sources and the audience has not heard before (Reinard, 1988; McCroskey, 1969). If they have heard it before and discounted it, they will not consider your argument well supported. An example is telling people who smoke that smoking will cause lung cancer. Everyone in the U.S. has heard that thousands of times, but 17.8% of the population still smokes, which is more than one in six (Gholipour, 2014). Many of those who smoke have not heard the information that really motivates them to quit yet, and of course quitting is very difficult. Additionally, new evidence is more attention-getting, and you will appear more credible if you tell the audience something new (as long as you cite it well) than if you use the “same old, same old” evidence they have heard before.

Third, in order to be effective and ethical, your supporting evidence should be relevant and not used out of context, and fourth, it should be timely and not out of date.

After choosing the evidence and apportioning it to the correct parts of the speech, you will want to consider use of metaphors, quotations, rhetorical devices, and narratives that will enhance the language and “listenability” of your speech. Narratives are especially good for introduction and conclusions, to get attention and to leave the audience with something dramatic. You might refer to the narrative in the introduction again in the conclusion to give the speech a sense of finality.

Next you will want to decide if you should use any type of presentation aid for the speech. The decision to use visuals such as PowerPoint slides or a video clip in a persuasive speech should take into consideration the effect of the visuals on the audience and the time allotted for the speech. The charts, graphs, or photographs you use should be focused and credibly done.

One of your authors remembers a speech by a student about using seat belts (which is, by the way, an overdone topic). What made the speech effective in this case were photographs of two totaled cars, both of which the student had been driving when they crashed (on two separate occasions). The devastation of the wrecks and his ability to stand before them and give the speech because he had worn his seat belt was effective (although it didn’t say much for his driving ability). If you wanted an audience to donate to disaster relief after an earthquake in a foreign country, a few photographs of the destruction would be effective, and perhaps a map of the area would be helpful. But in this case, less is more. Too many visual aids will likely distract from your overall speech claim.

Finally, since you’ve already had experience in class giving at least one major speech prior to this one, your delivery for the persuasive speech should be especially strong. Since delivery does affect credibility (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990), you want to be able to connect visually as you make your appeals. You want to be physically involved and have vocal variety when you tell dramatic narratives that emphasize the human part of your topic. If you do use presentation slides, you want them to work in seamlessly, using black screens when the visuals are not necessary.

Conclusion

Your persuasive speech in class, as well as in real life, is an opportunity to share a passion or cause that you believe will matter to society and help the audience live a better life. Even if you are initially uncomfortable with the idea of persuasion, we use it all the time in different ways. Choose your topic based on your own commitment and experience, look for quality evidence, craft your proposition so that it will be clear and audience appropriate, and put the finishing touches on it with an eye toward enhancing your logos, ethos, and pathos.

Something to Think About

Go to YouTube and look for “Persuasive Speeches by College Students.” There are quite a few. Here’s one example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNr7Fx-SM1Y>.

Do you find this speech persuasive? Why or why not? Based on the content of this chapter, what did the speaker do correctly or perhaps not so correctly that affected his or her persuasiveness?

Sample Outline: Persuasive Speech on Facebook Usage

By Janet Aguilar

Specific Purpose: To persuade my classmates to eliminate their Facebook use.

Introduction: There she was late into the night still wide awake staring at her phone’s screen. In fact, she had to be at work early in the morning, but scrolling through her Facebook account kept her awake. That girl was me before I deactivated my Facebook account. I honestly could not tell you how many hours I spent on Facebook. In the survey that I presented to you all, one person admitted to spending “too much” time on Facebook. That was me in the past, I spent too much time on Facebook. Time is precious and once it is gone it does not return. So why do you spend precious time on Facebook? Time that could be spent with family, resting, or just being more productive.

Thesis/Preview: Facebook users should eliminate their usage because Facebook can negatively affect their relationships with others, their sleeping patterns and health, and their ability to focus on school work.

I. Family relationships can be affected by your Facebook usage.

A. In the survey conducted in class, 11 of 15 students confessed to have ignored someone while

they were speaking.

1. Found myself ignoring my children while they spoke.
 2. Noticed other people doing the same thing especially in parks and restaurants.
- B. According to Lynn Postell-Zimmerman on hg.org, Facebook has become a leading cause for divorce.
- C. In the United States, 1 in 5 couples mentioned Facebook as a reason for divorce in 2009.

Transition: We have discussed how Facebook usage can lead to poor relationships with people, next we will discuss how Facebook can affect your sleep patterns and health.

II. Facebook usage can negatively affect your sleep patterns and health.

- A. Checking Facebook before bed.
1. In my survey 11 students said they checked their Facebook account before bed.
 2. Staying on Facebook for long hours before bed.
- B. Research has shown that Facebook can cause depression, anxiety, and addiction.
1. According to researchers Steels, Wickham and Acitelli in an article in the Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology titled “Seeing everyone else’s highlight reels: How Facebook usage is linked to depressive symptoms,” because Facebook users only view the positive of their friend’s life they become unhappy with their life and it can lead to becoming depressed and unhappy.
 2. Marissa Maldonado on psychcentral.com, concluded from recent studies that, “Facebook increases people’s anxiety levels by making them feel inadequate and generating excess worry and stress.”
 3. Facebook addiction is a serious issue, according to the article “Too much Facebook leads to anger and depression” found on cnn.com and written by Cara Reedy.
 - a. Checking Facebook everywhere we go is a sign of addiction
 - b. Not being able to deactivate your Facebook account.

Transitions: Many of you have probably never thought of Facebook as a threat to your health, but we will now review how it can affect you as a college student.

III. Facebook negatively affects students.

- A. I often found myself on Facebook instead of doing schoolwork.
- B. I was constantly checking Facebook which takes away from study time.
- C. I also found myself checking Facebook while in class, which can lead to poor grades and getting in trouble with the professor.
- D. A study of over 1,800 college students showed a negative relationship between amount of Facebook time and GPA, as reported by Junco in a 2012 article titled, “Too much face and not enough books” from the journal Computers and Human Behavior.

Conclusion: In conclusion, next time you log on to Facebook try deactivating your account for a few days and see the difference. You will soon see how it can bring positive changes in your family relationships, will avoid future health problems, will help you sleep better, and will improve your school performance. Instead of communicating through Facebook try visiting or calling your close friends. Deactivating my account truly helped me, and I can assure you we all can survive without Facebook.

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Chapter 20: Logical Reasoning

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and inductive reasoning.
2. Distinguish between inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning.
3. Know the four types of inductive reasoning.
4. Know the common logical fallacies.
5. Become a more critical listener to public speeches and more critical reader of source material.

What is Good Reasoning?

In Chapter 13, we reviewed ancient and modern research on how to create a persuasive presentation. We learned that persuasion does not just depend on one mode, but on the speaker using his or her personal credibility and credentials; understanding what important beliefs, attitudes, values, and needs of the audience connect with the persuasive purpose; and drawing on fresh evidence that the audience has not heard before. In addition to fresh evidence, the audience expects a logical speech and to hear arguments that they understand and to which they can relate. These are historically known as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. This chapter will deal with the second part of logos, logical argument and using critical thinking to fashion and evaluate persuasive appeals.

We have seen that logos involves composing a speech that is structured in a logical and easy-to-follow way; it also involves using correct logical reasoning and consequently avoiding fallacious reasoning, or logical fallacies.

Although it is not a perfect or literal analogy, we can think of correct reasoning like building a house. To build a house, you need materials (premises and facts) a blueprint (logical method), and knowledge of building trades (critical thinking ability). If you put a person out in a field with drywall, nails, wiring, fixtures, pipes, and wood and handed him a blueprint, he would need knowledge of construction principles, plumbing, and reading plans (and some helpers), or no building is going up. Logic could also be considered like cooking. You need ingredients, a recipe, and knowledge about cooking. In both cases, your ingredients or materials must be good quality (your information and facts must be true); your recipe or directions must be right (the logical process); and the user must know what he or she is doing.

In the previous paragraph, **analogical reasoning** was used. As we will see in Section 14.2, analogical reasoning involves drawing conclusions about an object or phenomenon based on its similarities to something else. Technically, it was a **figurative analogy**, not a literal one, because the two processes are not essentially the same. A figurative analogy is like a poetic one: “My love is like a red, red rose,” (Robert Burns, 1759-1796); love, or a loved person, and a flower are not essentially the same. An example of a **literal analogy** would be one between this college, Dalton State, and another state college in Georgia with a similar mission and similar student bodies.

Figurative analogy

Analogical reasoning

Analogical reasoning is one of several types of logical reasoning methods

an analogy where the two things under comparison are not essentially the same

drawing conclusions about an object or phenomenon based on its similarities to something else

which can serve us well if used correctly, but it can be confusing and even unethical if used incorrectly. In this chapter we will look first at “good” reasoning and then at several of the standard mistakes in reasoning, called **logical fallacies**. In higher education today, teaching and learning critical thinking skills are a priority, and those skills are one of the characteristics that employers are looking for in applicants (Adams, 2014). The difficult part of this equation is that critical thinking skills mean slightly different things for different people.

Involved in critical thinking are problem-solving and decision-making, the ability to evaluate and critique based on theory and the “knowledge base” (what is known in a particular field), skill in self-reflection, recognition of personal and societal biases, and the ability to use logic and avoid logical fallacies. On the website *Critical Thinking Community*, in an article entitled “Our Concept and Definition of Critical Thinking” (2013), the term is defined this way:

Critical thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities, as well as a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism.

Literal analogy

an analogy where the two things under comparison have sufficient or significant similarities to be compared fairly

Logical fallacies

mistakes in reasoning; erroneous conclusions or statements made from poor inductive or deductive analyses

Critical thinking is a term with a wide range of meaning, one of which is the traditional ability to use formal logic. To do so, you must first understand the two types of reasoning: inductive and deductive.

Inductive Reasoning

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and inductive reasoning.
2. Distinguish between inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning.
3. Know the four types of inductive reasoning.
4. Know the common logical fallacies.
5. Become a more critical listener to public speeches and more critical reader of source material.

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning (also called “induction”) is probably the form of reasoning we use on a more regular basis. Induction is sometimes referred to as “reasoning from example or specific instance,” and indeed, that is a good description. It could also be referred to as “bottom-up” thinking. Inductive reasoning is sometimes called “the scientific method,” although you don’t have to be a scientist to use it, and use of the word “scientific” gives the impression it is always right and always precise, which it is not. In fact, we are just as likely to use inductive logic incorrectly or vaguely as we are to use it well.

Inductive reasoning happens when we look around at various happenings, objects, behavior, etc., and see patterns. From those patterns we develop conclusions. There are four types of inductive reasoning, based on different kinds of evidence and logical moves or jumps.

Inductive reasoning

a type of reasoning in which examples or specific instances are used to supply strong evidence for (though not absolute proof of) the truth of the conclusion; the scientific method

Generalization

Generalization is a form of inductive reasoning that draws conclusions based on recurring patterns or repeated observations. Vocabulary.com (2016) goes one step further to state it is “the process of formulating general concepts by abstracting common properties of instances.” To generalize, one must observe multiple instances and find common qualities or behaviors and then make a broad or universal statement about them. If every dog I see chases squirrels, then I would probably generalize that all dogs chase squirrels.

If you go to a certain business and get bad service once, you may not like it. If you go back and get bad treatment again, you probably won’t go back again because you have concluded “Business X always treats its customers badly.” However, according to the laws of logic, you cannot really say that; you can only say, “In my experience, Business X treats its customers badly” or more precisely, “has treated me badly.” Additionally, the word “badly” is imprecise, so to be a valid conclusion to the generalization,

Generalization

a form of inductive reasoning that draws conclusions based on recurring patterns or repeated observations

badly should be replaced with “rudely,” “dishonestly,” or “dismissively.” The two problems with generalization is over-generalizing (making too big an inductive leap, or jump, from the evidence to the conclusion) and generalizing without enough examples (hasty generalization, also known as stereotyping).

In the example of the service at Business X, two examples are really not enough to conclude that “Business X treats customers rudely.” The conclusion does not pass the logic test for generalization, but pure logic may not influence whether or not you patronize the business again. Logic and personal choice overlap sometimes and separate sometimes. If the business is a restaurant, it could be that there is one particularly rude server at the restaurant, and he happened to wait on you during both of your experiences. It is possible that everyone else gets fantastic service, but your generalization was based on too small a sample.

Inductive reasoning through generalization is used in surveys and polls. If a polling organization follows scientific sampling procedures (sample size, ensuring different types of people are involved, etc.), it can conclude that their poll indicates trends in public opinion. Inductive reasoning is also used in science. We will see from the examples below that inductive reasoning does not result in certainty. Inductive conclusions are always open to further evidence, but they are the best conclusions we have now.

For example, if you are a coffee drinker, you might hear news reports at one time that coffee is bad for your health, and then six months later that another study shows coffee has positive effects on your health. Scientific studies are often repeated or conducted in different ways to obtain more and better evidence and make updated conclusions. Consequently, the way to disprove inductive reasoning is to provide contradictory evidence or examples.

Causal reasoning

Instead of looking for patterns the way generalization does, **causal reasoning** seeks to make cause-effect connections. Causal reasoning is a form of inductive reasoning we use all the time without ever thinking about it. If the street is wet in the morning, you know that it rained based on past experience. Of course, there could be another cause—the city decided to wash the streets early that morning—but your first conclusion would be rain. Because causes and effects can be so multiple and complicated, two tests are used to judge whether the causal reasoning is valid.

Good inductive causal reasoning meets the tests of *directness* and *strength*. The alleged cause must have a *direct* relationship on the effect and the cause must be strong enough to make the effect. If a student fails a test in a class that he studied for, he would need to examine the causes of the failure. He could look back over the experience and suggest the following reasons for the failure:

Causal reasoning
a form of inductive reasoning that seeks to make cause-effect connections

1. He waited too long to study.
2. He had incomplete notes.
3. He didn't read the textbook fully.
4. He wore a red hoodie when he took the test.
5. He ate pizza from Pizza Heaven the night before.
6. He only slept four hours the night before.
7. The instructor did not do a good job teaching the material.
8. He sat in a different seat to take the test.
9. His favorite football team lost its game on the weekend before.

Which of these causes are direct enough and strong enough to affect his performance on the test? All of them might have had a slight effect on his emotional, physical, or mental state, but all are not strong enough to affect his knowledge of the material if he had studied sufficiently and had good notes to work from. Not having enough sleep could also affect his attention and processes more directly than, say, the pizza or football game. We often consider “causes” such as the color of the hoodie to be superstitions (“I had bad luck because a black cat crossed my path”).

Taking a test while sitting in a different seat from the one where you sit in class has actually been researched (Sauffley, Otaka, & Bavaresco, 1985), as has whether sitting in the front or back affects learning (Benedict & Hoag,

2004). (In both cases, the evidence so far says that they do not have an impact, but more research will probably be done.) From the list above, #1-3, #6, and #7 probably have the most direct effect on the test failure. At this point our student would need to face the concept of locus of control, or responsibility—was the failure his doing, or his instructor's?

Causal reasoning is susceptible to four fallacies: historical fallacy, slippery slope, false cause, and confusing correlation and causation. The first three will be discussed later, but the last is very common, and if you take a psychology or sociology course, you will study correlation and causation well. This [video](#) of a TedTalk will explain the concept in an entertaining manner. Confusing correlation and causation is the same as confusing causal reasoning and sign reasoning, discussed below.

Sign Reasoning

Right now, as one of the authors is writing this chapter, the leaves on the trees are turning brown, the grass does not need to be cut every week, and geese are flying towards Florida. These are all signs of fall in this region. These signs do not make fall happen, and they don't make the other signs—cooler temperatures, for example—happen. All the signs of fall are caused by one thing: the rotation of the earth and its tilt on its axis, which make shorter days, less sunshine, cooler temperatures, and less chlorophyll in the leaves, leading to red and brown colors.

It is easy to confuse signs and causes. **Sign reasoning**, then, is a form of inductive reasoning in which conclusions are drawn about phenomena based on events that precede or co-exist with, but not cause, a subsequent event. Signs are like the correlation mentioned above under causal reasoning. If someone argues, "In the summer more people eat ice cream, and in the summer there is statistically more crime. Therefore, eating more ice cream causes more crime!" (or "more crime makes people eat more ice cream."), that, of course, would be silly. These are two things that happen at the same time—signs—but they are effects of something else – hot weather. If we see one sign, we will see the other. Either way, they are signs or perhaps two different things that just happen to be occurring at the same time, but not causes.

Analogical reasoning

As mentioned above, **analogical reasoning** involves comparison. For it to be valid, the two things (schools, states, countries, businesses) must be truly alike in many important ways—essentially alike. Although Harvard and Dalton State are both colleges, they are not essentially alike in very many ways. They have different missions, histories, governance, surrounding locations, sizes, clientele, funding sources, funding amounts, etc. So it would be foolish to argue, "Harvard has a law school; therefore Dalton State should have a law school." On the other hand, there are colleges that are very similar to DSC in all those ways, so comparisons could be valid in those cases.

You have probably heard the phrase, "that is like comparing apples and oranges." When you think about it, though, apples and oranges are more alike than they are different (they are both still fruit, after all). This observation points out the difficulty of analogical reasoning—how similar do the two "things" have to be for there to be a valid analogy? Second, what is the purpose of the analogy? Is it to prove that State College A has a specific program (sports, Greek societies, a theatre major), therefore, Dalton State should have that program, too? Are there other factors to consider? Analogical reasoning is one of the less reliable forms of logic, although it is used frequently.

To summarize, inductive or bottom-up reasoning comes in four varieties, each capable of being used correctly or incorrectly. Remember that inductive reasoning is disproven by counter evidence and its conclusions are always up to revision by new evidence. Also, the conclusions should be precisely stated.

Sign reasoning

a form of inductive reasoning in which conclusions are drawn about phenomena based on events that precede or co-exist with (but not cause) a subsequent event

Analogical reasoning

drawing conclusions about an object or phenomenon based on its similarities to something else

Deductive Reasoning

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and inductive reasoning.
2. Distinguish between inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning.
3. Know the four types of inductive reasoning.
4. Know the common logical fallacies.
5. Become a more critical listener to public speeches and more critical reader of source material.

Deductive Reasoning

The second type of reasoning is called **deductive reasoning**, or deduction, a type of reasoning in which a conclusion is based on the combination of multiple premises that are generally assumed to be true. It has been referred to as “reasoning from principle,” which is a good description. It can also be called “top-down” reasoning. However, you should not think of deductive reasoning as the opposite of inductive reasoning. They are two different ways of thinking about evidence.

First, deductive reasoning employs the **sylogism**, which is a three-sentence argument composed of a major premise (a generalization or principle that is accepted as true), a minor premise (an example of the major premise), and a conclusion. This conclusion has to be true if the major and minor premise are true; it logically follows from the first two statements. Here are some examples. The most common one you may have seen before.

All men are mortal. (Major premise: something everyone already agrees on)

Socrates is a man. (Minor premise: an example taken from the major premise.)

Socrates is mortal. (Conclusion: the only conclusion that can be drawn from the first two sentences.)

Major Premise: All State College students must take COMM 1110.

Minor Premise: Brittany is a State College student.

Conclusion: Brittany must take COMM 1110.

Major Premise: All dogs have fur.

Deductive reasoning

a type of reasoning in which a conclusion is based on the combination of multiple premises that are generally assumed to be true

Sylogism

a three-sentence argument composed of a major premise (a generalization or principle that is accepted as true), a minor premise (an example of the major premise), and a conclusion

Minor Premise: Fifi is a dog.

Conclusion: Fifi has fur.

Of course, at this point you may have some issues with these examples. First, Socrates is already dead and you did not need a syllogism to know that. The Greek philosopher lived 2,400 years ago! Second, these seem kind of obvious. Third, are there some exceptions to “All Dalton State College students must take COMM 1110”? Yes, there are; some transfer students do not, and certificate students do not. Finally, there are breeds of dogs that are hairless. Some people consider them odd-looking, but they do exist. So while it is true that all men are mortal, it is not true that all DSC students must take COMM 1110 or that all dogs have fur.

Consequently, the first criterion for syllogisms and deductive reasoning is that the premises have to be true for the conclusion to be true, even if the method is right. A right method and untrue premises will not result in a true conclusion. Equally, true premises with a wrong method will also not result in true conclusions. For example:

Major premise: All dogs bark.

Minor premise: Fifi barks.

Conclusion: Fifi is a dog.

You should notice that the minor premise is stated incorrectly. We know other animals bark, notably seals (although it is hard to think of a seal named “Fifi”). The minor premise would have to read “Fifi is a dog” to arrive at the logical conclusion, “Fifi barks.” However, by restating the major premise, you have a different argument.

Major premise: Dogs are the only animals who wag their tails when happy.

Minor premise: Fifi wags her tail when happy.

Conclusion: Fifi is a dog.

Another term in deductive reasoning is an **enthymeme**. This odd word refers to a syllogism with one of the premises missing.

Major premise: *(missing)*

Minor premise: Daniel Becker is a chemistry major.

Conclusion: Daniel Becker will make a good SGA president.

Enthymeme
a syllogism with one of the premises missing

What is the missing major premise? “Chemistry majors make good SGA presidents.” Why? Is there any support for this statement? Deductive reasoning is not designed to present unsupported major premises; its purpose is to go from what is known to what is not known in the absence of direct observation. If it is true that chemistry majors make good SGA presidents, then we could conclude Dan will do a good job in this role. But the premise, which in the enthymeme is left out, is questionable when put up to scrutiny.

Major premise: Socialists favor government-run health care.

Minor premise: *(missing)*

Conclusion: Candidate Fran Stokes favors government-run health care.

Consequently, it is best to avoid enthymemes with audiences and to be mindful of them when used by persuaders. They are mentioned here to make you aware of how commonly they are used as shortcuts. Enthymemes are common in advertising. You may have heard the slogan for Smucker’s jams, “With a name like Smucker’s, it has to be good.”

Major premise: Products with odd names are good products. (questionable!)

Minor premise: “Smucker’s” is an odd name.

Conclusion: Smucker’s is a good product.

To conclude, deductive reasoning helps us go from known to unknown and can lead to reliable conclusions if the premises and the method are correct. It has been around since the time of the ancient Greeks. It is not the flipside of inductive but a separate method of logic. While enthymemes are not always errors, you should listen carefully to arguments that use them to be sure that something incorrect is not being assumed or presented.

Logical Fallacies

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and inductive reasoning.
2. Distinguish between inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning.
3. Know the four types of inductive reasoning.
4. Know the common logical fallacies.
5. Become a more critical listener to public speeches and more critical reader of source material.

Logical Fallacies

The second part of achieving a logical speech is to avoid logical fallacies. **Logical fallacies** are mistakes in reasoning—getting one of the formulas, inductive or deductive, wrong. There are actually dozens upon dozens of fallacies, some of which have complicated Latin names. This chapter will deal with 18 of the most common ones that you should know to avoid poor logic in your speech and to become a critical thinker.

False Analogy

A **false analogy** is a fallacy where two things are compared that do not share enough key similarities to be compared fairly. As mentioned before, for analogical reasoning to be valid, the two things being compared must be essentially similar—similar in all the important ways. Two states could be analogous, if they are in the same region, have similar demographics and histories, similar size, and other aspects in common. Georgia is more like Alabama than it is like Hawaii, although both are states. An analogy between the United States and, for example, a tiny European country with a homogeneous population is probably not a valid analogy, although common.

False Cause

False cause is a fallacy that assumes that one thing causes another, but there is no logical connection between the two. A cause must be direct and strong enough, not just before or somewhat related to cause the problem. In a false cause fallacy, the alleged cause might not be strong or direct enough. For example, there has been much debate over the causes of the recession in 2008. If someone said, “The exorbitant salaries paid to professional athletes contributed to the recession” that would be the fallacy of false cause. Why? For one thing, the salaries, though large, are an infinitesimal part of the whole economy. Second, those salaries only affect a small number of people. Third, those salaries have nothing to do with housing market or the management of the large car companies, banks, or Wall Street, which had a stronger and more direct effect on the economy as a whole.

False analogy

a fallacy where two things are compared that do not share enough (or key) similarities to be compared fairly

Slippery Slope

A **slippery slope** fallacy is a type of false cause which assumes that taking a first step will lead to subsequent events that cannot be prevented. The children's book, *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* is a good example of slippery slope; it tells all the terrible things (from a child's point of view) that will happen, one after another, if a moose is given a muffin. If A happens, then B will happen, then C, then D, then E, F, G and it will get worse and worse and before you know it, we will all be in some sort of ruin. So, don't do A or don't let A happen, because it will inevitably lead to Z, and of course, Z is terrible.

This type of reasoning fails to look at alternate causes or factors that could keep the worst from happening, and often is somewhat silly when A is linked right to Z. A young woman may say to a young man asking her out, "If I go out with you Thursday night, I won't be able to study for my test Friday. Then I will fail the test. Then I will fail the class. Then I will lose my scholarship. Then I will have to drop out of college. Then I will not get the career I want, and I'll be 30 years old still living with my parents, unmarried, unhappy, and no children or career! That's why I just can't go out with you!" Obviously, this young woman has gone out of her way to get out of this date, and she has committed a slippery slope. Additionally, since no one can predict the future, we can never be certain on the direction a given chain of events will lead.

Slippery slope arguments are often used in discussions over emotional and hot button topics such as gun control and physician-assisted suicide. One might argue that "If guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns," a bumper sticker you may have seen. This is an example of a slippery slope argument because it is saying that any gun control laws will inevitably lead to no guns being allowed at all in the U.S. and then the inevitable result that only criminals will have guns because they don't obey gun control laws anyway. While it is true criminals do not care about gun laws, we already have a large number of gun laws and the level of gun ownership is as high as ever.

However, just because an argument is criticized as a slippery slope, that does not mean it is a slippery slope. Sometimes actions do lead to far-reaching but unforeseen events, according to the "law of unintended consequences." We should look below the surface to see if the accusation of slippery slope is true.

For example, in regard to the anti-gun control "bumper sticker," an investigation of the facts will show that gun control laws have been ineffective in many ways since we have more guns than ever now (347 million, according to a website affiliated with the National Rifle Association). However, according to the Brookings Institution, there are

"...about 300 major state and federal laws, and an unknown but shrinking number of local laws'. . . Rather than trying to base arguments for more or fewer laws on counting up the current total, we would do better to study the impact of the laws we do have." (Vernicko & Hepburn, 2002, p. 2).

Note that in the previous paragraph, two numerical figures are used, both from sources that are not free of bias. The National Rifle Association obviously opposes gun restrictions and does not support the idea that there are too many guns. Their website gives the background to show how that figure was discovered. The Brookings Institution is a "think-tank" (a group of scholars who write about public issues) that advocates gun control. Their article explains how it came to its number of state and federal laws, but admits that it omitted many local laws about carrying or firing guns in public places. So the number is actually higher, by its own admission. The Brookings Institution does not think there are too many laws; it thinks there should be more, or at least better enforced ones.

This information about the sources is provided to make a point about possible bias in sources and about critical thinking and reading, or more specifically, reading carefully to understand your sources. Just finding a source that looks pretty good is not enough. You must ask important questions about the way the information is presented.

Hasty Generalization

Making a **hasty generalization** means making a generalization with too few examples. It is so common that we might wonder if there are any legitimate generalizations. The key to generalizations is how the conclusions are "framed" or put into language. The conclusions should be specific and be clear about the limited nature of the sample. Even worse is when the generalization is also applied too hastily to other situations. For example:

Premise: Albert Einstein did poorly in math in school.

Conclusion: All world-renowned scientists do poorly in math in school.

False cause

a general fallacy involving causal reasoning, where it is assumed that something that is neither strong or direct enough has caused something else, or something that happened first in time caused something later

Slippery slope

a fallacy that assumes that taking a first step will lead to subsequent events that cannot be prevented

Hasty generalization

a fallacy that involves making a generalization with too few examples

Secondary Conclusion: I did poorly at math in school, so I will become a world-renowned scientist.

Or this example that college professors hear all the time.

Premise: Mark Zuckerberg dropped out of college, invented Facebook, and made billions of dollars.

Premise: Bill Gates dropped out of college, started Microsoft, and made billions of dollars.

Conclusion: Dropping out of college leads to great financial success.

Secondary conclusion: A college degree is unnecessary.

Straw Man

A **straw man** fallacy is a fallacy that shows only the weaker side of an opponent's argument in order to more easily tear it down. The term "straw man" brings up the image of a scarecrow, and that is the idea behind the expression. Even a child can beat up a scarecrow; anyone can. Straw man fallacy happens when an opponent in a debate misinterprets or takes a small part of his/her opponent's position in a debate and blows that misinterpretation or small part out of proportion and makes it a major part of the opponent's position. This is often done by ridicule, taking statements out of context, or misquoting.

Politicians, unfortunately, commit the straw man fallacy quite frequently. If someone argues that college professors don't care about students' learning because they say, "you must read the chapter to understand the material; I can't explain it all to you in class," that is taking a behavior and making it mean something it doesn't. If someone states, "College A is not as good as College B because the cafeteria food at College A is not as good" is a pretty weak argument—and making too big of a deal over of a minor thing—for attending one college over another.

Straw man

a fallacy that shows only the weaker side of an opponent's argument in order to more easily tear it down

Post hoc ergo propter hoc

This long Latin phrase means "After the fact, therefore because of the fact." Also called historical fallacy, this one is an error in causal reasoning. Historical fallacy uses progression in time as the reason for causation, but nothing else. In this scenario, A happens, then B happens; therefore A caused B. The fallacy states that because an event takes place first in time, it is the cause of an event that takes place later in time. We know that is not true, but sometimes we act as if it is.

Elections often get blamed for everything that happens afterward. It is true that a cause must happen first or before the effect, but it doesn't mean that everything or anything that happens beforehand must be the cause. In the example given earlier, a football team losing its game five days earlier can't be the reason for a student failing a test just because it happened first.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc (historical fallacy)

using progression in time as the reason for causation, but nothing else

Argument from Silence

You can't prove something from nothing. If the constitution, legal system, authority, or the evidence is silent on a matter, then that is all you know. You cannot conclude anything about that. "I know ESP is true because no one has ever proven that it isn't true" is not an argument. Here we see the difference between fallacious and false. Fallacious has to do with the reasoning process being incorrect, not with the truth or falseness of the conclusion. If I point to a girl on campus and say, "That girl is Katy Perry," I am simply stating a falsehood, not committing a fallacy. If I say, "Her name is Katy Perry and the reason I know that is because no one has ever told me that her name is not Katy Perry" (argument from silence), that is a fallacy and a falsehood.

Statistical fallacies

The first type of statistical fallacy is "small sample," the second is "unrepresentative sample," and the third is a variation of appeal to popularity (discussed below). In small sample, an argument is being made from too few examples, so it is essentially hasty generalization. In unrepresentative sample, a conclusion is based on surveys of people who do

Argument from Silence

Making a converse argument from lack of evidence or information about a conclusion

not represent, or resemble, the ones to whom the conclusion is being applied. If you ever take a poll on a website, it is not “scientific” because it is unrepresentative. Only people who go to that website are participating, and the same people could be voting over and over. In a scientific or representative survey or poll, the pollsters talk to different socio-economic classes, races, ages, and genders and the data-gathering is very carefully performed.

If you go to the president of your college and say, “We need to have a daycare here because 90% of the students say so,” but you only polled ten students, that would be small sample. If you say, “I polled 100 students,” that would still be small, but better, unless all of them were your friends who attended other colleges in the state. That group would not be representative of the student body. If you polled 300 students but they were all members of the same high school graduating class and the same gender as you, that would also be unrepresentative sample.

In the end, a survey indicates trends in opinions and behaviors, not the future and not the truth. We have lots of polls before the election, but only one poll matters—the official vote on Election Day.

Non Sequitur

Non sequitur is Latin for “it does not follow.” It’s an all-purpose fallacy for situations where the conclusion sounds good at first but then you realize there is no connection between the premises and the conclusion. If you say to your supervisor, “I need a raise because the price of BMWs went up,” that is a *non sequitur*.

Inappropriate Appeal to Authority

There are appropriate appeals to authority, such as when you use sources in your speech who are knowledgeable, experienced, and credible. But not all sources are credible. Some may be knowledgeable about one field but not another. A person with a Nobel Prize in economics is not qualified to talk about medicine, no matter how smart he/she is (the economist could talk about the economic factors of medicine, however). Of course, the most common place we see this is in celebrity endorsements on commercials.

Non sequitur

a fallacy where the conclusion does not follow from its premise

False Dilemma

This one is often referred to as the “either-or” fallacy. When you are given only two options, and more than two options exist, that is false dilemma. Usually in false dilemma, one of the options is undesirable and the other is the one the persuader wants you to take. False dilemma is common. “America: Love it or Leave It.” “If you don’t buy this furniture today, you’ll never get another chance.” “Vote for Candidate Y or see our nation destroyed.”

Appeal to Tradition

Essentially, appeal to tradition is the argument, “We’ve always done it this way.” This fallacy happens when traditional practice is the only reason for continuing a policy. Tradition is a great thing. We do many wonderful things for the sake of tradition, and it makes us feel good. But doing something only because it’s always been done a certain way is not an argument. Does it work? Is it cost effective? Is some other approach better? If your college library refused to adopt a computer database of books in favor of the old card catalog because “that’s what libraries have done for decades,” you would likely be upset and argue they need to get with the times. The same would be true if the classrooms all still had only chalkboards instead of computers and projectors.

False Dilemma

a fallacy that forces listeners to choose between two alternatives when more than two alternatives exist

Bandwagon

This fallacy is also referred to as “appeal to majority” and “appeal to popularity,” using the old expression of “get on the bandwagon” to support an idea. Essentially, *bandwagon* is a fallacy that asserts that because something is popular (or seems to be), it is therefore good, correct, or desirable. In a sense it was mentioned before, under statistical fallacies. Of course, you’ve probably heard it or said it many times: “Everybody is doing it.” Well, of course, everybody is not doing it, it just seems like it. And the fact (or perception) that more than 50% of the population is engaging in an activity does not make that a wise activity.

Many times in history over 50% of the population believed or did something that was not good or right, such as believing the earth was

Appeal to Tradition

Arguing that traditional practice and long-term history is the only reason for continuing a policy

Bandwagon

the center of the solar system and the sun orbited around the earth. In a democracy we make public policy to some extent based on majority rule, but we also have protections for the minority. This is a wonderful part of our system. It is sometimes foolish to say that a policy is morally right or wrong or wise just because it is supported by 50% of the people. So when you hear a public opinion poll that says, “58% of the population thinks...” keep this in mind. Also, all it means is that 58% of the people on a survey indicated a belief or attitude on a survey, not that the belief or attitude is correct.

a fallacy that assumes that because something is popular, it is therefore good, correct, or desirable

Red Herring

This one has an interesting history, and you might want to look it up. A herring is a fish, and it was once used to throw off or distract foxhounds from a particular scent. A **red herring**, then, is creating a diversion or introducing an irrelevant point to distract someone or get someone off the subject of the argument. When a politician in a debate is asked about his stance on immigration, and the candidate responds, “I think we need to focus on reducing the debt. That’s the real problem!”, he is introducing a red herring to distract from the original topic under discussion. If someone argues, “We should not worry about the needs of people in other countries because we have poor people in the United States,” that may sound good on the surface, but it is a red herring *and* a false dilemma (either-or) fallacy. It is possible to address poverty in this country and other countries at the same time.

Ad Hominem

This Latin term means “argument to the man,” and generally refers to a fallacy that attacks the person rather than dealing with the real issue in dispute. A person using **ad hominem** connects a real or perceived flaw in a person’s character or behavior to an issue he or she supports, asserting that the flaw in character makes the position on the issue wrong. Obviously, there is no connection. In a sense, *ad hominem* is a type of red herring because it distracts from the real argument. In some cases, the “hidden agenda” is to say that because someone of bad character supports an issue or argument, therefore the issue or argument is not worthy or logical.

Red herring

creating a diversion or introducing an irrelevant point to distract someone or get someone off the subject of the argument

A person using *ad hominem* might say, “Climate change is not true. It is supported by advocates such as Congressman Jones, and we all know that Congressman Jones was convicted of fraud last year.” This is not to say that Congressman Jones should be re-elected, only that climate change’s being true or false is irrelevant to his fraud conviction. Do not confuse *ad hominem* with poor credibility or ethos. A speaker’s ethos, based on character or past behavior, does matter. It just doesn’t mean that the issues he or she supports are logically or factually wrong.

Ad hominem

a fallacy that attacks the person rather than dealing with the real issue in dispute

Ad Misericordium

This Latin term means “appeal to pity” and sometimes that term is used instead of the Latin one. There is nothing wrong with pity and human compassion as an emotional appeal in a persuasive speech; in fact, that is definitely one you might want to use if it is appropriate, such as to solicit donations to a worthwhile charity. However, if the appeal to pity is used to elicit an emotional appeal and cover up a lack of facts and evidence, it is being used as a smokescreen and is deceiving the audience. If a nonprofit organization tried to get donations by wrenching your heartstrings, that emotion may divert your attention from how much of the donation really goes to the “cause.” Chapter 3 of this book looked at ethics in public speaking, and intentional use of logical fallacies is a breach of ethics, even if the audience accepts them and does not use critical thinking on its own.

Plain Folks

Plain folks is a tactic commonly used in advertising and by politicians. Americans do not like elitism, so powerful persons will often try to make themselves appear like the “common man.” A man running for Senate may walk around in a campaign ad in a flannel shirt, looking at his farm. (Flannel shirts are popular for politicians, especially in the South.) A businessman of a large corporation may want you to think his company cares about the “little guy” by showing the owner helping on the assembly line. The image that these situations create says, “I’m one of the guys, just like

Ad misericordium

inappropriate appeal to pity or emotions to hide lack of facts or argument

you.” There is nothing wrong with wearing a flannel shirt and looking at one’s farm, unless the reason is to divert from the real issues.

Guilt by Association

This fallacy is a form of false analogy based on the idea that if two things bear any relationship at all, they are comparable. No one wants to be blamed for something just because she is in the wrong place at the wrong time or happens to bear some resemblance to a guilty person. An example would be if someone argued, “Adolf Hitler was a vegetarian; therefore being a vegetarian is evil.” Of course, vegetarianism as a life practice had nothing to do with Hitler’s character. Although this is an extreme example, it is not uncommon to hear guilt by association used as a type of *ad hominem* argument. There is actually a fallacy called “*reductio ad Hitlerum*”—whenever someone dismisses logical arguments by bringing up Hitler out of nowhere.

There are other fallacies, many of which go by Latin names. You can visit other websites, such as <http://www.logicalfallacies.info/> for more types and examples. These 18 are a good start to helping you discern good reasoning and supplement your critical thinking knowledge and ability.

Conclusion

This chapter took the subject of public speaking to a different level in that it was somewhat more abstract than the other chapters. However, a public speaker is responsible for using good reasoning as much as she is responsible to have an organized speech, to analyze the audience, or to practice for effective delivery.

Something to Think About

You cannot hear logical fallacies unless you listen carefully and critically. Keep your ears open to possible uses of fallacies. Are they used in discussion of emotional topics? Are they used to get compliance (such as to buy a product) without allowing the consumer to think about the issues? What else do you notice about them?

[PART XXI]

Chapter 21: Special Occasion Speaking



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://cod.pressbooks.pub/communication/?p=690>

Understanding Special Occasion Speeches

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to

1. Understand the differences between research-based speeches (informative and persuasive) and special occasions speeches.
2. Identify the types of special occasion speeches.
3. Use language to create emotional and evocative phrases.
4. Understand the proper techniques for delivering a special occasion speech.

Understanding Special Occasion Speeches

Often the speaking opportunities life brings our way have nothing to do with specifically informing or persuading an audience; instead, we are most commonly asked to speak during special occasions in our lives. Whether you are standing up to give a speech at an awards ceremony or a toast at a wedding, knowing how to deliver speeches in a variety of different contexts is the nature of special occasion speaking. In this chapter, we are going to explore what special occasion speeches are as well as a number of types of special occasion speeches ranging from humorous to somber.

In broad terms, a **special occasion** speech is a speech designed to capture an audience's attention while delivering a message. Like informative or persuasive speeches, special occasion speeches should communicate a clear message, but the manner of speaking used is typically different. The word "special" in the term "special occasion speeches" is somewhat subjective in that while some speaking occasions truly are special occasions (e.g., a toast at a wedding, an acceptance speech at an awards banquet, a eulogy for a loved one), they can also be given at more mundane events, such as the hundreds of public relations speeches that big companies give every day. The goal of a special occasion speech is ultimately to stir an audience's emotions and make them feel a certain way in response to the situation or occasion.

Of all the types of speeches we are most likely to have to give during our lives, many of them will fall into the special occasion category. These often include speeches that are designed to inspire or motivate an audience to do something. These are, however, different from a

traditional persuasive speech. While special occasion speeches can be persuasive, we differentiate the two often based on the rhetorical situation itself. Let's say you're the coach of your child's Little League team or a project leader at your work. In both cases you might find yourself delivering a speech to motivate your teams that has the added effect of persuading them to do their best. You can imagine how giving a motivational speech like that would be different from traditional persuasive speaking, focusing on, for example, persuading a group of

Special Occasion Speech

a speech designed to capture an audience's attention while delivering a message

50-somethings to change their investment strategy or a group of your peers to vote for a certain candidate for Student Senate.

To help us think through how to be effective in delivering special occasion speeches, let's look at four key ingredients: preparation, adaptation to the occasion, adaptation to the audience, and mindfulness about the time.

Be Prepared

First, and foremost, the biggest mistake you can make when standing to deliver a special occasion speech is to underprepare or simply not prepare at all. We've stressed the need for preparation throughout this text, so just because you're giving a wedding toast or a eulogy doesn't mean you shouldn't think through the speech before you stand up and speak out. If the situation is impromptu, even jotting some basic notes on a napkin is better than not having any plan for what you are going to say.

Adapt to the Occasion

Not all content is appropriate for all occasions. If you are asked to deliver a speech commemorating the first anniversary of a school shooting, then obviously using humor and telling jokes wouldn't be appropriate. But some decisions about adapting to the occasion are less obvious. Consider the following examples:

- You are the maid of honor giving a toast at the wedding of your younger sister.
- You are receiving a Most Valuable Player award in your favorite sport.
- You are a sales representative speaking to a group of clients after a mistake has been discovered.
- You are a cancer survivor speaking at a high school student assembly.
- You are giving an after-dinner speech to the members of your fraternity.

How might you adapt your message and speaking style to successfully convey your message to these various audiences?

Remember that being a competent speaker is about being both personally effective and socially appropriate. Different occasions will call for different levels of social appropriateness. One of the biggest mistakes entertaining speakers can make is to deliver one generic speech to different groups without adapting the speech to the specific occasion. In fact, professional speakers always make sure that their speeches are tailored for different occasions by getting information about the occasion from their hosts. When we tailor speeches for special occasions, people are more likely to remember those speeches than if we give a generic speech.

Adapt to Your Audience

Once again, we cannot stress the importance of audience adaptation enough in this text. Different audiences will respond differently to speech material, so the more you know about your audience, the more likely you'll succeed in your speech. One of our coauthors was once at a conference for teachers of public speaking. The keynote speaker stood and delivered a speech on the importance of public speaking. While the speaker was good and funny, the speech really fell flat. The keynote speaker basically told the public speaking teachers that they should take public speaking courses because public speaking is important. Right speech, wrong audience!

Be Mindful of the Time

The last major consideration for delivering special occasion speeches successfully is to be mindful of your time. Different speech situations have their own conventions and rules with regard to time. Acceptance speeches and toasts, for example, should be relatively short (typically under five minutes). A speech of introduction should be *extremely* brief—just long enough to tell the audience what they need to know about the person being introduced in a style that prepares them to appreciate that person's remarks. In contrast, commencement speeches and speeches to commemorate events can run ten to twenty minutes in length.

It's also important to recognize that audiences on different occasions will expect speeches of various lengths. For example, although it's true that graduation commencement speakers generally speak for ten to twenty minutes, the closer that speaker heads toward twenty minutes the more fidgety the audience becomes. To hold the audience's attention, a commencement speaker would do well to make the closing minutes of the speech the most

engaging and inspiring portion of the speech. If you're not sure about the expected time frame for a speech, either ask the person who has invited you to speak or do some quick research to see what the average speech times in the given context tend to be.

Types of Special Occasion Speeches

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to

1. Understand the differences between research-based speeches (informative and persuasive) and special occasions speeches.
2. Identify the types of special occasion speeches.
3. Use language to create emotional and evocative phrases.
4. Understand the proper techniques for delivering a special occasion speech.

TYPES OF SPECIAL OCCASION SPEECHES

Unlike the informative and persuasive speeches you were required to give, special occasion speeches are much broader and allow for a wider range of topics, events, and approaches to be employed. However, while the following list of special occasion speeches is long, your instructor will have specific types of special occasion speeches that you will be allowed (or required) to do for class. But since you are like to give many special occasion speeches in your life, we want to cover everything you might need to know to give a good one.

Speeches of Introduction

The first type of special occasion speech is the **speech of introduction**, which is a mini-speech given by the host of a ceremony that introduces another speaker and his or her speech. Few things are worse than when the introducer of a speaker stands up and says, “This is Wyatt Ford. He’s going to talk about stress.” While we did learn the speaker’s name and the topic, the introduction falls flat. Audiences won’t be the least bit excited about listening to Wyatt’s speech.

Just like any other speech, a speech of introduction should be a complete speech and have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion—and you should do it all in under two minutes. This brings up another “few things are worse” scenario: an introductory speaker who rambles on for too long or who talks about himself or herself instead of focusing on the person being introduced.

Speech of introduction

a mini-speech given by the host of a ceremony that introduces another speaker and his or her speech

For an introduction, think of a hook that will make your audience interested in the upcoming speaker. Did you read a news article related to the speaker’s topic? Have you been impressed by a presentation you’ve heard the speaker give in the past? You need to find something that can grab the audience’s attention and make them excited about hearing the main speaker.

The body of your speech of introduction should be devoted to telling the audience about the speaker’s topic, why the speaker is qualified, and why the audience should listen (notice we now have our three main points). First,

tell your audience in general terms about the overarching topic of the speech. Most of the time as an introducer, you'll only have a speech title and maybe a paragraph of information to help guide this part of your speech. That's all right. You don't need to know all the ins and outs of the main speaker's speech; you just need to know enough to whet the audience's appetite. Next, you need to tell the audience why the speaker is a credible speaker on the topic. Has the speaker written books or articles on the subject? Has the speaker had special life events that make him or her qualified? Lastly, you need to briefly explain to the audience why they should care about the upcoming speech. The outline can be adjusted; for example, you can give the biographical information first, but these three areas should be covered.

The final part of a good introduction is the conclusion, which is generally designed to welcome the speaker to the lectern. Many introducers will conclude by saying something like, "I am looking forward to hearing how Wyatt Ford's advice and wisdom can help all of us today, so please join me in welcoming Dr. Wyatt Ford." At this point, you as the person introducing the speaker are "handing off" the speaking duties to someone else, so it is not uncommon to end your speech of introduction by clapping as the speaker comes on stage or shaking the speaker's hand.

Speeches of Presentation

The second type of special occasion speech is the **speech of presentation**. A speech of presentation is a brief speech given to accompany a prize or honor. Speeches of presentation can be as simple as saying, "This year's recipient of the Lavache Public Speaking prize is Ryann Curley," or could last up to five minutes as the speaker explains why the honoree was chosen for the award. An interesting example of a speech presenting an award is this one by Zoe Saldana for J.J. Abrams (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x03cGSzr8Q>).

When preparing a speech of presentation, it's always important to ask how long the speech should be. Once you know the time limit, then you can set out to create the speech itself. First, you should explain what the award or honor is and why the presentation is important. Second, you can explain what the recipient has accomplished in order for the award to be bestowed. Did the person win a race? Did the person write an important piece of literature? Did the person mediate conflict? Whatever the recipient has done, you need to clearly highlight his or her work. Lastly, if the race or competition was conducted in a public forum and numerous people didn't win, you may want to recognize those people for their efforts as well. While you don't want to steal the show away from winner, you may want to highlight the work of the other competitors or nominees.

Speech of presentation

a brief speech given to accompany a prize or honor

Speeches of Acceptance

The complement to a speech of presentation is the **speech of acceptance**. The speech of acceptance is a speech given by the recipient of a prize or honor. There are three typical components of a speech of acceptance: 1) thank the givers of the award or honor, 2) thank those who helped you achieve your goal, and 3) put the award or honor into perspective. First, you want to thank the people who have given you the award or honor and possibly those who voted for you. We see this done every year during the Oscars, "First, I'd like to thank the Academy and all the Academy voters."

Second, you want to give credit to those who helped you achieve the award or honor. No person accomplishes things in life on his or her own. We all have family members, friends, and colleagues who support us and help us achieve what we do in life, and a speech of acceptance is a great time to graciously recognize those individuals. Lastly, put the award in perspective. Tell the people listening to your speech why the award is meaningful to you. If you know you are up for an award, the odds of your winning are high. In order to avoid blubbing through an acceptance speech, have one ready. A good rule to remember is: Be thankful, be gracious, be short.

Speech of acceptance

a speech given by the recipient of a prize or honor

Speeches of Dedication

A fourth special occasion speech is the **speech of dedication**. A speech of dedication is delivered when a new store opens, a building is named after someone, a plaque is placed on a wall, a new library is completed, and so on. These speeches are designed to highlight the importance of the project and possibly those to whom the project has

been dedicated. Maybe your great-uncle has died and left your college tons of money, so the college has decided to rename one of the residence halls after him. In this case, you may be asked to speak at the dedication.

When preparing a speech of dedication, start by explaining how you are involved in the dedication. If the person to whom the dedication is being made is a relative, tell the audience that the building is being named after your great-uncle who bestowed a gift to his alma mater.

Second, you want to explain what is being dedicated. If the dedication is a new building or a pre-existing building, you want to explain the importance of the structure. You should then explain who was involved in the project.

If the project is a new structure, talk about the people who built the structure or designed it. If the project is a pre-existing structure, talk about the people who put together and decided on the dedication. Lastly, explain why the structure is important for the community in which it is located. If the dedication is for a new store, talk about how the store will bring in new jobs and new shopping opportunities. If the dedication is for a new wing of a hospital, talk about how patients will be served and the advances in medicine the new wing will provide the community.

Speech of dedication

a speech delivered to mark the unveiling, opening, or acknowledging of some landmark or structure

Toasts

At one time or another, almost everyone is going to be asked to deliver a toast. A **toast** is a speech designed to congratulate, appreciate, or remember. First, toasts can be delivered for the purpose of congratulating someone for an honor, a new job, or getting married. You can also toast someone to show your appreciation for something he or she has done. Lastly, we toast people to remember them and what they have accomplished.

When preparing a toast, the first goal is always to keep your remarks brief. Toasts are generally given during the middle of some kind of festivities (e.g., wedding, retirement party, farewell party), and you don't want your toast to take away from those festivities for too long.

Second, the goal of a toast is to focus attention on the person or persons being toasted—not on the speaker.

As such, while you are speaking, you need to focus your attention toward the people being toasted, both by physically looking at them and by keeping your message about them. You should also avoid any inside jokes between you and the people being toasted because toasts are public and should be accessible for everyone who hears them. To conclude a toast, simply say something like, "Please join me in recognizing Gina for her achievement" and lift your glass. When you lift your glass, this will signal to others to do the same and then you can all take a drink, which is the end of your speech.

Toast

a speech designed to congratulate, appreciate, or remember

Roasts

A **roast** is a very interesting and peculiar speech because it is designed to both praise and good-naturedly insult a person being honored. Because of this combination of purposes, it is not hard to argue that the roast is probably a challenging type of speeches to write given the difficult task of simultaneously praising and insulting the person. Generally, roasts are given at the conclusion of a banquet in honor of someone's life achievements. The television station *Comedy Central* has been conducting roasts of various celebrities for a few years, and if you've ever watched one, you'll know that the roasters don't pull any punches.

During a roast, the roaster will stand behind a lectern while the roastee is seated somewhere where he or she is clearly on display for the audience to see, thus allowing the audience to take in his or her reactions. Since half the fun of a good roast is watching the roastee's reactions during the roast, it's important to have the roastee clearly visible to the audience.

How does one prepare for a roast? First, you want to really think about the person who is being roasted. Does he or she have any strange habits or amusing stories in their past that you can discuss? When you think through these questions, you want to make sure that you cross anything off your list that is truly private information or will really hurt the person. The goal of a roast is to poke at him, not massacre him.

Second, when selecting which aspects to poke fun at, you need to make sure that the items you choose are widely known by your audience. Roasts work when the majority of people in the audience can relate to the jokes being made. If you have an inside joke with the roastee, bringing it up during roast may be great fun for the two of you,

Roast

a humorous speech designed to both praise and good-naturedly insult a person being honored

but it will leave your audience unimpressed. Lastly, end on a positive note. While the jokes are definitely the fun part of a roast, you should leave the roastee knowing that you truly do care about and appreciate the person.

Eulogies

A **eulogy** is a speech given in honor of someone who has died (Don't confuse "eulogy" with "elegy," a poem or song of mourning). Not to sound depressing, but since everyone who is alive will someday die, the chance of your being asked to give a eulogy someday for a friend, family member, or loved one is significant. However, when the time comes to deliver a eulogy, it's good to know what you're doing and to adequately prepare your remarks.

When preparing a eulogy, first you need to know as much information about the deceased as possible. The more information you have about the person, the more personal you can make the

Eulogy

a speech given in honor of someone who has died

eulogy. While you can rely on your own information if you were close to the deceased, it is always a good idea to ask friends and relatives of the deceased for their memories, as these may add important facets that may not have occurred to you. Of course, if you were not very close to the deceased, you will need to ask friends and family for information. Second, although eulogies are delivered on the serious and sad occasion of a funeral or memorial service for the deceased, it is very helpful to look for at least one point to be lighter or humorous. In some cultures, in fact, the friends and family attending the funeral will expect the eulogy to be highly entertaining and amusing.

Take, for example, Tom Arnold's eulogy of *Saturday Night Live* actor Chris Farley. During his speech at Farley's funeral, Arnold noted, "Chris was concerned about his size, and so he made sure that all of us who knew him well saw him naked at least once" (Glionna, 1998). Picturing the heavy-set comedian naked surely brought some humor to the somber proceedings, but Arnold knew Farley (and his audience) well enough to know that the story would be appropriate.

Knowing the deceased and the audience is vital when deciding on the type and amount of humor to use in a eulogy. You can imagine the audience being shocked and possibly offended if someone had suggested picturing Eleanor Roosevelt in the nude during her funeral. But it would be appropriate to tell a funny story about Uncle Joe's love for his rattletrap car or Aunt Mary's love of tacky Christmas sweaters. Ultimately, the goal of the humor or lighter aspects of a eulogy is to relieve the tension that is created by the serious nature of the occasion.

If you are ever asked to give a eulogy, that means you were probably close to the deceased and are experiencing shock, sadness, and disbelief at your loved one's passing. The last thing that you will want to do (or be in a mental state to do) is figure out how to structure your eulogy. To that end, here are three parts of a eulogy (i.e. main points) you can use to write one without worrying about being original with structure or organizational patterns.

Praise

The first thing you want to do when remembering someone who has passed away is remind the audience what made that person so special. So you will want to praise her and her accomplishments. This can include notable achievements (being an award winner; helping with charities), personal qualities ("she was always willing to listen to your problems and help in any way she could"), or anecdotes and stories (being a great mother; how she drove to college to visit you when you were homesick).

Lament

The second thing you want to do in a eulogy is to lament the loss. To **lament** means to express grief or sorrow, which is what everyone at a funeral has gathered to do. You will want to acknowledge that everyone is sad and that the deceased's passing will be difficult to get through. Here you might mention all the things that will no longer happen as a result of the death. "Now that Grandpa is gone, there won't be any more Sunday dinners where he cooks chicken on the grill or bakes his famous macaroni and cheese."

Console

Lament

to express grief or sorrow

The final step (or main point) in a eulogy is to **console** the audience, or to offer comfort in a time of grief. What you must remember (and many people often forget) is that a eulogy is not a speech for the person who has died; it is a speech for the people who are still living to try to help them deal with the loss. You will want to end your eulogy on a positive note. Offer some hope that someday, things will get

better. If the deceased was a religious person, this is where you might want to incorporate elements of that belief system. Some examples would include ideas like:

“Jim has gone home to be with the Lord and is looking down on us fondly today.”

Console

to offer comfort in a time of grief

“We may miss Aunt Linda deeply, but our memories of her will live on forever, and her impact on this world will not soon be forgotten.”

Using the Praise-Lament-Console format for eulogies gives you a simple system where you can fill in the sections with 1) why was the person good, 2) why you will miss him or her, and 3) how you and the audience will get through this loss. It sometimes also helps to think of the three points in terms of Past-Present-Future: you will praise the deceased for what he did when he was alive (the past), lament the loss you are feeling now (the present), and console your audience by letting them know that things will be all right (the future).

With regard to a eulogy you might give in class, you generally have two options for how to proceed: you can eulogize a real person who has passed away, or you can eulogize a fictional character (an alarmingly high number of students tend to eulogize Santa Claus for some reason). If you give a eulogy in class on someone in your life who has actually passed away (a relative or close friend), be aware that it is very common for students to become emotional and have difficulty giving their speech. Even though you may have been fine practicing at home and feel good about giving it, the emotional impact of speaking about a deceased loved one in front of others can be surprisingly powerful. Conversely, if you give a eulogy on a fictional character, and if your professor allows that, the one rule you must remember above everything else is that you must treat your eulogy as you would a real eulogy. You wouldn't make fun of or trivialize someone's life at an actual funeral, so don't do that in your eulogy for a serious speech assignment either.

Speeches of Farewell

A **speech of farewell** allows someone to say good-bye to one part of his or her life as he or she is moving on to the next part of life. Maybe you've accepted a new job and are leaving your current job, or you're graduating from college and entering the work force. Periods of transition are often marked by speeches of farewell. When preparing a speech of farewell, the goal should be to thank the people in your current position and let them know how much you appreciate them as you make the move to your next position in life. Second, you want to express to your audience how much the experience has meant to you. A farewell speech is a time to commemorate and think about the good times you've had. As such, you should avoid negativity during this speech. Lastly, you want to make sure that you end on a high note.

Speeches of Apology

Speeches of apology have become more and more commonplace. Every time we turn around, a politician, professional athlete, musician, or actor/actress is doing something reprehensible and getting caught. In fact, the speech of apology has quickly become a fodder for humor as well. Let's take a look at a real apology speech delivered by professional golfer Tiger Woods.

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs8nseNP4s0>).

When you need to make an apology speech, there are three elements that you need to include: be honest and take responsibility, say you're sorry, and offer restitution.

Speech of farewell

a speech allowing someone to say goodbye to one part of his or her life as he or she is moving on to the next part of life

Speech of apology

a speech designed to acknowledge wrongdoing, take responsibility, and offer restitution

First, a speaker needs to be honest and admit to doing something wrong. The worst apology speeches are those in which the individual tries to sidestep the wrongdoing. Second, say that you are sorry. People need to know that you are remorseful for what you've done. One of the problems many experts saw with Tiger Woods' speech is that he doesn't look remorseful at all. While the words coming out of his mouth were appropriate, he looked like a robot forced to read from a manuscript written by his press agent.

Lastly, you need to offer restitution. Restitution can come in the form of fixing something broken or a promise not to engage in such behavior in the future. Most people are very willing to forgive when they are asked sincerely.

Speeches for Commencements

A **speech of commencement** (or, as it is more commonly known, a “commencement speech”) is designed to recognize and celebrate the achievements of a graduating class or other group of people. These typically take place at graduation ceremonies. Nearly all of us have sat through commencement speeches at some point in our lives. And if you’re like us, you’ve heard good ones and bad ones. Numerous celebrities and politicians have been asked to deliver commencement speeches at colleges and universities. A famous and well-thought-out commencement speech was given by famed Harry Potter author J. K. Rowling at Harvard University in 2008 (found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkREt4ZB-ck>). Rowling’s speech has the perfect balance of humor and inspiration, which are two of the main ingredients of a great commencement speech.

If you’re ever asked to deliver a commencement speech, there are some key points to think through when deciding on your speech’s content.

Speech of commencement

a speech designed to recognize and celebrate the achievements of a graduating class or other group of people

- If there is a specific theme for the graduation, make sure that your commencement speech addresses that theme. If there is no specific theme, come up with one for your speech. Some common commencement speech themes are commitment, competitiveness, competence, confidence, decision making, discipline, ethics, failure (and overcoming failure), faith, generosity, integrity, involvement, leadership, learning, persistence, personal improvement, professionalism, reality, responsibility, and self-respect.
- Talk about your life and how graduates can learn from your experiences to avoid pitfalls or take advantages of life. How can your life inspire the graduates in their future endeavors?
- Make the speech humorous. Commencement speeches should be entertaining and make an audience laugh.
- Be brief! Nothing is more painful than a commencement speaker who drones on and on. Remember, the graduates are there to get their diplomas; their families are there to watch the graduates walk across the stage.
- Remember, while you may be the speaker, you’ve been asked to impart wisdom and advice for the people graduating and moving on with their lives, so keep it focused on *them*.
- Place the commencement speech into the broader context of the graduates’ lives. Show the graduates how the advice and wisdom you are offering can be utilized to make their own lives better.

Overall, it’s important to make sure that you have fun when delivering a commencement speech. Remember, it’s a huge honor and responsibility to be asked to deliver a commencement speech, so take the time to really think through and prepare your speech.

After-Dinner Speeches

After-dinner speeches are humorous speeches that make a serious point. These speeches get their name from the fact that they historically follow a meal of some kind. After-dinner speakers are generally asked to speak (or hired to speak) because they have the ability both to speak effectively and to make people laugh. First and foremost, after-dinner speeches are speeches and not stand-up comedy routines. All the basic conventions of public speaking previously discussed in this text apply to after-dinner speeches, but the overarching goal of these speeches is to be entertaining and to create an atmosphere of amusement.

After-dinner speaking is an extremely difficult type of speaking to do well because it is an entertaining speech that depends on the successful delivery of humor. People train for years to develop comic timing, or the verbal and nonverbal delivery used to enhance the comedic value of a message. But after-dinner speaking is difficult, not impossible. What follows is the method we recommend for developing a successful after-dinner speech.

After-dinner speech

a humorous speech that makes a serious point

First, use all that you have learned about informative or persuasive speeches to prepare a real informative or persuasive speech roughly two-thirds the length of what the final speech will become. That is, if you’re going to be giving a ten-minute speech, then your “real” informative or persuasive speech should be six or seven minutes in

length. This is the “serious message” portion of the speech where you will try to make a point of educating your audience.

Next, go back through the speech and look for opportunities to insert humorous remarks. Once you’ve looked through your speech and examined places for verbal humor, think about any physical humor or props that would enhance your speech. Physical humor is great if you can pull it off without being self-conscious. One of the biggest mistakes any humorist makes is to become too aware of what his or her body is doing because it’s then harder to be free and funny. As for props, after-dinner speakers have been known to use everything from oversized inflatable baseball bats to rubber clown noses. The goal for a funny prop is that it adds to the humor of the speech without distracting from its message.

Last, and probably most important, try the humor out on real, live people. This is important for three reasons. First, the success of humor depends heavily on delivery, and especially timing in delivery. You will need practice to polish your delivery so that your humor comes across. If you can’t make it through one of your jokes without cracking up, you will need to either incorporate the self-crackup into your delivery or forgo using that joke.

Second, just because you find something unbelievably funny in your head doesn’t mean that it will make anyone else laugh. Often, humor that we have written down on paper just doesn’t translate when orally presented. You may have a humorous story that you love reading on paper, but find that it just seems to drone on once you start telling it out loud. Furthermore, remember there is a difference between written and verbal language, and this also translates to how humor is interpreted. Third, you need to make sure the humor you choose will be appropriate for a specific audience. What one audience finds funny another may find offensive. Humor is the double-edged sword of public speaking. On one side, it is an amazing and powerful speaking tool, but on the other side, few things will alienate an audience more than offensive humor. If you’re ever uncertain about whether a piece of humor will offend your audience, don’t use it.

So you may now be asking, “What kind of topics are serious that I can joke about?” The answer to that, like the answer to most everything else in the book, is dependent on your audience and the speaking situation, which is to say any topic will work, while at the same time you need to be very careful about how you choose your topic.

Take, for example, the experience one of your authors had while he was attending a large university. One of the major problems that any large university faces is parking: the ratio of parking spaces to students at some of these schools can be 1:7 (one parking space for every seven students). In addressing this topic at a banquet, a student gave an after-dinner speech that addressed the problem of the lack of student parking. To do so, he camouflaged his speech as a faux-eulogy (fake eulogy) for the yellow and black board on the parking lot gates (see Image 15.1) that was constantly and consistently driven through by students wanting to access restricted parking. The student personified the board by noting how well it had done its job and lamented that it would never get to see its little toothpick children grow up to guard the White House. But underneath the humor incorporated into the speech was a serious message: this wouldn’t keep happening if there were adequate parking for students on campus.

Motivational Speeches

A **motivational speech** is designed not only to make an audience experience emotional arousal (fear, sadness, joy, excitement) but also to motivate the audience to do something with that emotional arousal. Whereas a traditional persuasive speech may want listeners to purchase product X or agree with ideology Y, a motivational speech helps to inspire people in a broader fashion, often without a clearly articulated end result in mind. As such, motivational speaking is a highly specialized form of persuasive speaking commonly delivered in schools, businesses, religious houses of worship, and club or group contexts. *The Toastmasters International Guide to Successful Speaking* (Slutsky & Aun, 1997) lists four types of motivational speeches: hero, survivor, religious, and success.

The **hero speech** is a motivational speech given by someone who is considered a hero in society (e.g., military speakers, political figures, and professional athletes). Just type “motivational speech” into YouTube and you’ll find many motivational speeches given by individuals who can be considered heroes or role models.

The **survivor speech** is a speech given by someone who has survived a personal tragedy or who

has faced and overcome serious adversity. In the following clip, cancer survivor Becky M. Olsen discusses being a

Motivational speech

a speech designed not only to make an audience experience emotional arousal (fear, sadness, joy, excitement) but also to motivate the audience to do something with that emotional arousal

Hero speech

a motivational speech given by someone who is considered a hero in society

cancer survivor (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuolu_C9_3g). Becky Olsen goes all over the country talking with and motivating cancer survivors to beat the odds.

The **religious speech** is fairly self-explanatory; it is designed to incorporate religious ideals into a motivational package to inspire an audience into thinking about or changing aspects of their religious lives. The final type of motivational speech is the **success speech**, which is given by someone who has succeeded in some aspect of life and is giving back by telling others how they too can be successful.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this section, you will almost certainly be limited by your professor with regards to which of these types of speeches you can give for your special occasion speech in class, but it is not unrealistic to think that you will be called upon at various points in your life to give one or more of these speeches. Knowing the types and basic structures will help when those moments arise.

Survivor speech

a speech given by someone who has survived a personal tragedy or who has faced and overcame serious adversity

Success speech

a speech given by someone who has succeeded in some aspect of life and is giving back by telling others how they too can be successful

Religious speech

a speech designed to incorporate religious ideals into a motivational package to inspire an audience into thinking about or changing aspects of their religious lives

Special Occasion Preparation

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to

1. Understand the differences between research-based speeches (informative and persuasive) and special occasions speeches.
2. Identify the types of special occasion speeches.
3. Use language to create emotional and evocative phrases.
4. Understand the proper techniques for delivering a special occasion speech.

SPECIAL OCCASION PREPARATION

Language

Special occasion speaking is so firmly rooted in the use of good language that it makes sense to address it here, drawing from concepts in Chapter 10. More than any other category of speech, the special occasion speech is arguably one where the majority of your preparation time will be specifically allocated towards the words you choose. This isn't to say you shouldn't have used good language in your informative and persuasive speeches, but that the emphasis shifts slightly in a special occasion speech.

For example, for your informative and persuasive speeches you were required to conduct research and cite your sources in a bibliography, which took you some amount of time to look up and format. In most cases, that probably won't happen in your special occasion speech. And to be honest, we're not sure what that would really sound like anyway. For example, you would probably have a tough time "researching" a eulogy on a loved one who has passed away ("According to Uncle Steve's Facebook post from July 15, Grandpa was a funny guy who said some crazy things.").

So for special occasion speeches, there is a trade-off. The time you *don't* spend doing research is now going to be reallocated towards crafting emotional and evocative phrases that convey the sentiment your speech is meant to impart.

The important thing to remember about using language effectively is that we are not talking about using big words just to sound smart. Do not touch a thesaurus! Good language isn't about trying to impress us with fancy words. It's about taking the words you are already comfortable and familiar with and putting them in the best possible order. Consider the following example from the then-president of the Ohio State University, Gordon Gee, giving a commencement address at Florida State University in 1997:

As you look back on your years at Florida State I hope you remember many good things that have happened. These experiences are, for the most part, events of the mind. The memories, ladies and gentlemen, however, are treasures of the heart.

Notice three things about his use of language: first, he doesn't try to use any fancy words, which he certainly could if he wanted to. Every word in this portion of his speech is one that all of us knew by the time we left elementary school, so again, don't mistake good language for big words. Using a five-syllable word when a two-syllable word will work just as well often means a speaker is trying too hard to sound smart. And given that the use of those big words often comes off sounding awkward or inappropriate, you're better off just sticking with what you know.

Second, notice how he uses those basic words to evoke emotion and wonderment. Putting the words you know into the best possible order, when done well, will make your speech sound extremely eloquent and emotional. Third, he uses parallelism in this brief snippet, one of the rhetorical techniques discussed in Chapter 10. The use of "events of the mind" and "treasures of the heart" to compare what is truly important about the college experience is powerful. Indeed, Gee's commencement is full of various rhetorical devices, with the twelve-minute speech also containing alliteration, assonance, and antithesis.

nonverbal Delivery

Just as the language for special occasion speaking is slightly different, so too are the ways in which you will want to deliver your speech. First and foremost, since you will be spending so much time crafting the perfect language to use and putting your words in the right order, it is imperative that you say exactly what you have written; otherwise, what was the point? To that end, your delivery for a special occasion speech will skew slightly more in favor of manuscript speaking discussed in Chapter 11. While it is still vital to establish eye contact with your audience and to not sound like you are reading, it is also important to get the words exactly right.

As much as you may not want to hear it, what this means is that you will need to practice your special occasion speech even more now than you did for your informative or persuasive speeches. You need to know what you are going to say and feel comfortable knowing what is coming next. This is not to say you should have your speech memorized, but you need to be able to take your eyes off the page in order to establish and maintain a rapport with your audience, a vital element in special occasion speaking because of the emotional component at the core of these speeches. Knowing your speech will also allow you to counteract the flow of adrenaline into your system, something particularly important given that special occasion speeches tend to be very emotional, not just for the audience, but for you as well.

Basically, knowing your speech well allows you to incorporate the emotion that a special occasion speech is meant to convey, something that is hard to do when you read the entirety of your speech. In this way your audience will sense the pride you feel for a graduating class during a commencement speech, the sorrow you feel for the deceased during a eulogy, or the gratitude you have when accepting an award.

Conclusion

Special occasion speaking is the most varied type of speaking to cover; however, there are some general rules to keep in mind regardless of what type you are engaged in. Remember that using good, evocative language is key, and that it is important that you deliver your speech in a way that both conveys the proper emotion for the occasion as well as allows you to give the speech exactly as you wrote it.

Sample Outline: Commemorative Speech on Edward Snowden

By Stacy Watts

Specific Purpose: To explain to my classmates why I admire Edward Snowden.

Introduction: I remember being a teenager and having parents who monitored what seemed like all of my actions. Could you imagine as an adult, having that same thing happen? Only this time it's not your parents, it's part of the government: the one thing that is supposed to stand for your freedoms and rights as an American. It's scary and enraging to think about, and yet that was happening to all of us. One man was so enraged by what was going on, he decided to act. That man is Edward Snowden and I admire him as a fellow American and upstanding human being.

Preview: I have great admiration for Edward Snowden for standing up for his beliefs, risking his life, and exhibiting bravery to face the media.

I. Edward Snowden is a man who selflessly stands up for what he believes in.

A. He took documents from the National Security Agency (NSA).

- B. Over time he would make copies of NSA documents.
- C. After setting up his plan, he then took the documents to the press.
- D. Through means of the press Snowden let the world know what the NSA was doing.
 - 1. He provided proof that citizens of the United States were having their basic right to privacy violated.
 - 2. In the documents, it was shown that text messages and phone calls were all being monitored by the NSA.

Transition: Like anyone who stands up for themselves or anyone else, Snowden risked it all.

- II. Edward Snowden knew and wasn't afraid that this meant putting his own life and well-being in danger.
 - A. After leaking the documents, Snowden was forced to give up many things.
 - 1. Working at the NSA meant a very comfortable salary for Snowden.
 - 2. In order to protect her, he had to leave behind his girlfriend.
 - 3. He now lives a life in exile.
 - B. The government had brought him up on charges, two of which could lead to the death penalty because of the Espionage Act.
 - 1. Unauthorized communication of national defense information.
 - 2. Willful communication of classified intelligence with an unauthorized person.

Transition: After risking his life, his fearless demeanor did not stop there.

- III. Snowden shows bravery when he is not afraid to face the media after everything was revealed.
 - A. After he leaked the information and was charged by the government Snowden still does interviews with the media.
 - 1. He did an interview with NBC this year.
 - 2. Also did an interview on Last Week Tonight with John Oliver.
 - B. A documentary was released about everything, Citizenfour.
 - 1. The film shows footage of his meetings with the journalist who helped leak the information.
 - 2. It shows that he is still in full support of his actions.

Conclusion: In conclusion, when looking at all Edward Snowden stood up for, I can only hope I could be that good of an American. Snowden saw the government invading the privacy of millions and believed it was wrong. He stood up for that belief, faced the risk of death and the loss of everything in America, and still had the courage to speak with the media. Knowing these things makes me want to have the courage to stand up for what I believe in.

Appendix A: Cultural Diversity in Public Speaking

Appendix A: Cultural Diversity in Public Speaking

It goes without saying that the United States is becoming more and more diverse. The millennial generation, those born between 1980 and 2000, are described the most diverse generation in American history. Forty-three percent are “non-white” due, in part, to increased immigration from Asia and Latin America in the recent past (Lilley, 2014). Even more, news stories and research indicate that the majority in the U.S. is not White, male, Protestant, and middle class, but multi-racial and ethnic, of different religions, 51% female, and of varying socio-economic groups. The population of Dalton State College is particularly affected by these long-term trends. Dalton’s Latino population is about 50% and the College’s Latino student enrollment is approximately 27%. These kinds of statistics may be similar to your institution.

Some issues related to the U.S.’s growing diversity were addressed in Chapter 2. In this appendix, we will look at how diversity can be a help and sometimes a challenge to a speaker.

Benefits and Challenges

The first way that diversity can be a help is if the speaker himself or herself has been exposed to diverse groups of people. Diversity should also be understood as not just ethnic or racial, although those tend to be in the forefront of many minds. Diversity of thought is often a more important type of diversity than what might appear on the surface. Your audience may “look” and “sound” like you, but have a completely different world view.

However, diversity can be a challenge because the more diverse an audience, the harder audience analysis and accommodating one’s speech to the audience become. Also, one must be sure that he or she truly understands the diversity of a group. For example, it is assumed that all Arabic speakers are Muslims; however, persons of Lebanese and Palestinian background may be of a Christian faith. As mentioned in Chapter 2, “Latino” is a broad term that involves many distinct cultures that often observe or utilize very different customs, holidays, political views, foods, and practices. The historical experience of African-Americans is not that of Afro-Caribbeans. A white person from South Africa considers herself “African,” although we in the U.S. might scratch our heads at that because of how we traditionally think of “African.”

The more one can study cross-cultural communication issues, the more sensitive one can become. It is, of course, next to impossible to know every culture intimately; some of us are still working on learning our own! What one should recognize is the basic ways that cultures are categorized or grouped, based on certain characteristics, while at the same time appreciating cultural uniqueness. Even more, appreciating cultural uniqueness leads one to see predominant communication styles.

One common method for categorizing or discussing cultures is by “collectivist” or “individualistic.” The United States, Germany, Israel, and a few other countries are highly individualistic, while Asian, some Latino, and some African cultures are highly collectivistic. While we in the U.S. value family, we generally are expected and encouraged to make our own life choices in career, education, marriage, and living arrangements. In more collectivist cultures, the family or larger community would primarily decide those life choices. In some cases, the individual makes decisions based on what is better for the community as a whole rather than what he or she would personally prefer.

Closely related to the distinction between collectivistic and individualistic cultures is the distinction between high-context and low-context. High-context cultures are so closely tied together that behavioral norms are

implicit, or not talked about clearly; they are just understood and have been learned through close observation. For example, if you and your friends have a routine of watching football every Sunday, saying, “I’ll see you guys this weekend for the game” implies that the “when” and “where” of the game is so ingrained that it doesn’t even need to be explicitly stated. Variations from the norms are so rare that learning them is easy; there is no confusion.

Low-context cultures have to be more explicit because individual freedoms and wider diversity of behavioral norms make learning through observations more difficult. Continuing the example from above, in these cases you might be gathering with a new group of friends who need explicit, high-context communication to know what is going on: “We’ll meet at Jay’s house on Bleaker Street at 11:30 on Sunday morning.”

High-context cultures are described as more

...relational, collectivist, intuitive, and contemplative. This means that people in these cultures emphasize interpersonal relationships. Developing trust is an important first step to any business transaction. . . . These cultures are collectivist, preferring group harmony and consensus to individual achievement. And people in these cultures are less governed by reason than by intuition or feelings. (Wilson, n.d.)

Unfortunately, due to cultural biases, this description may make individuals from high-context cultures sound “less than” in some ways compared to Western cultures, which are low-context cultures. This is something we should be very careful about in addressing an audience or developing relationships with those of other cultures. Low-context cultures are often described as more rational, action-oriented, practical, clear in their communication, efficient, precise, and factual. In contrast, high-context cultures spend more time on interpersonal trust, are less direct and straightforward, and may use more polite and flowery language. These descriptions can be problematic. Let us be clear that these descriptions are about generalized differences, but not about “better” or “worse” and definitely not about every individual member of the culture. A person from a high-context culture is perfectly capable of being rational, action-oriented, practical, etc. and a person from a low-context culture still values interpersonal trust and politeness.

Another way to distinguish cultural groups is how decisions are made and the predominant communication modes. As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, public speaking—a logical, rational, straightforward, individualistic mode of communication, where traditionally one person attempts to exert power over others through verbal means—is at the core of Western communication history. Public speaking exists in the context of debate, two opposing views being presented either for one side to “win” or for the audience to choose a compromised, hybrid position. Other cultures have traditionally taken a more narrative communication mode, with storytelling being the way the important information is conveyed, more indirectly. Others value group discussion and keeping the harmony of the group, while others value almost exclusively the advice of elders in decision making. They believe the past and those who have experienced more of it have a wisdom all their own and are worthy of more respect.

In reference to cultural differences, we see the differences most obviously in nonverbal communication. While we Westerners may think of these nonverbal communication differences (such as the traditional Asian practice of greeting with a bow instead of shaking hands) as simply quaint or only superficial, they reveal deep difference in the world views of each culture. It would be worth your time to look into (easily done on the Internet) why Asians traditionally bow and Westerners shake hands. The practices say a lot about our shared histories and our views of the past, religion, and interpersonal trust. Likewise, it is not unusual for adult men friends of the same age to walk hand-in-hand in some Middle Eastern countries, but that is pretty uncommon in the United States and has a totally different interpretation. In the two places, the same practice means two entirely different things.

Nonverbal communication, which is what is most obvious and visible to us when we experience a new culture, is divided into types such as:

- Oculistics (eye behavior)
- Haptics (touch behavior)
- Proxemics (distance from others)
- Vocalics (voice characteristics)
- Chronemics (use of time in communication)
- Kinesics (use of the arms, legs, and posture)
- Olfactics (the meaning of smell in communication)

- Objectics (the use of objects to convey or interpret meaning)

Each of these has unique patterns in various cultures, and the differences in nonverbal communication behavior are often not understood to have deeper cultural meanings. Some cultures may avoid eye contact out of respect; their high-context nature means direct confrontation is discouraged. Westerners, however, tend to judge low eye contact rather harshly, as either dishonest, disinterest, or low self-esteem. Likewise, Westerners value punctuality sometimes over relationships, although the higher the status of the individual, the more tolerant we can be of tardiness. Other cultures simply do not understand the Western love affair with the hands on the clock. People from the United States are sometimes seen by other cultures as loud (vocalics), too direct and forward (oculesics), taking up too much space (kinesics and proxemics), and uncomfortable with touch or close spaces (haptics and proxemics).

Of course, most audiences of different cultural backgrounds may include those for whom English is a second (or third or fourth) language. Humor columnist Dave Barry ironically wrote, “Americans who travel abroad for the first time are often shocked to discover that, despite all the progress that has been made in the last 30 years, many foreign people still speak in foreign languages” (“Dave Barry Quotes,” 2013). Often second language speakers’ use of correct English is as good as or better than some native speakers in the United States[¹], but there will be some areas of concern here.

Watch out for metaphors, slang, and figurative language that simply have no meaning to non-native speakers of English. Many American expressions have to do with sports—everything from poker to football—and have no significance to those who have not grown up around those sports.[²] Some of our expressions are actually racist or have a racist past, without our knowing or recognizing it because we do not know the origin of the phrase. When we say “bury the hatchet,” “go on the warpath,” or “put you in the paddy wagon,” “let’s hear from the peanut gallery,” or “I was gipped,” we are inadvertently referring to ethnic stereotypes as well as using references those of non-U.S. cultures would not understand.

Implications

What does all this mean to you, a college student taking a public speaking class? Well, as emerging technology makes communicating with people around the world easier and more common, there is a good chance you might find yourself communicating or interacting with persons from other cultures in your future careers. The ten items that follow should help you successfully navigate any such situations more effectively.

- Dealing with persons of other cultures may mean that the straightforward, supposedly rational approach expected from traditional public speaking may be too forceful for other cultures. More descriptive, more narrative, and more relational forms of communication may be of service. As mentioned in chapter 1, stories may be your most powerful form of communication, especially with audiences of diverse cultures. At the same time, choose your stories carefully (see the next bullet point below).
- Primarily, recognize the underlying values of the culture. The value and place of family stands out here. You would want to be sure to show respect to parents and grandparents in everything you say; if you cannot do that, do not mention them at all. Other values may have to do with how genders are treated, modesty in clothing, or criticism of the government.
- Do not jump to judge speakers of other cultures by Western standards. Time limits are a good example. While this book stresses speaking within time limits, a speaker from a high context culture may not see strict time limits as a standard for speaking and may go overtime.
- Know your audience. Know what they appreciate (positive) and what would concern them (negative).
- Approach humor very carefully. Humor is highly contextual, personal, and cultural. Test your humor on a group representative before the presentation.
- Show knowledge of their culture. If speaking to an audience made up predominantly of persons who speak a certain language, learning a greeting or phrase in that language is a way to gain rapport. You could also use appropriate holiday references. Two presidents known for their oratorical abilities used this technique. When John F. Kennedy spoke in Berlin in 1963, he famously said, “*Ich bin ein Berliner.*” (Although many have claimed he was actually saying the equivalent of “I am a Danish pastry” instead of

“I am a person from Berlin,” that myth has been debunked.) Either way, it did not matter; the crowd appreciated it. Ronald Reagan did much the same at the beginning of his historic “Tear Down This Wall” speech at the Brandenburg Gate in 1986. His accent was not great, but his grammar and message were clear.

- If the group is diverse, don’t leave out or marginalize someone by assuming all share exactly the same values or practices.
- Never “tokenize” someone by drawing attention to his or her difference, at least not without asking permission.
- Use the term preferred by the group to refer to them. Not all persons of Latin American descent want to be called “Latino/a,” according to the Pew Research Center (Lopez, 2013). In fact, more prefer Hispanic, which is the term used by the U.S. Census Bureau since the 1970.
- Always seek for commonalities over differences.

Below we have included some references sent to us by a professor in Zhuhai, People’s Republic of China. He shared them with us in reference to public speaking in Asian cultures. As the world becomes “smaller” and we are confronted with diversity more and more everyday, we should continue to build our knowledge and skill in intercultural communication.

Oliver, R.T. (1976). Rhetoric and the social matrix: Reflections from the Asian classics. *Communication: A Journal of the Communication Association of the Pacific*, 4(2), 134-151. (read p. 141-148).

Oliver, R.T. (2009). The rhetorical tradition in China: Confucius and Mencius. *Today’s Speech*, 17(1), 3-8. (read ALL)

Gunaratne, S.A. (2009). Emerging global divides in media and communication theory: European universalism versus non-Western reactions. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 19(4), 366-383. (read p. 373-376)

Appendix B: Succeeding as a College Student

Appendix B: Succeeding as a College Student

Part 1: How to Be a College Student

Part 2: Learning to Learn

Part 3: Reading your Textbooks and Other Resources

Part 4: Effective Memorization

Part 5: Test Anxiety/Speech Anxiety

Part 6: Test-Taking

Part 7: Avoiding Plagiarism in Writing and Speaking

Thanks to Ms. Cathy Hunsicker for authoring Parts 3, 4, 5, and 6. Thanks to Ms. Amy Mendes for authoring Part 7. Thanks to Ms. Amy Burger for authoring Appendix E

Part 1: How To Be a College Student

Many students who take a basic public speaking course are enrolled in their first semester or year of college. For that reason, in this third edition of *Exploring Public Speaking*, we include helpful material on making the life transition to being a college student and thus a lifelong learner. Your instructor may or may not assign you to read these appendices, but we hope you will consider reading them even if not assigned.

The Journey

In some ways, going to college is like taking a journey. It will feel like a different culture with a different language, customs, expectations, and even values. Consider these appendices as a guidebook for the journey.

In choosing the metaphor of a journey for college, we are comparing them on several factors.

1. Like a journey, rather than a weekend trip, college is a long process. The journey takes time.
2. A journey goes through different terrain. Sometimes you will feel like it's more uphill than downhill.
3. A journey involves guides, people who have been there before and have wisdom about the way to get to the destination. These are your professors mostly, but also your academic advisors, peer mentors, administrators, older students, and staff in Enrollment Services and the Dean of Students' Office.
4. A journey requires a map. This is, for the most part, the college catalog that tells you what courses are required to fulfill your major. Your advisor can also probably provide you with a "course plan," which breaks down in order which classes you should try to take each semester.
5. A journey has a destination. Here is where you might find that your values are different from your professors or mentors.

Your destination for now is probably the career you see yourself working in five years or more from now. You probably chose a major or perhaps even the college based on that career destination. That is reasonable and you were probably encouraged by your high school teachers, counselors, spiritual advisors, and parents to do that.

Why College?

However...there are a few problems with approaching college with only a career destination focus.

First, you are likely to change your mind. Most college students do at some point. In fact, according to Gordon, Haubley, et al (2000), *50% – 70% of students change their majors at least once, and most will change majors at least 3 times before they graduate.*

Second, you may have to change your mind about your major. Some college majors are competitive, meaning a fraction of those who want to get into them are allowed in, based on grades and other factors.

Third, you might want to change majors as you are exposed to new ideas and career fields you didn't even know about.

Fourth, the career you end up in may not even have been invented yet. In 2007, when my son started college as a communication major, no one had heard of a social media director. That is what he does now. Conversely, some of the hottest jobs now might not be so hot in five years. Technology is changing, knowledge is expanding, politics alter realities, and the population is getting generally older. These trends will affect the kinds of jobs that are created.

Fifth, and more to my point, college is about becoming a better version of you, not just getting a job. If you see the main point of college as coming out with a career, you will miss some of the best parts of the journey. Or even worse, if you feel that every class is just an obstacle to that career rather than a stepping stone to being a more prepared individual for that career, you will miss the value of each class. And let's face it; you are going to take at least forty classes over the next four to six years. You want to enjoy them, not just see most of them as roadblocks to getting out.

Now, don't get me wrong. I am **not** saying to spend all this time, effort, and money to get a piece of paper that doesn't take you to a career path. But note, I say career path. It is highly unlikely you will not walk off the platform after graduation and into the perfect job you will stay in for decades. The reality of today's workplace is that you will have many positions and perhaps many careers over your forty or fifty years of work life, and college cannot prepare you specifically for all of them right now.

What college prepares you for is to be a lifelong learner who can adapt yourself and your skills to the new jobs the marketplace will create or will interest you in the future, and the new skills you will be expected to have in your chosen career field. If you want to be a registered nurse and graduate with a bachelor of science in nursing, that will just be the beginning of your learning to be a good nurse.

You have probably heard it before, but the top skills employers want, inappropriately called "soft skills," have more to do with personal abilities. Team work, critical thinking, work ethic, spoken and written communication, conflict resolution, and group facilitation are common skills seen on lists of what employers want in new hires. (Go ahead and do an Internet search for this subject, and you will see what I mean). The soft skills, which are really not soft but the basis of your success, are what you learn in college classes and college experiences outside of the classroom. (The term "soft" does not refer to them being squishy but fluid and transferable to different contexts.)

In other words, college is not a vocational program that trains you for a specific job. If that goal interests you, you should consider it, because the workplace desperately needs skilled workers such as electricians, plumbers, technicians, and the like. College is designed to help you attain (not give you) a wide set of skills and knowledge so you can adapt, grow, communicate, and learn no matter what field you pursue, as well as given you more specific skills for positions where you will need the "soft skills."

Also, college will not be the end of your learning. You may want to attain another credential or degree after graduating from college. You will definitely be expected by your employers to be involved in for-credit and not-for-credit continuing education. This is the just the beginning of the learning journey. Yes, you have been learning since birth and in school since you were four or five, but there is one difference now: you are learning because you want to. Learning is now your choice.

So, every part of the college experience, even the hard parts, should be seen as part of the journey. If you're hiking in the mountains, the view from the top will be magnificent but you might sweat a lot, trip and get scrapes, or tramp through some thorny bushes before you reach the summit.

However, if you **prepare** for the journey and stay on the right path, many of the problems can be avoided. That is the purpose of these appendices.

Preparation

Of course, much of your preparation for college came in your K-12 years. You learned to read and write, solve equations, perhaps speak the basics of a foreign language, and perform many other academic tasks. You also probably learned about working with others, solving problems, and taking responsibility through musical groups, sports teams, clubs, and other extracurricular activities. In some ways, college will be a continuation of those years, but many students find that high school did not prepare them for everything that college brings. There are many reasons for this lack of preparation. The question is, “If you find yourself unprepared, what can you do about it?” That is the subject of these appendices: Getting the big picture of what college is about; understanding your friend, the instructor; time management; appreciating how we learn and you learn individually; studying, reading, and test-taking; and avoiding the plagiarism trap. We will finish up with some resources on campus.

Part 1 of Appendix B will deal with the first two; the others will address the remaining five.

Getting the Big Picture of College

The institution of the university has actually been around longer than high schools or elementary schools. The first university was founded in Morocco in 859 C.E., the University of Karueein. (A college is traditionally considered a section of a university as well as an independent unit; today “universities” usually refer to institutions with graduate programs.) Oxford University in England came along in 1096. For that reason, centuries of tradition still cling to the culture of colleges and universities. Traditions change slowly, especially when they have been around over 1000 years! Part of being a college student is to learn the physical and cultural terrain of the college, much of which comes from traditions.

Colleges and universities are generally separated into public and private. In most cases, public institutions are in a system of related colleges or universities in a state. Dalton State, for example, is a unit of the University System of Georgia, which means a number of positive things for you. You have access to books in all the libraries in the University System, as well as other resources. Your credits can transfer easily to other institutions, although we hope you decide to stay here and not transfer! To a large extent, the curriculum (the nature and number of courses you take) is determined by the University System of Georgia.

A college degree is either a two-year (associate of arts or science) or four-year (bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, bachelor of fine arts, bachelor of social work, bachelor of business administration, etc.). Associate’s degrees are usually limited to 60 required hours. A bachelor’s degree is usually limited to 120 hours. There are, of course, exceptions to these standards. At Dalton State, there are 42 hours of required “core” classes. Although you have some options to choose from here, you still have to take a certain set of classes. These 42 hours are divided into five areas called A-E:

A: Essential Areas (English 1101, 1102, and a math course) B: Institutional Options (for Dalton State, you take COMM 1110 and a one-hour academic elective) C: Literature and Fine Arts D: Science and Math, including two lab sciences E: Social Sciences (including required American Government and U.S. History)

Then there is Area F, 18 hours, which will be different depending on your major. In some majors you have choices in Area F; in some, for example, everything is set by state or accreditation standards. Other colleges, public and private, typically have similar breakdowns or requirements for “core” classes. Then in the junior and senior year, the student takes 60 or more hours of courses in the major and perhaps a minor.

Many students feel that some of their freshman year classes are repeats of what they had in high school. Unless you took AP or dual enrollment classes, your freshman year classes will be much more demanding than those high school classes, even if some of the material is review.

How will they be more demanding? First, you don’t get “do-overs” on tests. It is common for some high schools to let students take tests over until they are passed. A failure on a college exam is, well, a failure. You might be able to bring the grade up on the next tests, but you will rarely get a second try on that test. Second, you are expected to be self-regulating and self-directed as a learner (see Part 2 on “Learning to Learn.”). You are a legal adult, so you are supposed to take responsibility as an adult. Third, there will be much more material on any one test than you probably had in high school, which is one of the things new college students find daunting. Fourth, your instructor may primarily lecture instead of having the class do activities, projects, or field trips, and the classes may be 75 minutes of straight instruction, even lecture.

All that said, the curriculum of college is not something a bunch of people in a room thought up last week. It is the result of those hundreds of years of what has traditionally been considered important to a college education.

History—how did we get to where we are? Social sciences—how do we relate to other people? Literature, language, and public speaking—what are the best ideas and how do we communicate them? Sciences—how does the physical world work? Math—what is the logic behind numbers? You can argue about the value of any one of them, but years of tradition have solidified that these are what an educated person needs to know about. The configurations of classes may differ from college to college, but the basic concepts are the same.

Advising and Your Classes

The subject of the curriculum brings us to another matter that students often do not understand about college. Each college or university system is “autonomous.” Each has its own curriculum and set of required classes for a particular major or degree. Each college has the right to accept or not accept courses for transfer from another institution. This may seem unfair, but that is part of the tradition of higher education and not likely to change anytime soon. If you transfer to from a public to a private institution, or vice versa, or to a college out of state, some of your credits may not be accepted for transfer there.

Also, our academic advisors cannot advise you for another institution, only for this one. If you plan on transferring, you are responsible to talk to the other institution about requirements and what will transfer. Since you don’t want to take a class that will not count for your final degree and you don’t want to lose time, credits, and money, be in contact with the school you hope to attend later.

Speaking of advisors, they are your best resource for making educational choices. At the same time, they want you to develop the ability to make your own academic decisions, specifically by being able to read the catalog, the course plan, Banner and DegreeWorks (these last two are common student record and degree auditing systems). You can then see what classes you need each semester and design your schedule. They are willing to help you in the freshmen year or if you change your major, but after a while the advisor (who might be a faculty member) will want you to take ownership of this process, with their help and approval. Some things to keep in mind about advising:

- As freshmen, almost all the courses you are required to take in Area A through E are offered frequently, usually every semester and with many sections, so you will not have trouble finding those courses when you need them.
- As you become a junior and senior, the courses may only be offered once a year, at a time that is not convenient, and/or even every two years. You will have to plan accordingly.
- Learn to use DegreeWorks; it is a great tool. If your advisor doesn’t mention it, ask about it.

Another very important point about advising: **Financial aid questions** must be addressed to the financial aid office staff in Enrollment Services. The professional and faculty advisors really have no access to your financial aid information. Students often run into financial aid problems for a number of reasons: dropping too many courses, failing to pass enough courses, and taking courses that are not required in their program are three major ones. Not completing the FAFSA on time is also a huge obstacle to navigating the financial aid universe. The financial aid office staff are the experts and you need to check your email, Banner, and your postal mail for notices from them about deadlines and your awards from financial aid.

Additionally, the college expects payment before the semester begins. In fact, if you do not pay your bill or make sure your financial aid is in order a couple of weeks before the start of the semester, your registration will be purged—you will no longer have a class schedule, even if you had registered very early. Dates are advertised on the website and calendar. Obviously, you do not want this to happen, because you have to begin all over again trying to get into classes, and by then they might be closed to new registrations. This is why you should have a way or plan to take care of the fees and tuition as soon as you register.

So, to recap, college is a new terrain, and the college experience is a journey over that terrain. The terrain has a physical and cultural features. The physical one is the actual campus, which for Dalton State involves many buildings over more than 40 acres of land. The cultural one involves the rules and regulations, the language, the values, and the persons and personalities. In the next section we will talk about the people most affecting you—the faculty—but first I’d like to address the values of higher education.

Values

The first value is rigor. That means the learning tasks require effort from students. You could say it means the courses are hard, but there is more to it than that. It means the academic standards and expectations are high. At Dalton State, we have a tradition of being a rigorous college. Our students who transfer do very well historically at other colleges. Our health professions students do very well on certification exams. To be honest, we take pride in being rigorous and having high standards but also in empowering the students to meet those standards through good teaching. Teaching is what our faculty do, and it is our priority.

The second is diversity and inclusion. College will allow you, and sometimes force you, to encounter people and ideas that you have not before. Your instructors may be from other countries or parts of the U.S., as might be your classmates. You will have classmates who are twenty years older than you—or younger. Your instructors may teach theories and concepts you personally disagree with. One thing that students often find in college is that the old cliques and “drama” that happened in high school simply doesn’t apply in college. It’s about the learning and the work, not social status, cliques, or in-groups. Everyone belongs, no matter what they look like, as long as they do the work.

The third is civility, which can be thought of as “actively showing respect.” Not agreement, but respect for them as human beings and members of the community and as persons who have a right to express their opinions with civility as well.

The fourth value is equality and fairness. You might not always think it is true in your experience, but higher education values access (availability of learning to those willing to work hard), equality (not getting a grade for any reason other than performance, and not giving or asking for special treatment) and fairness (equal output for equal input). For that reason, if you ask a professor for special favors, you are asking him or her to be unfair to the rest of the class who did not get those favors.

Now, in case my emphasis on work is making you worry that there is nothing fun going on at Dalton State, let me stop here and say that Dalton State offers a wide variety of programs for social interaction, relaxation, fun, and developing relationships and leadership. The Dean of Students’ Office, the Health and Wellness programs, and the Athletic Department are three website you should check out right now just to convince you college is not all hard work and there is plenty of activities to get involved in here!

College Faculty

I have mentioned faculty several times in this section on values, and there is a reason for that. The persons you will have the most contact with on campus, other than students, are your faculty. You will spend several hours a week with them. It is best if you start to think of them in positive and constructive manners rather than as stern, rigid, distant authority figures who have no connection to your lives. The following is from a PowerPoint I created for a first-year seminar course taught in 2016 I called “The Care and Feeding of College Faculty.”

- Forget all the things you have heard about college professors. You might have been taught that college faculty:
- Spend most of their times writing books
- Are introverted, weird, or eccentric (the absent-minded professor stereotype)
- Have inappropriate relationships with their students (while this has happened in some colleges, it usually ends badly, as in unemployment.)
- Don’t work very hard (We might only be on campus about 30 hours per week, but we work away from the office many more hours.)
- Are mean. Students have informed me that their high school teachers told them that college professors were uncaring. Perhaps they said that so that the students would not expect the professors to be easy; perhaps those high school teachers did have bad experiences. I can say this is not the case at Dalton State. You will find your instructors to be warm, polite, helpful, and friendly—but professional. Part of growing up is to learn to negotiate between those two.

These mistaken and questionable ideas often come from TV and movies are questionable. However, college faculty do have specific characteristics.

- They LOVE their discipline. They live their discipline. They went to school for years to understand their discipline. They think it's the greatest thing ever. I teach communication and do not understand why the subject does not fascinate everyone. Consequently, don't blow off their subject. Don't say it's worthless or boring or of no value. How would you feel if someone did that to you?
- They like to question, so they seem skeptical. We are taught to question ideas and assumptions. Sometimes we say things in class for you to think about, even if we don't agree with it.
- We expect you to follow the syllabus and do the assignments. The syllabus in college means much more than the syllabus in high school; you should keep it in a prominent or accessible position in your notebook.
- They have different personalities. Some of us are extraverts and some are introverts. Some have quirky senses of humor and some have fairly quiet ones.
- They are in total charge of their classrooms. College instructors are not to be disturbed when teaching. Do not walk into a college instructor's class and interrupt in the middle of a session, unless the building is on fire.
- Higher education changes slowly, and so do faculty. Colleges were originally run entirely by the faculty; there was not really a separate administrative staff. Even today, many college academic policies cannot be changed without the approval of the faculty. For example, we cannot change financial aid policy, but we can change the curriculum in a major if we choose to do so.
- Professors at Dalton State are student-oriented. We chose to work here because it is a teaching institution, which means our main responsibility is to teach, advise, and serve students, as opposed to doing research. We do engage in research, but that is not our priority.
- They don't treat some students better because they like them.
- We have heavy workloads. We teach 3-5 classes per semester, with varying numbers of students—as few as ten, as many as 100 or more. We have to keep office hours, one or two a day, which does not include committee meetings (faculty participate in governance of the college, and that takes time), advising students, preparing classes, grading, assessments, and required continuing education.
- We have families and lives, too.
- College faculty do not deal with parents. It is against federal law for a college instructor to talk to your parents about your status (that means grades) in their class. That law is called the Buckley Amendment and often referred to as FERPA because of its origin in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. If a parent calls and asks about a student—and it does happen occasionally—we just say we are not allowed to talk about a student's progress to parents or anyone else outside the College personnel. There is a way around this law; the student can sign a waiver of his or her privacy rights in Enrollment Services. But our first response will be to refer to FERPA.
- As adults, authority figures, and experts in their subject matters, faculty members expect respect. It is best to refer to him or her as "Professor" if you do not know if the instructor has earned a doctorate, and as "Dr." if you know they have (it will probably be on the syllabus). We work hard for the doctorate and it is professional courtesy to use it. Some will say it is all right to call them by their first name (very rare) or "Mr." or "Ms." but unless they do, you should default to "Professor." You should also learn your professor's name and office location on Day One.

Keeping all these characteristics in mind, here is a list of Don'ts that will keep you in good shape with your professors. **Don't...**

- Ever ask them if anything important happened in class on a day you were absent. This is literally the Kiss of Death and you may get a very harsh or sarcastic answer, such as "No, since you were not there, we put our heads down and thought about your absence."
- Don't email them like text speak. Emails should start professionally, "Dear Professor," identify who you are and your class (the email address may not do that), and clearly give your question or concern. You should have a closing as well. Your relationship with your faculty member is a professional one and this is

a good time to learn professional communication. Many professors simply will not answer an email like this:

hey I missed class today can I get the notes from you or the power point? Bill

Yes, I have gotten emails like this from students.

- Expect special treatment. Fairness to students is extremely important to us.
- Play with your electronic devices in class. I cannot stress this one enough. Each faculty member will have a policy on phones and laptops, and you must abide by it. Remember, we are in control of our classrooms. Faculty are also allowed to call public safety and have students escorted out of class if they are really disruptive or causing harm to other students and their learning.
- Think attendance doesn't matter. This is one of the biggest lies that is propagated about college life. Attendance in class does matter, very, very much. No, we won't call the county truant officer. However, many faculty take daily roll, and we have to keep some record for financial aid purposes. So, we are aware of your attendance, but more important, you will not do well by missing many classes, even in a class that is purely lecture and test-taking. Lots of research shows this.
- Be afraid to go to their offices and ask for help. It's one of the best things you can do if you are having academic concerns. If you do go to their office, however, don't overlook the office hours sign on the door (also on the syllabus). If the professor has informed the students that she is in from 1:00-3:00 on Thursday afternoon, don't expect her to be there at 4:30.
- Think your instructors are psychic. If you never ask questions in class, even if you have them, we are not mind readers. Please ask.

At the end of the semester you will be asked to evaluate your instructors online. First, please comply. The data is important to the college's operations. Second, answer thoughtfully. Third, don't blindsides the instructor. If you say "He never explained X clearly," did you ask about X? Fourth, don't get ugly and personal; swearing on the evaluations isn't helping anyone. State your case about the instructor's behavior, not that you didn't like her shoes. The evaluations are about the learning experience in the class, not whether you think the class should be in the curriculum.

Parting thoughts

While there are a lot more things I could say about the journey of being a college student, some things you just have to experience. Not everything will make sense at first. Remember, it's a long journey.

Expect your college life to have a cyclical nature. The first few weeks will be exciting and daunting; you may feel like your head will explode with all the newness. A few weeks in you might feel a little down. The newness has worn off and man, oh, man, the work is piling up. By the eighth week, it will feel like everything came at once, but you do get a short break about then. The stress and activity builds and builds until finals and whew, it's time to sleep and binge watch shows on Netflix. You say, "I got to get a better start next time" before it starts again in January.

I'm telling you this now because the key word I want to leave you with is PROACTIVITY. Your college journey will be enjoyable and successful to the extent that you are **proactive**. I learned this all-important word from the best book on time management, *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* by Stephen A. Covey. In a sense it means "planning" but more than that. Because we cannot plan for everything, we plan margin for what we know we cannot plan for. I cannot plan when I will have a flat tire; I can plan to have the resources to fix it in my car when it happens. I cannot plan the traffic between my home and the campus, but I can plan to leave 10 minutes early every day to get a parking space and miss the worst of the traffic turning into the entrance.

Proactivity is about having a future-orientation that is executed in the present. Paper planners, or electronic ones, can help. But you can write down or type into your phone all the plans you want if you don't choose to execute the plans. After a while, proactivity can become a habit and you cease to even recognize it as such. For example, years ago I learned to put my clothes out the night before a workday. My husband sets the coffee pot up before going to bed. These are small things but they save loads of time and more importantly, stress. Much of the stress we feel is self-inflicted from poor planning.

It is common for textbooks for transition for first-year students in college to contain a chapter on time management. In place of a separate chapter or appendix, we will include some online resources. Inventories, filling out sample weekly calendar/schedules, and tips on time management are very helpful, but they start with this attitude of proactivity and some of the mental processes discussed in the Part 2, specifically self-efficacy and locus of control. Now is the time in your life to realize that there are urgent things and important things in your life, and those will change as you go through various seasons.

Urgent means that for whatever reason the task must be done very, very soon. Important means that it is central to your values and to your reaching your goals. Urgent means the task or activity demands your attention now; important tends to mean it will demand your attention long-term. Some things are simply urgent, but not important; some are important but not urgent; some are neither, and some are both. The diagram on the next page is often used to show that comparison.

Many of you have family and work responsibilities. Being a student is one of your many roles. This means balancing priorities; you have more things in your life that are both urgent and important. For that reason, using tools such as planners are a must for you. As a friend of mine says, “Everything takes longer than it takes,” so be realistic about trying to pack too many activities into your day. For your health and good relationships, you need to plan “margin” in your life, time in the day that is not packed to the full. That time will probably be taken up by the urgent and semi-urgent things that come up.

Here are some resources that can help you with time management:

image

image

http://lgdata.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/docs/1396/492636/Time_Management_Activities___Self_Quiz.pdf

https://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_HTE.htm

<http://www.rasmussen.edu/student-life/blogs/college-life/time-management-tips-college/>

<https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/professors-guide/2009/10/14/top-12-time-management-tips>

<https://www.projectsmart.co.uk/smart-goals.php>

In conclusion, time management is more about self-management than the clock. You can’t really manage time—it keeps going forward, no matter what we do. You can only manage your own goals and behaviors, and college life will bring the importance of that home to you.

Part 2: Learning to Learn

“Remember, in business and in life – success is earned from learning how to do things that you don’t like doing.” (Glenn Llopis, *7 Reasons Networking Can Be a Professional Development Boot Camp*, May 29, 2012, Forbes.com)

One of the most important things that you will learn in college is how to learn. Why does that matter? Because learning will be one of our jobs in the future. No matter what profession you eventually enter after your formal education—social work, nursing, accounting, social media director, elementary school teacher, business manager, respiratory therapist, banker, or one of many others—you will continue learning new procedures, new policies, new techniques, new ways of thinking. Your employers will expect you to attend training. You may decide to change careers completely or slightly and have to learn new skills. Software and technology change constantly. Many of you will eventually want to earn a graduate degree.

Psychologist Herbert Gerjuoy said many years ago, “**Tomorrow’s illiterate will not be the man who can’t read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn.**” This quotation has often been attributed to the futurist Alvin Toffler, who used it in his book *Future Shock* from the 1970s. These men’s words were prophetic, although they could not have foreseen all of today’s technology.

Of course, not every learning task will be the same as the type you do in college. However, the truth remains that you are only beginning to learn as an adult, and this is the time in our life where you can focus on learning, on understanding the process, on how you best learn, and how you can expand your repertoire to learn better.

There are many theories about how we learn. While in some cases they contradict, for the most part they complement and supplement each other because they concern themselves with different aspects of the learning process, either the physiological effects of learning on the brain and body, the social aspects, or the personal and psychological effects.

Thanks to magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs), other medical science, and the growing field of neuroscience, we

know much more about how we learn. We know that learning creates a physical change in the brain as synapses grow. We know that this happens not by passive reception or exposure to information but by our effort. We know that memories are formed by passing from a short-term category to long-term through rehearsal, usage, and other efforts.

We understand how attention works and that distractions inhibit learning rather than helping it. While you think listening to music may help you study, it probably is not, and your [open laptop in class is distracting the students behind you](#). In fact, the idea of multitasking is a myth. You may think you can do several things at a time, but you are actually cutting the efficiency and quality of the work you are doing. In other words, you might get some things done when you multitask, [but you won't do them as quickly or as completely](#).

We understand now that intelligence is malleable (change-able, flexible) and that a person with a fixed mindset about learning (those who say they are just born to be good at a skill like math, music, or writing) will face frustrations and obstacles in comparison with those who have a growth mindset. A growth mindset sees one's failures in a learning task as ways to find new methods for learning, not as a stopping off point in learning. Also, to the advantage of all college students who sometimes feel like their heads are going to explode, we know that learning is not a zero sum game. Learning one thing does not mean it has to displace something else. Your brain is an organ that is developing new and more intricate connections; it is not a box that will only hold so much. We also know there are different kinds of knowledge and different kinds of intelligence, and we know there is a distinct difference in learning and processing between novices and experts.

We also know that some of the common ideas about learning do not have much evidence. One of them is learning styles. You have probably taken a test that classified you as a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner. While there is nothing wrong with being classified in such a way, there is no evidence from scientific studies that you will learn better if your instructor teaches to your learning style. Unfortunately, I have heard many students over the years attribute their failure in a class to the professor who didn't teach to their learning style. What the students did not understand is that we learn through all styles (visual, print, hearing, and activity) depending on the demands of the learning tasks.

You did not learn to drive a car simply by reading about it or looking at videos (print, visual). You had to drive around in a car and listen to the instructor (kinesthetic and auditory learning). Think about learning how to ride a bicycle—same scenario. On the other hand, learning to speak a foreign language requires auditory and visual input, not just one, and is enhanced by movement. It would be better for you to use all four modalities than to pigeonhole yourself and limit your learning to a certain modality. As Steiner and Foote (2017) stated,

Like other labels, learning style labels may contain a grain of truth. A student who prefers to learn auditorily may find studying more productive when her notes are spoken aloud into a recording device and revisited later. But she may also find that when studying for a geometry test, drawing diagrams (visual) and physically manipulating shapes on paper (kinesthetic) work best for her.

In fact, it's just as important what you do with the information after it is accessed (enters your mind) than how it gets in there! As a college student and developing adult learner, you will want to be aware of what learning tasks require, especially what they require of you in terms of effort, attention, and time. You will want to notice what you are doing when you learn *and even when you do not learn as you hoped to*. You will want to think about and talk about how you learn best because using language is part of the effort behind creating those synaptic connections. These behaviors are called metacognition, or "thinking about thinking."

This need for metacognition is why your professors will often ask you to turn to your partner and discuss some of the lecture material, such as what was unclear— "the muddiest point"—or to compare notes you have taken. It is why your instructor might have you look at the questions you got wrong on that midterm exam and figure out why you got them wrong—what processes did you go through to get that answer, and where, perhaps, did you get off track. It is why your professor might give you a pre-test at the beginning of the course to see what your pre-conceptions about the material are.

Of course, learning is not just about adding knowledge but also reshaping your understanding and approaches. For an example, I'll use public speaking. Students come into the class with ideas about public speaking that they have to "unlearn." One is that they cannot do it, because of bad past experiences or fear. Another is that all they have to do to be a good speaker is be funny, even silly. Another might be that public speaking is not an important skill, or that public speaking is just reading to an audience. As another example, science instructors often see that their beginning students have faulty ideas about science as a field of knowledge as well as about specific scientific

facts. Their goal is not just to fill the students' minds with scientific facts but to think like scientists—to move from a novice to an expert.

All this is to say that one of the things you will hear over and over again, and one of the things that is a major difference between high school and college, is “time on task.” College learning, because it is “higher” in terms of the thought processes your professors want you to engage in, takes time. You cannot jot off a ten-page paper in a couple of hours. You cannot study for a midterm for an hour the night before. Well, you can try, but how successful you will be, in terms of really learning and earning good grades, is up for grabs.

Six theories of learning I would like to present here that will be of value to you as a student are Bloom's/Krathwohl's/Anderson's taxonomy, Albert Bandura's self-efficacy, self-directed and self-regulated learning, the usefulness of mindset, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, and Kolb's experiential learning cycle. What matters with each is that learning is effort. While learning can be enjoyable, the old “learning is fun” adage gives the idea that it is easy and that it shouldn't require much effort. It learning does take effort, the erroneous thinking goes, then something must be wrong. On the contrary, **learning is hard work**.

Recently I signed up for an online course with an organization that credentials online courses. The organization's purpose is to help instructors create excellent courses and to train college personnel in applying excellent standards to the course. I have taught online for almost twenty years but wanted to learn this organization's system. It proved to be more challenging than I planned.


Because I had many years of experience in teaching online and reading about how to do it and design classes, I found I had to put aside some of my attitudes and ideas because of the philosophy and approach of this organization's system. I had to “unlearn” some of my former ways of thinking about online teaching and course design. To “unlearn” doesn't mean to forget, since memory is not something we can just erase like deleting a file from a computer. Due to my willingness to do that, I walked away with a deeper understanding of good online course design. I was also able (and this is another aspect of college learning) to transfer or apply that knowledge to my traditional classroom teaching.

What is one of the things I “unlearned?” I like to put lots of extra resources in my online class, as in “when you get a chance, this is something interesting to read.” I “unlearned” that that was a good idea. It just confuses the students, and unless it directly meets a learning objective or outcome, it does not belong with all the other materials. What I might do in a regular classroom doesn't translate to online, not in all cases. That was a hard lesson for me because of my personality—I like to give students lots of choices! But it was a good one to learn.

In that personal learning situation I see each one of the six theories mentioned above. I see that I had to go up the taxonomy, and I had to be stretched into a new zone. I had to believe that my failure on the first assignments (yes, I failed them!) was not because I couldn't learn but that I had to—and could—find new strategies. I also had to regulate my time and work on the class when I was mentally prepared, and I had to reflect on my experience to learn. Let's talk about each one in more detail.

Bloom's taxonomy was created in the 1960s to help teachers recognize that all learning was not the same and happened in an upward movement. This is a typical reproduction (source: Wikimedia.commons) of the original “taxonomy,” which means “a scheme of classifications.” In this case, it is classifying learning tasks.

image

Later, in 2001, the model was updated to use verbs rather than nouns and emphasize the activity of learning. (Also from Wikimedia.commons) This configuration turns the triangle (or rhombus) upside down but other versions keep it like the one above.  image

The important thing for you to get from this is that your instructors will have some learning tasks at the bottom—remembering facts or concepts, such as being able to recreate lists of information on a test, and understanding, such as being able to define the concepts in your own words. However, in higher education we move higher up the taxonomy. You will be asked to apply the learning, and then do new things with it. You will also be asked to learn a greater volume of information for tests, in most cases, than what you have been used to in high school.

So in a history class, obviously you will have to remember dates. Then you will have to be able to explain or define an historical concept such as Manifest Destiny. Then you will be asked to apply, such as “Did the concept of Manifest Destiny influence a president's behavior?” In this case the instructor may have never addressed that question specifically in class; you are supposed to take the concept and compare it to what the president did and said. Those are the lower levels, and it is possible that those will be your major learning tasks in your first year or so of classes, although not entirely.

However, as you progress, you will be asked to:

- Analyze (taking apart, contrasting and comparing parts): “What are the beliefs behind Manifest Destiny and where did they come from?”
- Evaluate: Assess how a concept or practice stands up to criteria: “Does Manifest Destiny violate the U.S. Constitution in spirit or in letter?”
- Create: Develop a new thesis from the materials you have learned.

This is not to say you will be asked to do all six levels of the taxonomy in anyone class; in fact, that is unlikely. But I introduce this for you to understand what your instructors are trying to do. If you come into class with the pre-conception that you will be learning lots of facts and taking tests on them, that is only partly true. You will be expected to operate more at the applying, analyzing, and evaluating levels.

The second theory we will examine is that of **Mindset**. This theory is based on the work of Carol Dweck, a psychologist from Stanford University in California, and it has encouraged a great deal of research on learning. It is simple, “elegant” as some say, but also has a number of parts and offshoots.

Learning is work, sometimes hard work. You do not learn a task primarily because you are inherently good at that task; you learn it because you work hard in the right way. Learning researcher Angela Duckworth shows that experts—the really skilled—spend an average of 10,000 hours becoming that skilled person. For example, concert musicians and professional athletes do not approach their tasks as “I am just talented at this” and let it slide. They constantly practice and keep working on skills.

A person with a fixed mindset does not realize this and thinks that ability in a skill and the ability to learn that skill are inborn; you either have it or you don’t. They take failure badly and take success almost as badly. “I succeeded because I am just talented” and “I failed because I’ll never be any good at this.” They might not try new things but prefer to stay safe at the things they are “good at.” They may get too much self-worth from what they think is inborn ability or from other people’s comments about “how intelligent Dylan is” or “how gifted Jamie is.”

A person with a growth mindset sees learning as possible and due to hard work. He or she will try new methods to learn because they don’t see having the skill as either “born with it or not.” Also, a person can change his or her mindset; it would be against the theory to say someone could not change! Thankfully those who are trained to recognize how their fixed mindsets are affecting them can change to a growth mindset. Finally, children (and adults) should probably not be praised for being “smart” or “gifted” but instead for “working hard,” “finding new ways to do things,” and having perseverance or endurance. (From <https://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/>)

Closely tied to the idea of mindset is self-efficacy, which is “one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task” (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is not just self-confidence, but is related to beliefs regarding specific tasks. Self-efficacy is tied to success in many endeavors, and to resilience and locus of control, which are also a large part of mindset. A person who believes that ability and talent are just natural and all that matters in success—absent from hard work and using the right techniques, practice, etc.—lacks self-efficacy. The mindset approach can help college students because they will be faced with daily events that can attack their self-worth and lead to dropping out, when what they often need is to find other ways to approach learning.

For example, let’s say that on your first Biology 1107 test you earn a 56. You say, “This is not me! I don’t 56s on exams! What is going on?” You now have a choice. You can study exactly the same way for the next exam, maybe just using more of it or spending longer hours at it. That might work, and it might not. You can blame the instructor’s teaching methods. That is not going to help, because then your only option is to drop the class, **something you do not want to do** because it will become a pattern. You can say, “I told you so; I stink at science, so I need to drop the class.” Again, not a pattern you want to establish. You can do nothing and hope for the best (not a good option either).

Or you can:

1. Examine your behavior in the class up to now. This is called reflection. Have you attended all your classes (that old myth that you don’t need to go to class in college rears its head again!) Have you read the material in the textbook outside of class? Did you come to class alert, having slept and eaten well? Did you look at your notes after class or go over them everyday, accumulating knowledge, or did you just wait until the night before the exam? All of these are standard things that college students are told to do, and it’s not because college professors want to control your life. **THEY WORK.**

2. Go talk to the professor during posted office hours (and don't expect him or her to be there at other times) to ask for help and some ideas for succeeding in the class.
3. Attend the tutoring services offered by the Dean of Students' Office.
4. If your instructor offers outside of class session, take advantage of them.

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So, you start by reflecting on what led up to the experience, as well as how you felt about the low grade and even the experience of taking the exam. What was on the test that you didn't expect? Did you study word-for-word definitions but the test asked you for applications? Did you memorize lists but it asked you to put concept in your own words? Was there a whole section of the textbook that you just skipped?

After reflecting, you have to make a plan for the next time and take action. It may be that your problem was not the amount of time you spent, but when you spent it and what you did during the time. For the purpose of learning and memory formation, repetition (going over the accumulated class notes every day or several days a week) would be better than what we call "cramming." Spending ten minutes a day for 21 days (three and half hours) will be more useful than cramming for five hours the night before, which is time you might not have that night anyway. You do have ten minutes every day.

You make a plan, you commit to it, you act upon it, and then you experience it again. Is there a difference? More than likely, yes. You might not get a 98 on the exam, but you should be able to approach the exam in a more organized and in control fashion. And you will have a clearer idea of how you can learn.

I have just described another theory of learning, one that I particularly like, Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. As the image shows, this model involves four steps that are cycled through: Experience, Reflection, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. The key part is the reflection. Many people like to say "we learn by experience" but we don't necessarily. We learn by reflecting on experience and doing something with it. In the model, don't let the word "Abstract Conceptualization" confuse you. It means, in this case, making a plan for what will work next time.

Reflection is something we all approach differently. Some of us talk to reflect (even to ourselves out loud), some write (I am a writer, but I reflect a lot when I walk my dog every evening), and some just mull it over in our minds when nothing else is holding our attention. There is no right way to do it, but there are some questions you should ask yourself, or some territory you should cover in reflection. In order for reflection to be useful, you should focus on **what** really happened in the experience as well as **how you felt** about it. You should turn the experience around and see it from **other points of view**. You should ask, "Is the way I feel about it, am evaluating it, **valid**, or am I just seeing one side of it?" You can question, **why** and **how** did it happen? These are only a few questions that you can use in reflecting. Here is a diagram of questions you can ask about a lecture, film, or speaker.

What I mean for you to take from this is that reflection is useful for you as a self-regulated and self-directed learner (discussed below).

Now, a few words here. First, notice I didn't say "get a study buddy." Study buddies or study groups are great . . . IF. What are the ifs?

- You know that the person is a good student. While you might think that student in your history class is cute and you want to get to know him or her, don't hide asking the other student out on a date behind studying. He or she may have gotten a 48 on the exam! By a good student I don't just mean someone with a high grade, however. This person needs to have good learning habits, take good notes, be willing to engage in asking questions, and generally be cooperative.
- If you don't commit to serious study and to trying new approaches, such as the ones listed above. Research shows mixed results on study groups because students use it without changing other behaviors, that is, they still don't read the textbook or go over accumulated notes every day.
- You have to realize this is a study session, not a tutoring session. You have to bring an equal part to the session. If it's just "I want to look at your notes because I take bad ones," or "I want you to explain this to me," you are just using the other person and not helping them.
- You need to study in a good setting, for example, one that is free of distractions, and come prepared (laptop, textbook, paper, etc.)

- You need a **plan**. It can't just be, "Well, here we are. What now?" You can first be sure all your sets of notes are complete, and then you can quiz each other, or think up possible questions that will be on the test. Plan to take breaks—we really don't study well in two-hour sessions. The breaks should just be for bathroom and a drink of water and stretching legs, not as long as the session itself!

A second note. Up to this point I have not used the two most important words about learning in college. Those words are "self-directed" and "self-regulated." *Self-directed learning* is learning you choose to do, that you are invested in and that you direct. The fact that you are in college should say that you are self-directed, because college is not legally required—we choose to go. Now, I realize that some people go to college for reasons other than choice (that is, someone told them they had to in order to get some kind of reward or avoid some sort of punishment), and those people usually are unsuccessful. I have heard of students who enrolled in college because their parents said, "You either go to work at manual labor, go in the military, or go to college," and college sounded like the best of the three. That type of student is rarely self-directed.

Self-directed also means that you choose the method of learning and you decide when you have learned it. In this case, college cannot be totally self-directed because, unfortunately, the college expects you to learn a certain amount and show that you have learned in order to get a degree. You have to get certain grades and take certain courses to even stay in school. However, you can still be self-directed by choosing the hours that you take the classes, the professors, the number of hours of classes you take each semester, and the subject matter of the courses.

The point is that your instructors expect a large amount of self-direction from you, because you are an adult now and not required by law to be in their classes. Granted, you may only be in that biology class because two lab science classes are required for your major, but in general you have chosen to be there.

I make this point because it relates to an aspect of self-efficacy called "locus of control." We do better at tasks, generally, when we have an internal locus of control rather than an external one. In other words, if I am the one making the choices in my life and I recognize that, my viewpoint on learning and success will be quite different than if I think I am just being bossed around by external forces, and therefore a victim. Locus of control means I take responsibility for my life rather than blaming others. If I get a ticket for going 15 miles per hour too fast in a 35 mph zone, I might blame the fact that the police officer was "out for me." That's external locus of control. If I own up to the fact it was my foot was the gas and I was going 50, that's internal locus of control.

On the other hand, *self-regulated learning* is more about the actual behaviors you engage in as a learner. The concept of metacognition that we mentioned earlier is key here. A self-regulated learner reflects and recognizes what he or she is doing as a learner and seeks to find approaches that will make him or her more successful (and that includes more economical in use of time and resources). A self-regulated learner is like an athlete who pays attention to her body and outcomes and what they are telling her about her athletic performance.

With all this talk of self-efficacy, self-regulation, and self-direction, it may sound like I am saying that learning is a very individualistic, "lone wolf" kind of phenomenon. That is not what I want to communicate, only that ultimately it does boil down, especially in college, to your own choices and work. However, one of the best parts of college (and one of the downsides of online classes) is that learning is social. Although Bandura originated the self-efficacy concept, it is rooted in his social learning theory, which states that an individual's actions and reactions are influenced by the actions that individual has observed in others. So, if we have self-efficacy (also called personal efficacy) it's not because it just sprang from nowhere or we figured it out on our own somehow magically. It came largely as a result of accumulated social interactions and observations over the lifespan.

The good news is, though, that even reading this textbook is a social situation for learning, as are the classes you are enrolled in this semester—especially the public speaking class! College allows you to learn in the best of situations—you can learn from others, directed and regulated by yourself.

Of course, one of those people in the situation is the class instructor, and this brings us to the last of the theories. Go back to the beginning of this appendix and read the quotation that starts it, from **Forbes Magazine** online. (*Forbes* is a leading business magazine.) Mr. Llopis has put in his own words the essence of Vygotsky's theory called "Zone of Proximal Development," which sounds like something from science fiction but is really quite simple and useful.

Vygotsky claimed that we learn only when we are given new tasks that are just outside our ability to do them. If we are given tasks to do that are within our ability, what's there to learn? Only when we have to stretch outside the "zone" do we learn. Just like an athlete who will try to beat his last time or distance, we have to be asked to do

something we cannot do right now in order to learn it. The qualifier is that it cannot be too far outside of the “zone of proximal development,” because the learner will fail and not really be able to figure out why. Ideally, learning tasks must be staged as a series of challenges just outside what you can currently do.

Public speaking instructors do this by making your series of speech assignments longer and more complicated. Your first speech will be short and probably personal; your last speech will be much longer and involve higher order thinking such as found on the Bloom’s taxonomy. Your history instructor in First Year U.S. History will probably not assign you to write a twenty-page paper. If you are a history major and take the seminar course before you graduate, you will by that time have the skills to write a forty-page, in-depth paper with scholarly sources.

It is your instructors’ and professors’ jobs to structure the classes this way. It may feel like the challenge is too far outside your “zone.” Sometimes, it is; that doesn’t mean you are incapable of the challenge, only that there are some steps in between that you need to do first. In that case, you might need to visit the tutoring center on campus and meet with the professor for extra help.

In my many years of teaching, I have found that sometimes a short conversation with the faculty member clears up a lot of matters. A student might just misunderstand what is being asked of him or her and consequently construe it into a much more difficult task than it is. At other times a tutor or tutorial videos can fill in the gaps. This is often true with math or science concepts that are not that difficult but were missed in your high school education for some reason. The key is not to give up when the task seems right outside your reach. Your “arm” is longer than you think. Although we really can’t make our arm longer, we can build synapses in our minds that connect neurons and lead to learning.

This part of the appendix has attempted to explain and inspire. By understanding what really goes on in the learning involved in “higher education,” you will have more tools to reflect on and regulate your learning. I have emphasized that learning is hard work and should be. That does not mean college is all drudgery. You have a unique opportunity to get to know really smart and interesting people in your classes who also want to learn, and in many cases they will be going into the same fields you are, so you have built-in networking colleagues. College is about gaining what is called “social capital” (networks of friends and relationships that you can draw upon later in life) as well as intellectual capital. Instead of coming into class, hiding in the back of the room, burying yourself behind your cell phone until the instructor starts class, turn to someone and say, “Hello. My name is...What did you think about...?”

Part 3: Reading Your Textbooks and Other Resources

College Reading

Many people do not realize that we read at different rates for different purposes. For instance, if we are looking for an answer to a question, we scan very quickly through the material to find the answer, and once the answer is found, we move on to something else. When we are reading a magazine for pleasure, we most likely read it quickly, skimming through the material and slowing down in sections that are especially interesting to us. We are reading for understanding, but we do not intend to memorize the material for a later date.

In college reading, we have to read slowly with an intent to remember what we have read because we know we will be tested on the material in the future. The most popular method of college reading uses a system known as SQ3R – Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review. This system has been used since WWII when it was created by Francis Pleasant Robinson from Ohio State University and is the most popular method for study reading used today.

The Survey step of SQ3R is be used to familiarize yourself with a new book or just a chapter of a book, depending on your goal. If you are looking at an entire book, you want to review the table of contents to see what the chapters are about. Many texts have two tables of content, one is general and short, and the other is detailed. The detailed one will give you the best overview of the text.

Next, look to see what else the book has to offer. Does it have an index? A glossary? Appendices of supplemental information? Self-tests throughout the chapters or at the end of each chapter? Lists of important terminology for each chapter? Terms defined in the margins? Terms defined in a single glossary or after each chapter? Boldface printed terms within the chapters? An introduction to each chapter? Objectives for each chapter? A summary or outline at the end of each chapter? Knowing what your text has to offer can help you devise a study plan for your reading that will be effective as well as giving you an idea as to what the text and the course will cover. Having

this information allows you to start reading with background information which improves your concentration and focus, and your comprehension of the material.

When you use the Survey step of SQ3R to survey a single chapter, you want to look for and skim the chapter's objectives and introduction. Then focus on the words in boldface print that divide the chapter into sections and emphasize the terminology. Browse the pictures, graphs, and charts and read their captions to see what examples are given of the information being presented. Look for a summary of the chapter at its end.

Once you have skimmed over for all these aspects, you will have created background information so that when you begin reading, you are not going into it cold, and you have improved your ability to focus and concentrate on the reading as well as comprehend it. This entire step should only take about ten minutes because you are skimming through the material to familiarize yourself with its contents.

Once you have finished the "S" and surveyed the chapter, you want to create questions related to the information that you can answer after reading. Basically, you want to be able to identify the main points the author is trying to get across to you. A simple way to do this is to take the boldface printed subtopics and turn them into questions. For instance, in chapter one of this text, the first section on page eight is already in a question format for you. You just have to read to find out what public speaking is. The second section on page nine is not in question format, but you can form a question out of it, such as "Why does public speaking produce anxiety?" Once you have the question, you can read to find the answer which will give you the important information in the section.

The third step of SQ3R is the Read step which goes hand-in-hand with the question step, and as you will see shortly, with the Recite step. Your goal in the Read step is to read actively and answer each of the questions you have formulated from the section headings. Pause after each section and ask yourself, "What have I just read and does it answer my question?" If you find you have understood the section, go back and highlight the key words and phrases that answer your question.

When you pause and highlight, you are in effect, reciting the information and entering the Recite step of SQ3R. Since repetition is the key to remembering what you have read, this step is very effective. To further your comprehension and memory of the information, summarize it in the margin of your book. If you find you do not understand or cannot recite what you have read, you will have to refocus and reread. Perhaps you became distracted as you were reading or started daydreaming or maybe the material is so foreign to you that you must reread it to comprehend it. Whatever the reason, it is important that you understand the section before moving on to the next section. This Recite step, coupled with repetition, is important if you want to build neural pathways to keep the information in your brain.

The last step of SQ3R, Review, is completed after you have read and highlighted the chapter in its entirety. This step can be done in different ways depending on your learning style. If you are an auditory learner, you will want to read over your high-lighted information aloud because your hearing ability is your strongest learning sense. If you are a visual, tactile, or kinesthetic learner, you will want to write out (tactile, kinesthetic) the information on paper to reread (visual). Maria Montessori, who created the Montessori schools, stated, "The hands are the instruments of man's intelligence." In essence, she believed that the hands were directly connected to the brain, so writing out the highlighted information is particularly effective to use for further review. You could write out the information and then study it aloud, too. This would incorporate all of your senses and bombard your brain with the information, making it more memorable.

The Review step must be repeated at periodic intervals because only through repetition will you build neural pathways for the information that will allow you to remember all that you have read and studied. Once you have achieved comprehension of the material, repetition and review are necessary if you want to be able to pass a test on what you have read. SQ3R promotes meaningful reading and test preparation which results in higher course grades.

Concentration

Concentration is essential when reading college textbooks and studying for exams. Poor concentration is more the result of a lack of internal direction than it is the result of external direction. You must have a positive attitude and be prepared to be actively involved with the materials you are reading and/or studying. Self-testing or reciting as in the recite step of SQ3R is crucial.

When trying to improve your concentration, keep the following in mind:

- The greater your interest in a subject, and the stronger your purpose or motivation in reading, the

deeper your concentration will be. Many times the preview step in the SQ3R system can perk your interest in a subject or help motivate you to learn more.

- The ability to concentrate must be acquired. It takes effort and practice. You want to read and study with an intent to understand and recall.
- Make sure you are working in a proper environment. Have good lighting, a suitable noise level with minimal distractions (put your phone away), plenty of air, and comfortable clothes and seating. Only you can drive away distractions. If you have something pressing on your mind that you need to take care of first, do so, so you can concentrate on the work at hand.
- Have a well-defined purpose in reading. Think—why am I reading this?
- Do not try to concentrate when you are very tired. You will be wasting your time and become discouraged when you can't recall what you have just read or studied.
- Find the time of day when your mind is most active and receptive to do your serious reading and studying. Reading at the same time in the same place every day will help you to form a reading and studying habit that will increase your powers of concentration.
- It helps to take a “thinking break” after each paragraph or chapter subheading. In SQ3R, this is when you recite the main points of what you have been reading. If you can't recite the main points, perhaps you were not concentrating.

Again, reading a college textbook is a different process than thumbing through a magazine or reading your favorite novel. Using the SQ3R method and seeking to improve your concentration will make the time spent in reading your textbooks more worthwhile.

Part 4: Effective Memorization

Effective Memorization

Many students tend to be able to recognize information, but not recall information. They frequently think that when they cannot recall a correct answer that they have forgotten it, when in reality, they never really knew the information, they could only recognize it. Recognition occurs when you are able to arrive at a correct answer after you have been given a number of answers to choose from, such as in a multiple choice test. Recall involves remembering information without any choices or cues; that is, without the aid of recognition. Essay questions and even short-answer questions put an emphasis on this skill.

Thus, do not study just to recognize information; study to recall information. In addition, you should always ask your instructor what kind of test you will be taking. Is it objective, meaning multiple choice, matching and true/false, or is it subjective, meaning short answer and essay. Knowing what the test will entail will aid you in studying the information correctly.

General Principles:

Intend to remember. Tell yourself you will recall this information because you want to remember it.

Learn from the general to the specific. In essence, build a framework or create context first. Superior, Erie, Michigan, Huron, and Ontario mean nothing if you don't identify them as the Great Lakes first.

Make the information meaningful by creating associations. Create a concept map of the main points and supporting details of what you have read or are trying to remember. Concept maps show the relationships between ideas and make memorization easier. They also allow you to create a “picture” of what you are learning. Pictures are easier to recall than lists of words or outlines because they allow you to visualize the information. In addition, when you try to remember lists or outlines, you have a tendency to recall the beginnings and the endings and confuse the information in the middle. An example of a concept map is on the next page.

Study actively. Look for answers, recite the material aloud, create flashcards, or write notes, and test yourself.

Recite and repeat, the more often the better. Overlearn the information. This means once you think you know the information, test yourself one more time.

As with increasing your concentration, reduce interference. Find a place to study where you won't be distracted. Turn off your phone and put it out of sight.

Keep a positive attitude. Find something that connects you to the information or motivates you even if you think the subject is boring. Tell yourself you will learn this information because you need to pass this course in order to fulfill your goal of graduating.

Space your studying. Distribute your learning over hours or days. Studying a little at a time is more effective than cramming.

Use all of your senses. Look at it, say it, listen to it, talk about it, and write it. Use the material in as many different ways as you can. Create flashcards, concept maps, timelines, charts, short lists, summaries, and self-tests.

Group items in groups of seven or less. For instance, your social security number is ten digits, but you tend to recall it in three parts or groups (i.e. 123-45-6789). We tend to remember seven groups of information at a time.

For information that is difficult for you to recall, use a mnemonic device. For instance, make up an acronym, a rhyme or song, or an acrostic. These are described below.

Acronym: The word scuba is an acronym that stands for Self, Contained, Underwater, Breathing, and Apparatus. The word homes stands for the Great Lakes: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. SQ3R is another acronym: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. These are popular acronyms, but you can make up your own acronyms by taking the first letter of each of the words you want to recall and making a new word to use as a memory tag. Absurd and silly words are especially easy to remember.

image

Suppose you needed to remember the six listening faults: daydreaming, closed-mindedness, false attention, intellectual despair, memorizing, and personality listening. You would take the first letter of each meaningful word; in this case, D, C, F, I, M and P and create a new word or phrase, such as PC DIMF or DC PIMF. The word or phrase doesn't have to make sense, it just has to be memorable. When you have your test in hand, take a moment to write down PC DIMF in the margin. When you come to the question that deals with the six listening faults, you will have a memory tag all ready to aid your thinking. If the list of items to be remembered has to be in order, you will be limited in what you can create, so you might want to create an acrostic instead.

Have you ever noticed that when a song comes on the radio or TV, you can easily recall the words? *Create a jingle or a song of concepts to aid your memory.* Perhaps you are familiar with the jingle:

Thirty days has September, April, June and November. All the rest have 31 except February, it's a different one. It has 28 days clear, and 29 each leap year.

An acrostic is another effective memory device. A popular one you may be familiar with is "My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas." This acrostic, which is a sentence using words with the same first letter as the words you are trying to recall, is a clue to the planets in order from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. The six listening faults could also be recalled using an acrostic. For instance, I may call proper friends daily. I for intellectual despair; M for memorizing; C for closedmindedness; P for personality listening; F for false attention; and D for daydreaming.

Keep in mind that mnemonic devices should not be overused. They are intended just for information that is difficult for you to recall. Many times people will recall the mnemonic device they used years after memorizing it, but not be able to recall what it stands for. Roy G. Biv is a popular acronym that many people recall, but don't remember that it stands for the colors of the rainbow in proper order; Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet. Thus, limit the number of mnemonic devices you use when you are studying.

Part 5: Test Anxiety/Speech Anxiety

All students experience some test anxiety – a fear or worry about having to take a test. When the anxiety is normal, it raises your alertness and is productive. When the anxiety is severe, it can cause mental interference which will make concentration difficult and make you easily distracted. It also can produce physical symptoms, such as restlessness; "butterflies in the stomach"; accelerated heart beat and/or breathing; nausea, sweaty palms and a headache, among other symptoms.

The worst part of severe test anxiety is that it causes a mental block which makes it difficult to focus on the task at hand and remember all the information you have studied. If you are very anxious about a test and have studied effectively, you can still do poorly on the test if you are unable to control your anxiety.

The most important step to take to control anxiety is to be prepared. You need to self-test and practice the information repeatedly to make it your own. You also need to keep your perspective and not let your emotions

interfere with logic. Consider why you are anxious. Are you anxious and afraid because of self-defeating thoughts? If you think you will do poorly, you are setting yourself up to do just that.

You must keep a positive attitude and talk to yourself. Say, “I have studied for this test and even though I may not know all the answers, I do know most of them, so I will earn a good grade;” or in the case of a speech, “I have researched this speech effectively, and I have practiced this speech numerous times in front of my friends and family, so I will be able to deliver it successfully in class.” Use your imagination and visualize yourself being successful. See yourself acing the test or delivering your speech calmly and in control. Imagining yourself successful in a situation sets you up to be successful as long as you have completed all the requirements to be successful, i.e. studying and practicing.

The last technique to controlling test anxiety is to learn to relax. If you find yourself breathing heavily and upset about the test or speech, take a little time and count your breaths for a minute. A breath is considered one intake and one outtake. Next, slow down your breathing and count your breaths again. The fewer breaths you take, the more your body will slow down. If you are anxious, you are probably taking fifteen to twenty breaths per minute; whereas, if you are relaxed, you can limit yourself to three or four breaths per minute without holding your breath. This little exercise can help you focus and relax before you take a test or give a speech, or during a test if you find your anxiety is worsening.

Another exercise you can practice consists of starting out in a comfortable position. Loosen your clothing if necessary. Then, beginning with your toes, tighten your muscles to the count of ten, and then release them from the tension. Next tighten your muscles in your feet, again to the count of ten and release. Continue moving slowly up your body, tightening and releasing. As you are doing this, breathe deeply and slowly. This is a good technique to use on test or speech day before you get to class or just after you arrive. This technique can be used whenever you feel yourself becoming anxious, when you can’t sleep at night, or as a refresher between study and practice sessions.

If you find your mind is blocked during an exam or just before you are to give your speech, close your eyes, take a long, deep breath and let it out slowly. Concentrate on your breathing, so that you can feel and hear yourself breathe. Don’t allow yourself to worry about the exam, speech, time, or tension. Repeat once and then return to the test or ready yourself to give your speech. Keep in mind that being able to make your mind and body relax takes practice, so try these techniques in non-anxious situations. As you become comfortable with them, try them in anxiety-producing situations.

Part 6: Test-taking

In many classes, the large part of your grade, and thus your success, will be from high grades on exams. These pointers will walk you through preparing and taking exams.

The first step to test-taking is to study. If you are prepared for the test, you will be less anxious and more apt to score a high grade. What should you study?

Key terms, definitions and examples: It is not enough to know the terminology and what each new vocabulary word means. You need to be able to provide an example or explain how the word fits into the subject you are studying.

Enumerations or lists of items: Lists of items make excellent test questions, especially the kind that read, “All of the following are related EXCEPT...” These questions demand that you know the entire list and be able to identify the one item that does not apply.

Points emphasized in class: If your instructor repeats a concept in class several times for emphasis, he is giving you a clue that you will see that concept on a test. Study it and know it.

Reviews, study guides, flash cards, PowerPoints: Many instructors provide tools to increase your learning and help you study. If your instructor provides reviews, study guides, PowerPoints and/or flashcards, use them to your advantage. This is information your instructor has designated as important to know.

Questions from quizzes and textbook chapters: If your instructor administers regular quizzes on the material, save the quizzes for future study. There is a good chance you will see those questions or similar ones on the midterm or final. Many textbooks offer questions at the end of each chapter. Ask your instructor if studying these questions would be beneficial or not.

General Tips for Studying for Exams

Get a good night's sleep. If you are tired while taking the exam, your focus will be weak, and you are more apt to make mistakes. Being well-rested will make you more alert during the exam.

Don't cram. Schedule regular study times. The optimum way to study is to review the information you have read in your text and heard in your class on a daily basis. This can be just a quick reading through the information, but the repetition will make the concepts stick in your head. If daily is not feasible, schedule time to study your text and class notes on the days the class meets at a minimum. Looking over your notes as soon after class as possible increases your memory of the material and gives you the opportunity to clarify what you have written. Studies have shown that the longer you wait to review your notes, the more you will forget. In fact, you can forget half of what you have learned in just an hour if you don't review!

The week before the test, you will need to schedule daily study times. Break up the information into workable parts. Study part one the first night. The second night review part one and study part two. The third night review parts one and two and study part three. Continue studying in this way to keep the information fresh in your mind for test day.

In addition, take breaks while you are studying. When you come back from your break, review the material you were focusing on before the break and start studying the new material. Break, review, study provides many beginnings and endings to your studying which is beneficial because we tend to remember the beginnings and endings of information and fudge up the information in the middle.

Take your books, pens, pencils, paper, etc. to class. In short, be prepared to take the test. Responsible college students have the necessary equipment to succeed in school ready every day, not just on test days. In addition to showing responsibility, having what you need with you provides a feeling of confidence because you are ready.

Be on time for the exam. It goes without saying that being on time to class shows respect to the instructor and your other classmates. Being on time also allows you to be more relaxed for the test. Rushing in late and worrying about whether you will have enough time to finish the test will weaken your focus and concentration.

Sit in a quiet spot and don't talk about the material. Every exam day, you will find a group or groups of students hurriedly trying to make themselves remember the concepts they should have been studying all along. They tend to be frenetic as they ask each other questions and look up answers in the text. You have studied and the information is all in your mind. Don't sit near these folks and join in their frenzy. Keep to yourself. You have put the material in your mind in a logical fashion and don't need to upset your thinking by talking with these students.

Read all of the directions on the test carefully. Just because the questions appear to be the usual multiple choice or true and false doesn't mean you are to answer them the usual way. Sometimes instructors want pluses and minuses instead of trues and falses or T's and F's. If you answer the questions using a method different from what the directions state, your answers will be incorrect.

Budget your time. Don't spend so much time on a single question that you can't finish the test. Mark the troubling question and come back to it if and when you have time.

Ignore those people who finish before you do. You are not in a race. Students who finish quickly either really know all the information or don't know any of the information. You may not know all of the information, but you will know most of it because you studied. Use your time wisely and review your test if you finish before time is up to make sure you haven't made any "stupid mistakes." Use all the time you are given.

Answer the easy questions first. Answering the easy questions first tends to build your confidence as you proceed through the test. In addition, these questions may provide clues to the more difficult questions.

Mark the troublesome questions so you can look at them again later. Many times troublesome questions become clearer after reading and answering other questions on the test. Just be sure to keep track of the questions you have deemed difficult, so you can go back to them later. It is usually wise to select an answer to those difficult questions before you move on just in case you don't have time to return them.

Answer all the questions. If you leave a question blank, it is wrong. Guess if you don't know the answer. A guess at least gives you a chance at getting the question correct.

If you don't understand the question, state the question in your own words. If this doesn't clarify the question, ask the instructor for clarification. You can't answer a question you don't understand.

Always review your answers before handing in your test. However, do not change any answers unless you are certain you have made a mistake and answered incorrectly. Perhaps you accidentally marked the wrong letter choice, or you misread the question. In these instances, changing your answer is wise. Otherwise, your first inclination is usually the right answer.

Additional Tips for Multiple Choice Questions

Use process of elimination. Read all of the choices and cross out those choices that are definitely false or incorrect, and choose from the answers that remain.

If unsure of an answer, even after using process of elimination, pick one, so you have an answer on your test, but mark the question to come back to later. This way, if you run out of time, you will still have an answer and not a blank.

Watch for qualifiers, such as, all, most, some, no, always, usually, sometimes, never, great, much, little, more, equal, less, good, only, bad, is, is not. Keep in mind that few things in life are always or never, so phrases such as, most of the time or rarely are more acceptable answers.

If one answer choice is a paraphrase of another answer choice, both choices are incorrect.

Additional Tips for Matching Questions

Read all of the items to be matched to understand the possibilities. Fill in all the matches you are sure of and then go back and choose answers for the difficult ones. Make sure you note which answers you have used, so you can keep track of what you are doing.

Additional Tips for True and False Questions

Watch for qualifiers, such as, all, most, some, no, always, usually, sometimes, never, great, much, little, more, equal, less, good, bad, is, is not. Keep in mind that few things in life are always or never, so phrases such as, most of the time or rarely are more acceptable answers.

If any part of the statement is false, the entire statement is false.

Additional Tips for Essay Questions

When studying for an essay test, anticipate probable questions beforehand and create outlines for the answers for memorization.

Read the questions carefully and answer what is being asked. Often essay questions consist of several questions in one. Answer all of them.

Jot down a brief outline in the margin before writing out your answer, so your answer is clear and organized.

Write a clear, organized essay. Begin by paraphrasing the question. Then introduce your main points and supporting details. Remember, each main point must have supporting information. Use transitional words, such as first, second, next, then, however, finally and also to connect your ideas. Last, be sure to proofread your essay answer for errors and legibility.

Part 7: Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a problem in many classrooms. It is a problem for students, since plagiarizing robs them of learning opportunities and can get them in serious trouble. It is a problem for teachers, since it leaves them unable to tell how much a student really knows and causes them to have extra administrative work to deal with students who plagiarize.

Unfortunately, it is also common. Some researchers estimate rates of cheating in undergraduate classrooms at over 80% (McCabe et al., 2001a, 2001b; McCabe & Trevino, 2002; Dawkins, 2004; Callahan, 2004; Whitley, 1998). This statistic includes other types of cheating, but we can deduce from it that plagiarism is common. And some researchers say that committing plagiarism in college can be a predictor of dishonesty in the workplace later in life (Hilbert, 1985; Lucas & Friedrich, 2005). Failing an assignment or a class is a bad consequence, but if this sort of behavior continues, it can ruin one's career.

One reason that plagiarism is such a problem is that students don't have a good understanding of what it is. Although students may articulate some understanding of plagiarism, and that it must be avoided, they do not understand the purpose of citation itself. They may only think of it as a required convention of academic writing, rather than as a means of learning and contributing to an ongoing accumulation of knowledge (Lofstrom, 2011).

Some researchers have found that students feel confused by the rules, and express fear that they may accidentally fall into plagiarism even when trying not to, or even to accidentally echo a phrase previously encountered and mistake it for their original thought (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997). This is consistent with

other's findings that students cannot identify plagiarism when given examples, do not know how to paraphrase and cite (Marshall & Garry, 2006; Yeo, 2007; Pecorari, 2003).

How do we teach about plagiarism?

The good news is that simply educating students about plagiarism helps reduce it (Landrau, Druen & Arcuri, 2002). But, a complicating factor in the public speaking classroom is the confusion that exists for some students about citation standards in verbal communication (Holm, 2002). Some students who may exhibit appropriate citation behaviors in written assignments fail to do so in speeches.

In a recent study (Mendes, 2017), student respondents on a plagiarism survey indicated some interesting things about their understanding of plagiarism. First, many respondents specifically used the terms “stealing” or “theft” and “words.” The implications of this usage are that these students focus specifically on others’ words, but not necessarily on thoughts, ideas, or conclusions. However, another significant minority of students used “thoughts” in their answers, indicating a more thorough understanding of citation requirements. Another important group of words that came up in the study was “knowing,” “intentional,” or “purpose,” indicating that plagiarism behaviors are always intentional (and that perhaps unintentional plagiarism does not count).

Below are a series of activities that will help you reach a better understanding of some important ideas about plagiarism:

- How to use quotation marks.
- When and how to paraphrase.
- How to cite information from multiple sources.

An important thing to remember about quotation marks is that you shouldn't use very many. Unless there is important technical language, a direct quote you need to reference, or a significant phrase, it is better to paraphrase the information you use, rather than directly quote it (more on paraphrasing later). If you are quoting something, the proper citation should include the quoted material and a parenthetical citation (Author's last name, Year of publication). Anytime you are going to use more than a couple words in the same order as the reference text, go ahead and add the quotation marks – but ask yourself if you could rephrase the idea so that you use different words. DO NOT just leave off the quotation marks!

Paraphrasing is when you take the information from a source and put it in your own words, usually by combining it with information you already know, or by explaining how the information is relevant to the topic you are writing about. It can be more difficult than you expect, because sometimes once you have read the original author's phrasing, it is hard to think of a “better” way to say it. Think instead of how you will be telling us something about the information – why is it important, how it relates to your topic or argument, whether it agrees or disagrees with other information in your speech.

Read the following passage, and from the information provided, take 1 quotation and 2 paraphrased sentences:

Cricket will be joining the crowded U.S. professional sports landscape as part of a \$70 million licensing agreement between the United States of America Cricket Association (USACA) and Pennsylvania-based Global Sports Ventures, LLC. The move is a significant first step in growing the popular sport in the U.S., which has the second highest viewership of cricket in the world behind only India. More than 1.4 million people in the U.S. watched the ICC World Twenty20 competition won by West Indies earlier this year.

Cricket was a popular American sport before the Civil War, with rules that were formalized by Benjamin Franklin in 1754. George Washington played cricket in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in 1778 and the first international competition in any sport was actually a cricket match between the U.S. and Canada, according to the USACA. The multiyear licensing agreement means a franchised Twenty20 (T20) professional league will be established within the next year or so. There are ongoing talks about the number of teams, the cities in which they'll be based, the facilities in which they'll play, and the creation of player contracts for both men and women (Matuszewski, 2016).

Sometimes you will be combining information from more than one source in one paraphrased statement. Using the 2 passages below, write a sentence that contains information from both in paraphrased form.

What happens, though, when a child with talent and enthusiasm has nowhere to play? The U.S. only has one purpose-built ICC-certified cricket ground, at Central Broward Regional Park in Lauderhill, Florida. In 2015, the Cricket All-Stars, two teams captained by Sachin Tendulkar and Shane Warne, two of cricket's best-recognized names, played three exhibition

games at Citi Field in New York City, home of the New York Mets, Minute Maid Park in Houston and Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, two other baseball venues, using drop-in cricket pitches for games of 20 overs a side. (Kakade, 2017)

An Indian-American cricket enthusiast has announced plans to build as many as eight cricket stadiums across the US at an estimated cost of \$2.4 billion to professionalise the game in the country. The eight proposed stadiums, each having a capacity of 26,000 people in New York, New Jersey, Washington DC, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Illinois and California, would create as many as 17,800 new jobs in the US, said Jignesh (Jay) Pandya, chairman of Global Sports Ventures (Press Trust of India, 2017).

Hopefully, this practice exercise has made it easier to understand when and how to cite, paraphrase, and combine sources. Your instructor can answer other questions you have.

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Appendix C: Public Speaking Online

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As we were looking toward this revision of *Exploring Public Speaking*, we realized that one area of public speaking that our readers might run into is “speaking online.” Although traditional face-to-face public speaking has a 2500-year history and thousands of research articles to support it, speaking online is a relatively new procedure. This appendix will attempt to give some guidelines for this new mode of public speaking, gleaned mostly from business communication sources such as the *Harvard Business Review*. The websites we used to compile this appendix are given at the end of it.

All online speaking is not created equal. You might take an online class that requires you to send a video of yourself giving a speech for a grade. You might be participating—or leading—a “webinar,” which is a meeting or presentation over the Internet using a tool such as Blackboard Collaborate, Citrix, GoToMeeting, Adobe Connect, or one of many other webconferencing tools. These have become very common in the educational and business world because they save a huge amount of money—employees, students, and learners can meet without having to travel to another location.

With this growth in popularity, we have a growth in problems and common behaviors, or misbehaviors, in webconferencing and thus online “public speaking.” Much of the advice on webconference public speaking comes as antidotes to the worst practices that have developed in them, which are:

1. the audience’s multitasking (and thus not fully attending to the webinar)
2. the audience’s being bored to death and going to sleep (which I confess to)

Both of these conditions come from the fact that the communication is mediated and that in many cases the speaker and audience don’t see each other. Even when the participants use their web cameras (which doesn’t always happen), the screen is often covered with a slide and the speaker is invisible. Therefore, the speaker has to depend on something else to address the temptation to multitask or nod off.

Preparation for Online Speaking

First, recognize that this is a different type of venue. You have two main tools: your voice and your visuals (slides).

If monotone and monorate speaking is horrible for face-to-face speaking, it is truly the “Kiss of Death” for web speaking. The key word is “energy”—an energetic voice has variety and interest to it. Since we tend to have a lower energy level when we sit, some experts suggest that web conference speakers stand to approximate the real speaking experience. This suggestion makes sense. As we have mentioned repeatedly through this book, preparing means practicing your speech orally and physically, many times. Audio-recording yourself during your practice on your smartphone or other device is a good first step, followed by critically and honestly thinking about whether your voice is listless, flat, energy-less, and likely to induce snooziness.

Second, your visuals. Most of us are tempted to put far too much text and too many graphics on the slides, and since the slides are the primary thing the audience will see (rather than your full body), the temptation is even stronger. As one expert on web speaking suggested, if your presentation in the workforce is likely to be graph, data, and information heavy because it’s all information the audience must know, send the information in a report ahead of time. We’ve mentioned before that speeches are not good for dumping a great deal of information on audiences.

Therefore, keep your visuals simple. They do not have to have lots of clip art and photographs to keep attention. One rule business speakers like to use is the “10-20-30: rule: No more than 10 slides, no more than 20 words on the slides, and no font smaller than 30 point.” Using 30 point font will definitely minimize the amount of text. Inserting short videos and planning interactivity (such as polls, which the software supports) are also helpful.

Also in the realm of preparation, avoid two other problems. Since some of your presentation might be visible, be sure your background is “right.” Many people perform webinars in their offices, and let’s be honest, some offices provide backgrounds that are less than optimal. They are either messy and disorganized or have distracting decorations. In other cases, you could be sitting in a neutral place with a blank wall behind you, but that setting can have its own issues. One writer talks about a speaker who wore a white shirt against a white background and almost disappeared.

It goes without saying that the web speaker must be master of the technology, not be mastered by it. Technology messes up. That is a fact of life. One of the sources for this appendix was an archived video of a webinar about web speaking by an expert; during the webinar, his Internet connection was lost! Even if the connection is strong, the speaker must know what buttons to push on the software. For this reason, it might be a good idea to have an “assistant” who handles the technology and makes sure it works so that you can focus on the communication.

Experts give a few other preparation tips:

1. Make sure you will not be interrupted during the webconference. This can be extremely embarrassing as well as ineffective. You have probably seen the priceless video from the BBC of an interview with an expert on Korea. His children photobomb the interview and then the mother tries to clean up the damage. It is hilarious, but the same situation won’t be for you. Lock the door, put a big sign on the door not to be disturbed, and turn off the phones.
2. Have notes and anything else you need right at hand.
3. If you can be seen, be seen—use the technology to your advantage so that you are not an entirely disembodied voice talking over slides.

Finally, in preparing, think humor. Humor is a great attention-getter (see Chapter 7 on factors of attention). Cartoons, short videos, funny anecdotes, and visual humor can help you work against the audience’s temptations to multitask or daydream in a webinar. There is a limit and it should be tasteful and relevant, but humor might be one of your best allies. Plus, it might increase your own energy level and fun with the webinar.

During the Web Speech

One of the helpful suggestions from the business writers used for this appendix was to start on time. This might seem obvious, but if you have ever been in an online meeting or webinar, it’s harder said than done—mainly because participants log on at the start of the meeting rather than early and it takes a while for the technology to kick in. Therefore, one suggestion is to have a “soft” introduction for the punctual and a “hard” opening for the late-comers. The soft intro could be the fun, attention-getting one (video, interactivity) and the hard one the “this is why the topic matters let’s get down to business” opening.

It goes without saying that you as the speaker should be online well before the beginning of the meeting, and ready to go technology- and presentation-wise.

Web speaking is often scheduled for a longer period of time than a face-to-face speech, which does not add to attention level of the audience. For this reason, your presentation should include time for questions and input from the audience. However, this should be planned at intervals, perhaps between main sections of the speech, so that the audience isn’t interrupting at inconvenient times.

Going deeper, perhaps we should ask the fundamental question of purpose. What is your intent in this webinar speech? To educate? To persuade/sell? To contribute to or facilitate a decision? Something else? Everything else you do comes from that intent or purpose, just like your face-to-face speech comes from the specific purpose speech. What do you really want to accomplish from this meeting?

The other fundamental question is about your audience. Who are they? Where are they? In fact, in some cases the audience is in a different time zone! And that really matters in how a listener responds.

Other experts suggest the following:

1. Along with standing up for your presentation, smile. People can hear a smile even when they don’t see

you.

2. Your anxiety does not go away just because you cannot see everyone in your “web audience.” Also, you might not have ever met the people to whom you are speaking. Be aware of the likelihood of anxiety—it might not hit until you are “on air.” As Ron Ashkenas says, “Anxiety in speaking is like static on the radio.”
3. In your use of periodic questions, be specific. The typical “Any questions?-pause- let’s go on” is really pretty ineffective. First, it’s not directed or specific, and second, people need time to formulate their questions and articulate them. Even saying, “What questions do you have?” is better, but even better is to ask specific questions about what you’ve been addressing. Many times you can forecast possible questions, and use those.
4. Remember the power of transitions. Many people think that slides don’t need transitions because, well, they change, isn’t that enough? No, it’s not. The speaker needs to tie the messages of the slides together.
5. Verbal pauses can be helpful. Since one of the things that put audiences to sleep is continual, non-stop flow of words, a pause can get attention.
6. Look at the camera, not the screen. You will appear more professional in those cases where the audience can see you.

Ending

As mentioned before, webconferences and webinars can go long—don’t let it. End on time. Allow participants to email you questions if needed, but don’t take advantage of people’s time by entertaining questions longer than the scheduled time. Software allows for recording and archiving, so the audience should know how to access the recording.

Speaking for an Online Class

This writer teaches an online business communication course where she requires either a face-to-face (if possible) presentation or one done online. In these cases, instructors usually want the presentation given in front of a live audience of a prescribed number of people and/or in a venue like a classroom (not the student’s living room). Many public speaking instructors do not believe this option is as good as an in-class speech, but if you are in this situation, here are some tips.

1. Film your whole body—not just your head and shoulders.
2. Do tech walk-throughs and make sure your camera is working well and picking up your voice.
3. Make sure you can get the recording to your instructor. You probably will not be able to just send it through email because the file will be too big. You will have to post it to the cloud in some manner.
4. Wear appropriate clothing. Not being in class may tempt you to wear something too informal. This might be an opportunity to go a step beyond in your clothing. Make sure, also, that it looks good on camera in terms of color and lighting in your setting.
5. Along that line, since you probably won’t have professional lighting, get the room as bright as you possibly can, but do not point the camera in the direction of a bright light. The light should be coming from behind the camera.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, this subject is an evolving one. These tips and tactics should help not just avoid the major problems but also cross the finish line into an effective presentation.

Links that might help with this topic:

<https://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/10-tips-for-giving-great-online-presentations.html>

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/how-to-give-a-killer-online-presentation/>

<http://performancesalesandtraining.com/great-online-presentation/>

<https://blog.cengage.com/five-guidelines-for-effective-online-presentations/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2013/05/28/how-to-bypass-the-5-worst-mistakes-in-online-presentations/#7cble71b3361>

<http://planyourmeetings.com/10-tips-effective-live-online-presentations/>

<https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/10-tips-giving-effective-virtual-presentations>

<https://hbr.org/2014/01/presenting-the-perfect-online-presentation>

<http://blog.visme.co/engage-audience-online-presentation/>

Appendix D: Humor Appendix (is that anything like the funny bone?)

Appendix D: Humor Appendix (is that anything like the funny bone?)

What is so funny about public speaking? Well, nothing really. On the other hand, a speech that includes some timely and well-delivered humor can be especially gratifying for both speaker and audience. The judicious, strategic, and appropriate use of humor in speaking can help the audience have a positive feeling about: 1) the Subject, 2) the Speaker and 3) the Speech itself. Many people are hesitant to use humor in speeches for a variety of reasons. Some people think that humor is never appropriate for speeches. Some people shy away from it because they do not feel that they are funny. Some people do not use it because they are afraid if no one laughs, it is another chance to be rejected. Some do not use it because it may take a bit of extra work to include relevant humor in a speech. You should not be afraid to use humor. With the right planning, preparation, and practice, you can be an effective purveyor of the comic arts. You may find that both you and your audience will be better for it.

Scholars and practitioners have studied the value and challenges of using humor in public speaking for many years. Consider the information in the following table:

Humor and Audiences: Positives and Negatives

Scholar	Work	Positives	Negatives
Beebe & Beebe	<i>Public Speaking Handbook</i> (2013)	Message Retention	Offensiveness Potential
Campbell & Huxman	<i>The Rhetorical Act</i>	Attention Keeping, Audience Identification	Bad Taste Potential
Engleberg & Daly	<i>Think Public Speaking</i> (2013)	Information Retention, Defuse Anger, Ease Tension, Stimulate Action	Offensiveness, Irrelevance
Ferguson	<i>Public Speaking: Building Competency in Stages</i> (2008)	Audience Attention and Enjoyment	Offensiveness
Fraleigh & Tuman	<i>Speak Up: An Illustrated Guide to Public Speaking</i> (2009)	Enhances Interest, Gains Attention, Establishes Credibility	Unfunny, Credibility Diminishing
Ford-Brown	<i>Speaker</i> (2013)		
Grice & Skinner	<i>Mastering Public Speaking</i> (2011)	Favorable Self Image, Attention Getting, Defuse Audience, Hostility, Emphasize Key Ideas, Transition Between Points	Trivializing Topic, Offending Audience
Hogan, et al	<i>Public Speaking and Civic Engagement</i> (2011)	Audience Attention and Interest	Disrespectful, Irrelevant
Lucas	<i>The Art of Public Speaking</i> (2012)	Audience Enjoyment	Offensiveness
O'Hair, Stewart & Rubenstein	<i>A Speaker's Guidebook</i> (2010)	Rapport Building, Make Key Points, Introduce Themes	Irrelevance, Bad Taste
Osborn, Osborn, & Osborn	<i>Public Speaking</i> (2009)	Relationship Building with Audience, Information Retention	Can Seem Contrived and Flat, Irrelevance
Ross & Leonard	<i>Introduction to the Speechmaking Process</i> (2009)	Positive Showmanship, Information Retention	Offensiveness
Samovar & McDaniel	<i>Public Speaking in a Multicultural Society</i> (2007)	Point the Audience in the Direction of the Topic	Cultural Inappropriateness
Zarefsky	<i>Public Speaking Strategies for Success</i> (2011)	Relaxes the Audience, Speaker Favorability, Disarms Skeptics	Irrelevance, Offensiveness

Humorous Speaking Tips

Having seen both the value and the complications connected to humor use in speeches, please examine the following tips that weigh both the positive and negative aspects of humor in public address.

Positive Aspects

- Humor is an effective **attention getter**. You have just a few seconds to make the audience want to hear more. Humor can be a wonderful tool to do exactly that. If you can make the audience laugh or smile at the very beginning, then you will have them anxiously awaiting what you have to say next.
- Humor is an effective **attention keeper**. Audiences can drift away, especially in an age when attention spans are shrinking. Sometimes you have to rein them back in. You can do this with a bit of humor.
- Humor can be used to **break the monotony**. Sometimes you will be dealing with a technical or tedious bit of information that requires a lot of explanation. When this happens people may begin to get restless. Perk them up with some humor.
- Humor can be used to **help your audience remember**. There is substantial research which supports the idea that information retention is aided when connected with a piece of humor or a good story. The key is to make sure that it is actually connected to the information you want them to remember.
- Humor can be used to **help your audience have a positive feeling about the message and about you as a speaker**. Humor can be used for affinity building with your audience. The more they like you or feel connected with you, the more open they are to your message.
- Humor can be used to **diffuse tension** or to **soften the blow of a serious or controversial point**. Sometimes you will have to make a point that your audience needs but may not want to hear. You can use humor to make that point. You can deflect criticism with humor. Both Presidents Kennedy and

Reagan were masters of this. Both used humor to deflect criticisms of their age when they ran for president. Opponents thought John Kennedy was too young to be president and Ronald Reagan was too old. Their humor obviously worked.

Negative Aspects

- Humor can **offend**. Avoid humor that uses sexist, racist, or demeaning language. Avoid profanity and vulgarity and sexual references. You should generally avoid partisan political humor unless you do not mind risking losing half of your audience. Be sure that your language is context-appropriate. Speaking at the Kiwanis club is not the same as speaking at the comedy club.
- Humor can **make your topic seem trivial**. The use of too much humor, especially irrelevant and silly humor, may cause your audience to lose sight of the importance of your topic. Consider how much and what kind of humor to use, particularly when dealing with sensitive or controversial topics.
- Humor can be **mere filler**. When you eat a meal, it is important to eat a balanced diet and remember to eat your vegetables. Dessert is delicious but should not be the entire meal. Think of humor as the dessert or as side dishes and not as the entrée.
- Humor can be **difficult to translate or understand**. If the audience contains several people who do not share your native tongue or national identity, be careful that you do not use humor that may not be easily translated by them. Word play can be especially challenging in this situation.
- Humor can be **culturally inappropriate**. Some gestures, words, or phrases may have different meanings in other cultures. In the U. S. the thumbs up sign means “all is well.” In some countries it is considered a vulgar and offensive gesture.
- Humor can be **irrelevant**. If the humor does not connect with the greater message, it can become a distraction. Remember, you do not just want them to laugh, but to consider your entire message very carefully. They may become annoyed or fail to understand the point you are trying to make.
- Humor can be **unfunny**. Sometimes humor falls flat. It may be that they have heard it before or they do not get it, or they just do not find it funny. Remember, humor is subjective. People laugh at different things and for different reasons. Sometimes they are preoccupied with other realities of life. Do not be disheartened. Move on to the next piece of information in the speech. Do not keep repeating the joke or try to explain to them why it is funny. They might be insulted and you are wasting valuable speech time.

As you can see, using humor in your speaking is not necessarily easy, but it is well worth the investment of time and energy. It will take some planning and some practice. One of the things that worries beginning speakers the most when it comes to humor use is that they think they must prepare original material and become professional standup comedians or humor writers. This is not the case. Certainly, if you have an aptitude for creating humor then develop and nurture that talent and apply it to your public speaking. Original, fresh humor that comes from a speaker’s experience is always appreciated by an audience.

On the other hand, you need not feel as though you must create amazing pieces of comedy when there is much good, relevant humor available for you to use. Remember that humor is not just joke-telling. In fact, for most speeches jokes are not really the best kind of humor to use. You can use amusing stories, light verse, funny lists, comical visuals, etc. Be sure to give credit to the source. The more you develop this skill, the more comfortable you will become. You may even find that you are a gifted humorist. At any rate, your audience will appreciate the effort.

Appendix E: APA Citation

Appendix E: APA Citation

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Understand the purposes of citation;
- Recognize when to cite information;
- Understand different ways to cite sources;
- Find citation assistance when needed; and
- Cite sources in APA format

For more information on APA Citations, refer to the [Citing Sources Guide](#) (College of DuPage Library).

Appendix Preview

E.1 – Citation

E.2 – When to Cite

E.3 – Elements of Citation

E.4 – APA Resources

E.5 — Reference List

E.1– Citation

Citing your sources is part of using information. While there are many citation styles, used by different disciplines, this appendix focuses on **APA Style**.

Citation, in any style, has many functions; it:

- allows you to support the claims you make,
- gives credit to the source of the information, and
- allows your audience to locate the information if they want to learn more.

APA Style

A citation style developed by the American Psychological Association (APA), used by a variety of disciplines, including psychology, health sciences, STEM fields, and communication.

APA Style is detailed in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition

The practice of citation is inseparable from research, because new developments always build on existing knowledge. No individual knows everything there is to know about a topic, which is why research involves examining what is already known.

Engaging with the ideas of others is a way of adding your voice into a conversation about a topic. This can include agreeing with others' perspectives, building on existing ideas, or introducing a new interpretation or counter-argument.

E.2—When to Cite

Any time you use someone else's original ideas, statistics, studies, borrowed concepts, phrases, images, quoted material, and tables—their **intellectual property**—you cite to indicate its source. This reflects both the research you have done and your academic integrity.

Not everything you use in your work needs to be cited, though. You do not have to cite facts which are commonly known by your audience and easily verified in reference sources. You also do not have to cite information that comes from you, such as your opinion.

When in doubt, though, it's not wrong to cite your source.

Intellectual property

A legal term used to refer to intangible creations of individuals, including art, written work, research findings, and ideas

E.3- Elements of Citation

There are two main elements of citation: the brief in-context citation, and the full reference entry.

In-Context Citation

You may be used to citing in text, and while citing in speeches works differently, the same principles apply—you want to ensure that your audience knows where you found the information.

You can use both quotation and paraphrasing in speeches, and for either, be sure to provide the details about the source when you use the information.

Quotation

Since quoting means using someone else's exact words, you should indicate that you are using a quote. A few examples of how to do this are:

“As legendary football coach Vince Lombardi said, ‘Winning isn’t everything, but wanting to win is.’”

“Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh said, and I quote, ‘I would rather die of passion than boredom.’”

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing, or restating a source's ideas in your own words, is another option. Be sure to acknowledge the author, source, and date of the information you use. This can be accomplished in various ways, such as:

“During the December 27, 2017 episode of *60 Minutes*, correspondent Lara Logan described the practice of airlifting rhinos by helicopter to protect them from poachers.”

“A 2017 study by Dr. Serge Ferrari, published in the medical journal *Lancet*, found that the use of drugs containing bone-forming agents in patients with osteoporosis reduced their risk of fragility fractures.”

E.4-APA Resources

You may have questions about APA style, and while full APA guidelines are included in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, other resources are also available. The APA runs a site, apastyle.org, that provides additional information about APA citation. Also, the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) has a wonderful online guide to APA citation, located at owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/1/. Of course, librarians are a good resource, too!

E.5-Reference List

As part of a speech assignment, you will likely be asked to provide a list of references used. This may be on a slide, if it is a presentation file, or on a document, for printed or electronically submitted written materials that are submitted in conjunction with the verbal presentation of your speech.

Each source you used will be listed on this page, using a full APA-style citation. The page itself will be labeled “References,” and will list all of the sources you used in alphabetical order. An example of an APA-style References page is shown in figure E.1.

Sample References

Book or eBook (APA manual, p. 202-203)

Author, A., Author, B., & Author, C. (Year). Title of book: Capitalize first letter in subtitle. City of Publication: Publisher.

Spellman, F. & Whiting, N. (2005). Environmental engineer's mathematics handbook. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Article, Chapter, or Work in a Reference Book or Edited Collection (APA manual, p. 204)

Author, A. (Year). Article or chapter title: Capitalize first letter of subtitle. In A. Editor, B. Editor (Eds.), Book title: Capitalize first letter in subtitle. (# ed., pp. #). Place of publication: Publisher.

Donnerstein, E. (2005). Is popular culture too violent? Media violence promotes violent behavior. In J. Woodward (Ed.), Popular culture: Opposing viewpoints (pp. 114-119). Detroit, MI: Thompson Gale.

Reference or Encyclopedia Article (APA manual, p. 203)

Author, A. (Year). Entry title. In A. Editor & B. Editor (Eds.), Title of encyclopedia (Vol. #, pp. #). Place of publication: Publisher.

Richelle, M.N. (2001). Skinner, Burrhus Frederick (1904-1990). In N. Smelser & P. Baltes (Eds.), International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences (Vol. 21, pp. 14141-14146). New York, NY: Elsevier.

Magazine Article (APA manual, p. 200)

Author, A. (Year, Month Day). Article title. Title of Magazine, Volume(Issue). Page(s).

Biedenharn, I. (2015, April 17). Grumpy, Inc. Entertainment Weekly, (1359/1360), 118.

Newspaper Article (APA manual, p. 200)

Author, A. B. (Year, Month Day). Article title. Title of Newspaper, p. SectionPage.

Brown, R. (2009, December 16). Long faces ethics complaint. Dalton Daily Citizen, p. A1.

Academic Journal Article (APA manual, p. 198-199)

Author, A.A. (Year). Article title. Title of Journal, Volume(issue), page(s).

Schultz-Bergin, M. (2018). Is CRISPR an ethical game changer?. Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Ethics, 31(2), 219-238. doi:10.1007/s10806-018-9721-z

Web Page (APA manual, p. 187-192) (Second example below is for a page with no author)

Author, A. (Year). Title of page. Title of website. Retrieved from <http://thewebsite.com>

Adderall. (2009). Prescribers' Digital Reference. Retrieved from <http://www.pdr.net/pdr-consumer-monograph/adderall?druglabelid=1048&ConsumerId=1008>

Naylor, S. (1998). Hindu mythology. Encyclopedia Mythica. Retrieved from http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hindu_mythology.html

Online Photograph, Illustration, or Image (not in APA manual, suggested format)

Creator, A. (Year). Title [Type]. Retrieved from <https://www.thewebsite.com/restofurl>

Historic American Buildings Survey. (1933). McCamy House, 401 South Thornton Avenue, Dalton, Whitfield County, GA. [Image]. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/item/ga0594>

Reports (APA Manual, p. 205-206)

Author, A. (Year). Title (Report #). Location: Publisher.

Citation FAQs

What if I'm citing multiple sources?

This depends on the information. Is it common knowledge/factual? If so, you do not need to cite it.

If it needs to be cited, be sure to indicate the sources:

As many scholars, including Buranen, Haviland & Mullin, Blum, and DeSena, have noted, plagiarism refers to a variety of phenomena, which vary widely.

What if I'm using a lot of information, but it's all from the same source?

Cite the source each time you use it:

According to Blum, Blum also found In the same study, . . .

Bauman, K. (2003). Educational attainment, 2000 (Census 2000 brief C2KBR-17). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Motion Picture (APA manual, p. 209)

Producer, A (Producer) & Director, A. (Director). (Year). Title [Motion picture]. Country of origin: Studio.

Carroll, G. (Producer) & Rosenberg, S. (Director). (1991). Cool hand Luke [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Video (Documentary/Non-Motion Picture) (APA manual, p. 209)

Producer, A (Producer). (Year). Title [Format]. Available from <http://www.producersURL.com>

American Psychological Association (Producer). (2000). Responding therapeutically to patient expressions of sexual attraction [DVD]. Available from <http://www.apa.org/videos>

Online Video (not in APA manual, suggested format)

Author. (Year, Month Day). Title of video [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.website.com/specificURL>

Adult Swim. (2014, November 7). Too many cooks [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrGrOK8oZG8>

Appendix G: References

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