Open Textbook for SPC 101 for 2021-2022

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About this open textbook

To students:

The idea for this compilation began with students in two ways. First, students asked why, in the Internet age, do we have a book? The answer to the question is complex, but the short answer is that not all information is equal. What this book contains is authoritative information, thanks to the Internet age and to open education resources. Second, I noticed some students didn't buy the required, commercial textbook, and I could tell that they didn't get enough from class discussions alone. This document is my attempt to provide that information in an affordable way.

This book's appearance may seem a bit messy, but the information is well-researched, drawn from a wide variety of perspectives on communication and written by communication scholars. I believe this course will make a difference in your life as a community member, as a family member, in your career, and in your relationships. Having the information in this book will help you effectively learn the communication skills and concepts you need.

Please read this book selfishly, for what you find valuable. But also be a little selfless. Help contribute to the open source method of learning, if you get the opportunity. You, too, have a part to play in helping to keep materials free for all students.

To help improve this book, you will need to read it and give feedback on it. Be sure to use the current edition and be sure to bring a copy, electronic or print, with you to class every day.

To all readers:

Attribution

The majority of this text has been adapted from Communication in the Real World: An Introduction to Communication Studies v. 1.0. (Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 License without attribution as requested by the work's original creator or licensee). Attributions for two additional works are listed separately in their respective chapters.

Origins of this book

The majority of the present text is based on an open source textbook from a repository created by Andy Schmitz (http://2012books.lardbucket.org/). That textbook was later adapted by the Constitution Foundation (http://www.saylor.org/books/). I chose to use the Saylor version because it removed the stock photos that were in the original publisher's version. It was also the only version converted to Microsoft Word, which was needed for creating a good, editable Pressbook version. This makes the current text rather plain, but I feel more confident that what I am using is truly open source. [Note: In August, 2019, I searched for the Word document I used at Saylor Academy, but it is no longer linked. The only remaining link is to Andy Schmitz' web-based version.]

Fifth Compilation for 2021-2022

This document is the fifth version of this compilation. It has very few substantive changes from the 2019-2020 version. I continue to correct typographic errors and refine the typography from the original Word document.

The contents of the original text, released in 2012, has not been updated in any version of this textbook that I am aware of. Updating content of this text to replace and/or add more current examples and concepts was delayed due to the the 2020 pandemic. This process will be the next step in evolving this open textbook.

This book is primarily designed for print and PDF usage. With its new base in Kirkwood's Pressbook collection, there may be some upcoming changes to include supplemental materials and to include H5P materials in the web format.

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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.

1.1 Forms of Communication

Learning Objectives

Define communication.

List the five forms of communication.

Distinguish among the five forms of communication.

Review the various career options for students who study communication.

For our purposes in this book, we will define **communication** as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts. This definition builds on other definitions of communication that have been rephrased and refined over many years. In fact, since the systematic study of communication began in colleges and universities a little over one hundred years ago, there have been more than 126 published definitions of communication. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1976), 23.

Now let’s turn to a discussion of the five major forms of communication.

Forms of Communication

Forms of communication vary in terms of participants, channels used, and contexts. The five main forms of communication, all of which will be explored in much more detail in this book, are intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, 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 is communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking. Like other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication is triggered by some internal or external stimulus. We may, for example, communicate with our self about what we want to eat due to the internal stimulus of hunger, or we may react intrapersonally to an event we witness. Unlike other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication takes place only inside our heads. The other forms of communication must be perceived by someone else to count as communication. So what is the point of intrapersonal communication if no one else even sees it?

Intrapersonal communication serves several social functions. Internal vocalization, or talking to ourselves, can help us achieve or maintain social adjustment. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, Speech Communication: Concepts and Behaviors (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1972), 51. 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. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, Speech Communication: Concepts and Behaviors (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1972), 55.

Sometimes we intrapersonally communicate for the fun of it. I'm sure we have all had the experience of laughing aloud because we thought of something funny. We also communicate intrapersonally to pass time. I bet there is a lot of intrapersonal communication going on in waiting rooms all over the world right now. In both of these cases, intrapersonal communication is usually unplanned and doesn't include a clearly defined goal. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, Speech Communication: Concepts and Behaviors (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1972), 28. We can, however, engage in more intentional intrapersonal communication. In fact, deliberate self-reflection can help us become more competent communicators as we become more mindful of our own behaviors. For example, your internal voice may praise or scold you based on a thought or action.

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

Interpersonal Communication

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

Interpersonal communication can be planned or unplanned, but since it is interactive, it is usually more structured and influenced by social expectations than intrapersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is also more goal oriented than intrapersonal communication and fulfills instrumental and relational needs. In terms of instrumental needs, the goal may be as minor as greeting someone to fulfill a morning ritual or as major

as conveying your desire to be in a committed relationship with someone. Interpersonal communication meets relational needs by communicating the uniqueness of a specific relationship. Since this form of communication deals so directly with our personal relationships and is the most common form of communication, instances of miscommunication and communication conflict most frequently occur here. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, Speech Communication: Concepts and Behaviors (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1972), 56. Couples, bosses and employees, and family members all have to engage in complex interpersonal communication, and it doesn't always go well. In order to be a competent interpersonal communicator, you need conflict management skills and listening skills, among others, to maintain positive relationships.

Group Communication

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

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

You know from previous experience working in groups that having more communicators usually leads to more complicated interactions. Some of the challenges of group communication relate to task-oriented interactions, such as deciding who will complete each part of a larger project. But many challenges stem from interpersonal conflict or misunderstandings among group members. Since group members also communicate with and relate to each other interpersonally and may have preexisting relationships or develop them during the course of group interaction, elements of interpersonal communication occur within group communication too. Chapter 13 "Small Group Communication" of this book, which deals with group communication, will help you learn how to be a more effective group communicator by learning about group theories and processes as well as the various roles that contribute to and detract from the functioning of a group.

Public Communication

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

Public communication, at least in Western societies, is also more sender focused than interpersonal or group communication. It is precisely this formality and focus on the sender that makes many new and experienced public speakers anxious at the thought of facing an audience. One way to begin to manage anxiety toward public speaking is to begin to see connections between public speaking and other forms of communication with which we are more familiar and comfortable. Despite being formal, public speaking is very similar to the conversations that we have in our daily interactions. For example, although public speakers don't necessarily develop individual relationships with audience members, they still have the benefit of being face-to-face with them so they can receive verbal and nonverbal feedback. Later in this chapter, you will learn some strategies for managing speaking anxiety, since presentations are undoubtedly a requirement in the course for which you are reading this book. Then, in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", Chapter 10 "Delivering a Speech", and Chapter 11 "Informative and Persuasive Speaking", 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.

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 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. What Can I Do with This Major? "Communication Studies," accessed May 18, 2012, http://whatcanidowiththismajor.com/major/communication-studies. Within each of these areas there are multiple career paths, potential employers, and useful strategies for success.

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.

Which of the areas listed above are you most interested in studying in school or pursuing as a career? Why?

What aspect(s) of communication studies does/do the department at your school specialize in? What concentrations/courses are offered?

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.

There are five forms of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication.

Intrapersonal communication is communication with oneself and occurs only inside our heads.

Interpersonal communication is communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another and typically occurs in dyads, which means in pairs.

Group communication occurs when three or more people communicate to achieve a shared goal.

Public communication is sender focused and typically occurs when one person conveys information to an audience.

Mass communication occurs when messages are sent to large audiences using print or electronic media.

Exercises

Getting integrated:

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).

1.2 The Communication Process

Learning Objectives

Identify and define the components of the transmission model of communication.

Identify and define the components of the interaction model of communication.

Identify and define the components of the transaction model of communication.

Compare and contrast the three models of communication.

Use the transaction model of communication to analyze a recent communication encounter.

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

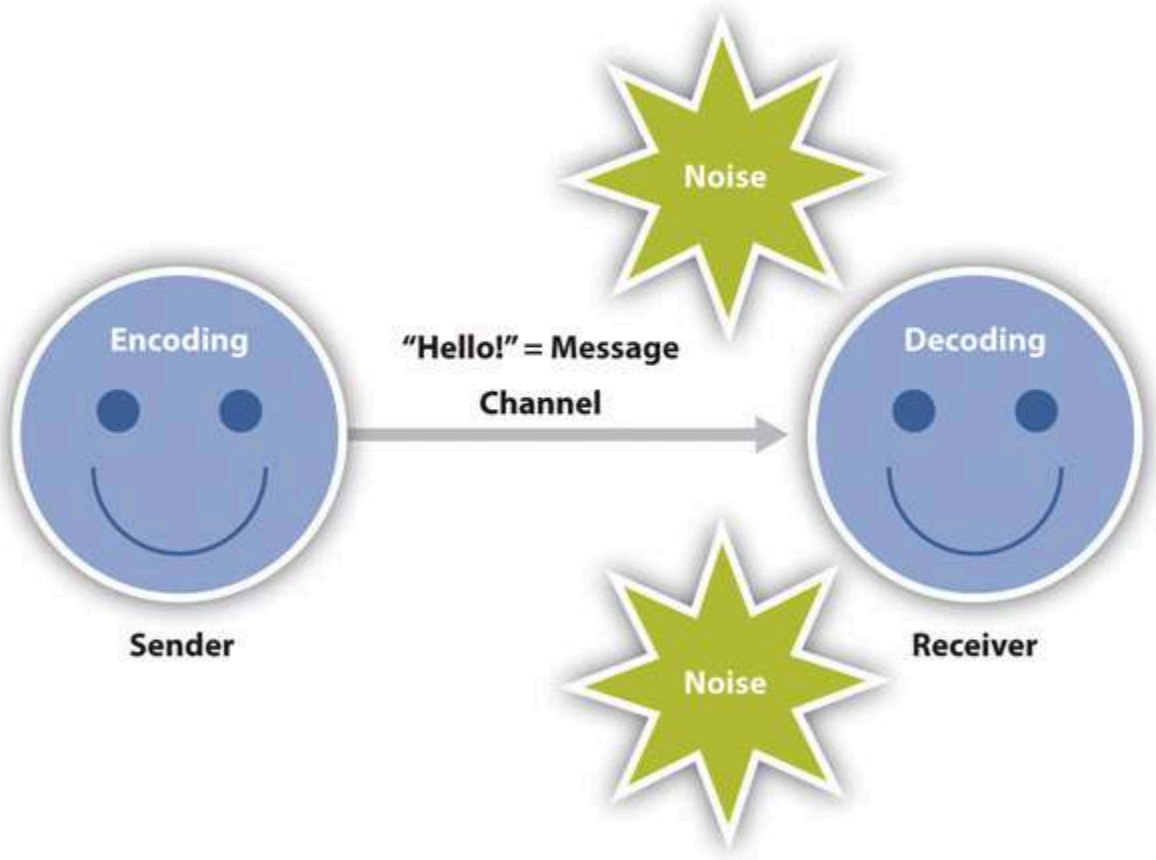
Although these models of communication differ, they contain some common elements. The first two models we will discuss, the transmission model and the interaction model, include the following parts: participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the **participants**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

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

Transmission Model of Communication

The **transmission model of communication** describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver. Richard Ellis and Ann McClintock, You Take My Meaning: Theory into Practice in Human Communication (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), 71. This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. The scholars who designed this model extended on a linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries before that included a speaker, message, and hearer. They were also influenced by the advent and spread of new communication technologies of the time such as telegraphy and radio, and you can probably see these technical influences within the model. Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, The Mathematical Theory of Communication (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949), 16. Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive his or her message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

Figure 1.1 The Transmission Model of Communication



Since this model is sender and message focused, responsibility is put on the sender to help ensure the message is successfully conveyed. This model emphasizes clarity and effectiveness, but it also acknowledges that there are barriers to effective communication. **Noise** is anything that interferes with a message being sent between participants in a communication encounter. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, noise may interfere with a message being accurately received and decoded. The transmission model of communication accounts for environmental and semantic noise. **Environmental noise** is any physical noise present in a communication encounter. Other people talking in a crowded diner could interfere with your ability to transmit a message and have

it successfully decoded. While environmental noise interferes with the transmission of the message, **semantic noise** refers to noise that occurs in the encoding and decoding process when participants do not understand a symbol. To use a technical example, FM antennae can't decode AM radio signals and vice versa. Likewise, most French speakers can't decode Swedish and vice versa. Semantic noise can also interfere in communication between people speaking the same language because many words have multiple or unfamiliar meanings.

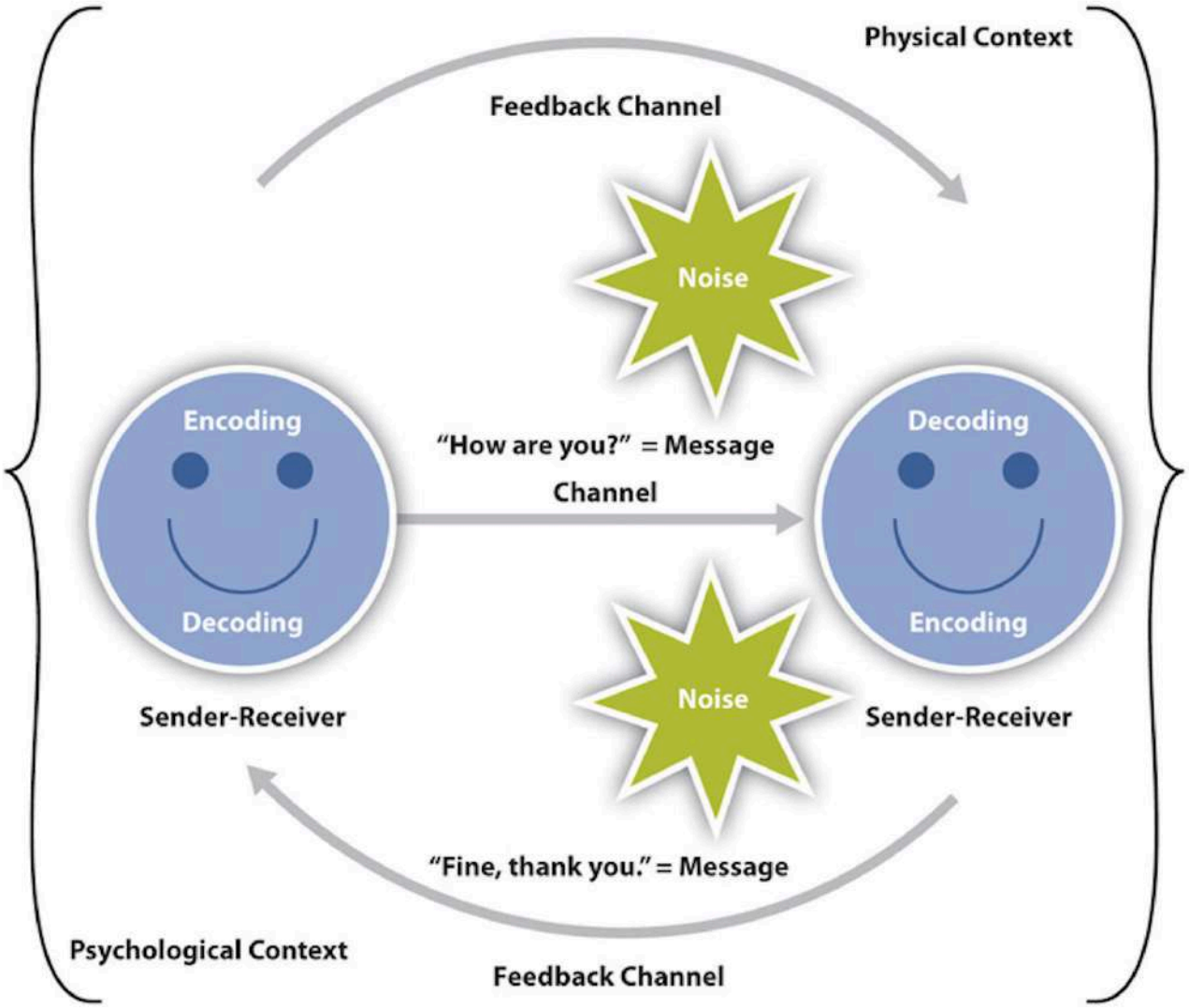
Although the transmission model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication that we will discuss more later. This model is not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

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

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

Figure 1.2 The Interaction Model of Communication



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

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

process, but the transaction model views communication as a powerful tool that shapes our realities beyond individual communication encounters.

Transaction Model of Communication

As the study of communication progressed, models expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don't send messages like computers, and we don't neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can't consciously decide to stop communicating, because communication is more than sending and receiving messages. The transaction model differs from the transmission and interaction models in significant ways, including the conceptualization of communication, the role of sender and receiver, and the role of context. Dean C. Barnlund, "A Transactional Model of Communication," in Foundations of Communication Theory, eds. Kenneth K. Sereno and C. David Mortensen (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1970), 83–92.

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

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

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

Figure 1.3 The Transaction Model of Communication

The transaction model also includes a more complex understanding of context. The interaction model portrays

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

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

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

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

Cultural context includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability. We will learn more about these identities in 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.

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, isn't a bad thing. In fact, intercultural communication has the potential to enrich various aspects of our lives. In order to communicate well within various cultural contexts, it is important to keep an open mind and avoid making assumptions about others' cultural identities. While you may be able to identify some aspects of the cultural context within a communication encounter, there may also be cultural influences that you can't see. A competent communicator shouldn't assume to know all the cultural contexts a person brings to an encounter,

since not all cultural identities are visible. As with the other contexts, it requires skill to adapt to shifting contexts, and the best way to develop these skills is through practice and reflection.

Key Takeaways

Communication models are not complex enough to truly capture all that takes place in a communication encounter, but they can help us examine the various steps in the process in order to better understand our communication and the communication of others.

The 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

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?

Use the transaction model or interaction 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 or sender-receiver; message; channel; feedback; noise; and physical, psychological, social, relational, and cultural contexts).

1.3 Communication Principles

Learning Objectives

Discuss how communication is integrated in various aspects of your life.

Explain how the notion of a "process" fits into communication.

Discuss the ways in which communication is guided by culture and context.

Taking this course will change how you view communication. Most people admit that communication is important, but it's often in the back of our minds or viewed as something that "just happens." Putting communication at the front of your mind and becoming more aware of how you communicate can be informative and have many positive effects. When I first started studying communication as an undergraduate, I began seeing the concepts we learned in class in my everyday life. When I worked in groups, I was able to apply what I had learned about group communication to improve my performance and overall experience. I also noticed interpersonal concepts and theories as I communicated within various relationships. Whether I was analyzing mediated messages or considering the ethical implications of a decision before I made it, studying communication allowed me to see more of what was going on around me, which allowed me to more actively and competently participate in various communication contexts. In this section, as we learn the principles of communication, I

encourage you to take note of aspects of communication that you haven't thought about before and begin to apply the principles of communication to various parts of your life.

Communication Is Integrated into All Parts of Our Lives

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

Academic

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

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. Wendy S. Zabava and Andrew D. Wolvin, "The Differential Impact of a Basic Communication Course on Perceived Communication Competencies in Class, Work, and Social Contexts," Communication Education 42 (1993): 215–17. 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, Job Outlook 2011 (2010): 25. Desired communication skills vary from career to career, but again, this textbook provides a foundation onto which you can build communication skills specific to your major or field of study. Research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving. Vincent S. DiSalvo, "A Summary of Current Research Identifying Communication Skills in Various Organizational Contexts," Communication Education 29 (1980): 283–90. 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, Job Outlook 2011 (2010): 25. Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Employers appreciate good listening skills and the ability

to communicate concisely because efficiency and clarity are often directly tied to productivity and success in terms of profit or task/project completion. Despite the well-documented need for communication skills in the professional world, many students still resist taking communication classes. Perhaps people think they already have good communication skills or can improve their skills on their own. While either of these may be true for some, studying communication can only help. In such a competitive job market, being able to document that you have received communication instruction and training from communication professionals (the faculty in your communication department) can give you the edge needed to stand out from other applicants or employees.

Personal

While many students know from personal experience and from the prevalence of communication counseling on television talk shows and in self-help books that communication forms, maintains, and ends our interpersonal relationships, they do not know the extent to which that occurs. I am certain that when we get to the interpersonal communication chapters in this textbook that you will be intrigued and maybe even excited by the relevance and practicality of the concepts and theories discussed there. My students often remark that they already know from experience much of what's discussed in the interpersonal unit of the course. While we do learn from experience, until we learn specific vocabulary and develop foundational knowledge of communication concepts and theories, we do not have the tools needed to make sense of these experiences. Just having a vocabulary to name the communication phenomena in our lives increases our ability to consciously alter our communication to achieve our goals, avoid miscommunication, and analyze and learn from our inevitable mistakes. Once we get further into the book, I am sure the personal implications of communication will become very clear.

Civic

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

Communication scholars have been aware of the connections between communication and a person's civic engagement or citizenship for thousands of years. Aristotle, who wrote the first and most influential comprehensive book on communication 2,400 years ago, taught that it is through our voice, our ability to communicate, that we engage with the world around us, participate in our society, and become a "virtuous citizen." It is a well-established and unfortunate fact that younger people, between the ages of eighteen and thirty, are some of the least politically active and engaged members of our democracy. Civic engagement includes but goes beyond political engagement, which includes things like choosing a political party or advocating for a presidential candidate. Although younger people have tended not to be as politically engaged as other age groups, the current generation of sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, known as the millennial generation, is known to be very engaged in volunteerism and community service. In addition, some research has indicated that college students are eager for civic engagement but are not finding the resources they need on their campuses. Scott Jaschik, "The Civic Engagement Gap," Inside Higher Ed, September 30, 2009, accessed May 18, 2012, http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/09/30/civic. The American Association of Colleges and Universities has launched several initiatives and compiled many resources for students and faculty regarding civic engagement. I encourage you to explore their website at the following link and try to identify some ways in which you can productively integrate what you are learning in this class into a civic context: http://www.aacu.org/resources/civic-learning.

Communication Is a Process

Communication is a process that involves an interchange of verbal and/or nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 15. When we refer to communication as a process, we imply that it doesn't have a distinct beginning and end or follow a predetermined sequence of events. It can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter, since communication doesn't always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or phenomena difficult. Any time we pull one part of the process out for study or closer examination, we artificially "freeze" the process in order to examine it, which is not something that is possible when communicating in real life. But sometimes scholars want to isolate a particular stage in the process in order to gain insight by studying, for example, feedback or eye contact. Doing that changes the very process itself, and by the time you have examined a particular stage or component of the process, the entire process may have changed. These snapshots are useful for scholarly interrogation of the communication process, and they can also help us evaluate our own communication practices, troubleshoot a problematic encounter we had, or slow things down to account for various contexts before we engage in communication. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1976), 28.

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.

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. Frank E. X. Dance and Carl E. Larson, The Functions of Human Communication: A Theoretical Approach (New York, NY: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1976), 25. Since intrapersonal communication happens in our heads and isn't intended for others to perceive, it wouldn't be considered communication. But imagine the following scenario: You and I are riding on a bus and you are sitting across from me. As I sit thinking about a stressful week ahead, I wrinkle up my forehead, shake my head, and put my head in my hands. Upon seeing this you think, "That guy must be pretty stressed out." In this scenario, did communication take place? If I really didn't intend for anyone to see the nonverbal communication that went along with my intrapersonal communication, then this definition would say no. But even though words weren't exchanged, you still generated meaning from the communication I was unintentionally sending. As a communication scholar, I do not take such a narrow definition of communication. Based on the definition of communication from the beginning of this chapter, the scenario we just discussed would count as communication, but the scenario illustrates the point that communication messages are sent both intentionally and unintentionally.

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

The dynamic nature of the communication process also means that communication is irreversible. After an

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

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

Content and Relationship in the Communication Process

Related to the process nature of communication is the principle that all communication contains content and relationship dimensions (Watzlavick, Beavin, and Jackson, 1967). **Content** is *what* the communication conveys, typically the idea that is being directly stated. This dimension is usually communicated in words. A more subtle message is also conveyed every time we communicate. The **relationship** dimension is how we view our connection with the person to whom we are communicating, and it is usually conveyed indirectly, in *how* we communicate. We may verbalize the relationship dimension by saying, "You're my best friend," or "I love you, man." More often we convey this nonverbally, through our tone of voice, our facial expression, or our posture and gesture. We may also convey this in our word choice and phrasing.

According to this principle, as we exchange messages at a content level, these relationship messages are also sent and received. Therefore, our relationships are constantly in a state of negotiation: being developed, defined, changed, or reaffirmed in every moment of communication. In order to understand and be successful in relationships, we must negotiate both content and relationship meanings.

While there are many kinds of relationship messages, three key relationship dimensions are often negotiated on the relationship level — dominance, affection, and involvement (Watson and Brodowsky, 2004). These are expressed as points on a continuum, from asserting control to giving up control, from liking to disliking, and from being familiar to being unacquainted.

Recognizing relationship messages

Here are three descriptions of messages. Identify possible relationship messages based on how the messages fit the three relationship dimensions. Where would you place each message based on the continua — from asserting control to giving up control, from liking to disliking, and from being familiar to being unacquainted:

1. Parent to child — "You are not leaving this house until you clean your room."
2. Older brother to younger sibling — "Let's go shoot some hoops. I want to see how your pathetic jump shot is coming along."
3. On a first date –"I don't care what movie we see. I'm not particular. What do you want to see?"

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Communication Is Guided by Culture and Context

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

Communication Is Learned

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

A key principle of communication is that it is symbolic. Communication is symbolic in that the words that make up our language systems do not directly correspond to something in reality. Instead, they stand in for or symbolize something. The fact that communication varies so much among people, contexts, and cultures illustrates the principle that meaning is not inherent in the words we use. For example, let's say you go to France on vacation and see the word poisson on the menu. Unless you know how to read French, you will not know that the symbol is the same as the English symbol fish. Those two words don't look the same at all, yet they symbolize the same object. If you went by how the word looks alone, you might think that the French word for fish is more like the English word poison and avoid choosing that for your dinner. Putting a picture of a fish on a menu would definitely help a foreign tourist understand what they are ordering, since the picture is an actual representation of the object rather than a symbol for it.

All symbolic communication is learned, negotiated, and dynamic. We know that the letters b-o-o-k refer to a bound object with multiple written pages. We also know that the letters t-r-u-c-k refer to a vehicle with a bed in the back for hauling things. But if we learned in school that the letters t-r-u-c-k referred to a bound object with written pages and b-o-o-k referred to a vehicle with a bed in the back, then that would make just as much sense, because the letters don't actually refer to the object and the word itself only has the meaning that we assign to it. We will learn more, in Chapter 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. Gunter Senft, "Phatic Communion," in Culture and Language Use, eds. Gunter Senft, Jan-Ola Ostman, and Jef Verschueren (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 226–33. **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?

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." Judy C. Pearson, Jeffrey T. Child, Jody L. Mattern, and David H. Kahl Jr., "What Are Students Being Taught about Ethics in Public Speaking Textbooks?" Communication Quarterly 54, no. 4 (2006): 508. Aristotle focuses on actions, which is an important part of communication ethics. While ethics has been studied as a part of philosophy since the time of Aristotle, only more recently has it become applied. In communication ethics, we are more concerned with the decisions people make about what is right and wrong than the systems, philosophies, or religions that inform those decisions. Much of ethics is gray area. Although we talk about making decisions in terms of what is right and what is wrong, the choice is rarely that simple. Aristotle goes on to say that we should act "to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way." This quote connects to communication competence, which focuses on communicating effectively and appropriately and will be discussed more in Section 1.4 "Communication Competence".

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

When dealing with communication ethics, it's difficult to state that something is 100 percent ethical or unethical. I tell my students that we all make choices daily that are more ethical or less ethical, and we may confidently make a decision only later to learn that it wasn't the 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, "NCA Credo for Ethical Communication," accessed May 18, 2012, http://natcom.org/Tertiary.aspx?id=2119&terms=ethical%20credo. 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.

What are some examples of unethical communication that you have witnessed?

Read through the whole credo. Of the nine principles listed, which do you think is most important and why?

Key Takeaways

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.

Personally, communication skills help us maintain satisfying relationships.

Communication is a process that includes messages that vary in terms of conscious thought and intention. Communication is also irreversible and unrepeatable.

We learn to communicate using systems that vary based on culture and language.

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

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?

What types of phatic communion do you engage in? How are they connected to context and/or social rules and norms?

1.4 Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

Define communication competence.

Explain each part of the definition of communication competence.

Discuss strategies for developing communication competence.

Discuss communication apprehension and 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. James C. McCroskey, "Communication Competence: The Elusive Construct," in Competence in Communication: A Multidisciplinary Approach, ed. Robert N. Bostrom (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 259. The ability to communicate effectively is often included as a primary undergraduate learning goal along with other key skills like writing, critical thinking, and problem solving. You likely haven't heard professors or university administrators use the term communication competence, but as we learn more about it in this section, I am sure you will see how communication competence can benefit you in many aspects of your life. Since this book focuses on communication in the real world, strategies for developing communication competence are not only limited to this section. A "Getting Competent" feature box is included in each chapter, specifically to help you develop communication competence.

Defining Competence

We have already defined communication, and you probably know that to be competent at something means you know what you're doing. When we combine these terms, we get the following definition: **communication competence** refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts. Ralph E. Cooley and Deborah A. Roach, "A Conceptual Framework," in Competence in Communication: A Multidisciplinary Approach, ed. Robert N. Bostrom (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 25. To better understand this definition, let's break apart its components.

The first part of the definition we will unpack deals with knowledge. The cognitive elements of competence include knowing how to do something and understanding why things are done the way they are. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 9. People can develop cognitive competence by observing and evaluating the actions of others. Cognitive competence can also be developed through instruction. Since you are currently taking a communication class, I encourage you to try to observe the communication concepts you are learning in the communication practices of others and yourself. This will help bring the concepts to life and also help you evaluate how communication in the real world matches up with communication concepts. As you build a repertoire of communication knowledge based on your experiential and classroom knowledge, you will also be developing behavioral competence.

The second part of the definition of communication competence that we will unpack is the ability to use. Individual factors affect our ability to do anything. Not everyone has the same athletic, musical, or intellectual ability. At the individual level, a person's physiological and psychological characteristics affect competence. In terms of physiology, age, maturity, and ability to communicate affect competence. In terms of psychology, a person's mood, stress level, personality, and level of communication apprehension (level of anxiety regarding communication) affect competence. Ralph E. Cooley and Deborah A. Roach, "A Conceptual Framework," in Competence in Communication: A Multidisciplinary Approach, ed. Robert N. Bostrom (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 24. All these factors will either help or hinder you when you try to apply the knowledge you have learned to actual communication behaviors. For example, you might know strategies for being an effective speaker, but public speaking anxiety that kicks in when you get in front of the audience may prevent you from fully putting that knowledge into practice.

The third part of the definition we will unpack is ability to adapt to various contexts. What is competent or not varies based on social and cultural context, which makes it impossible to have only one standard for what counts as communication competence. Ralph E. Cooley and Deborah A. Roach, "A Conceptual Framework,"

in Competence in Communication: A Multidisciplinary Approach, ed. Robert N. Bostrom (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), 26. Social variables such as status and power affect competence. In a social situation where one person—say, a supervisor—has more power than another—for example, his or her employee—then the supervisor is typically the one who sets the standard for competence. Cultural variables such as race and nationality also affect competence. A Taiwanese woman who speaks English as her second language may be praised for her competence in the English language in her home country but be viewed as less competent in the United States because of her accent. In summary, although we have a clear definition of communication competence, there are not definitions for how to be competent in any given situation, since competence varies at the individual, social, and cultural level.

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

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

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

Developing Competence

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

In regards to competence, we all have areas where we are skilled and areas where we have deficiencies. In most cases, we can consciously decide to work on our deficiencies, which may take considerable effort. There are multiple stages of competence that I challenge you to assess as you communicate in your daily life:

unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 7. Before you have built up a rich cognitive knowledge base of communication concepts and practiced and reflected on skills in a particular area, you may exhibit **unconscious incompetence**, which means you are not even aware that you are communicating in an incompetent manner. Once you learn more about communication and have a vocabulary to identify concepts, you may find yourself exhibiting **conscious incompetence**. This is where you know what you should be doing, and you realize that you're not doing it as well as you could. However, as your skills increase you may advance to **conscious competence**, meaning that you know you are communicating well in the moment, which will add to your bank of experiences to draw from in future interactions. When you reach the stage of **unconscious competence**, you just communicate successfully without straining to be competent. Just because you reach the stage of unconscious competence in one area or with one person does not mean you will always stay there. We are faced with new communication encounters regularly, and although we may be able to draw on the communication skills we have learned about and developed, it may take a few instances of conscious incompetence before you can advance to later stages.

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

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. Judee K. Burgoon, Charles R. Berger, and Vincent R. Waldron, "Mindfulness and Interpersonal Communication," Journal of Social Issues 56, no. 1 (2000): 105. Becoming a more mindful communicator has many benefits, including achieving communication goals, detecting deception, avoiding stereotypes, and reducing conflict. Whether or not we achieve our day-to-day communication goals depends on our communication competence. Various communication behaviors can signal that we are communicating mindfully. For example, asking an employee to paraphrase their understanding of the instructions you just gave them shows that you are aware that verbal messages are not always clear, that people do not always listen actively, and that people often do not speak up when they are unsure of instructions for fear of appearing incompetent or embarrassing themselves. Some communication behaviors indicate that we are not communicating mindfully, such as withdrawing from a romantic partner or engaging in passive-aggressive behavior during a period of interpersonal conflict. Most of us know that such behaviors lead to predictable and avoidable conflict cycles, yet we are all guilty of them. Our tendency to assume that people are telling us the truth can also lead to negative results. Therefore, a certain amount of tentativeness and mindful monitoring of a person's nonverbal and verbal communication can help us detect deception. However, this is not the same thing as chronic suspicion, which would not indicate communication competence. This is just the beginning of our conversation about communication competence. Regarding the previous examples, we will learn more about paraphrasing in 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.

What aspects of communication do you think are "common sense?" What aspects of communication do you think require more formal instruction and/or study?

What communication concept has appealed to you most so far? How can you see this concept applying to your life?

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.

Decades of research conducted by communication scholars shows that communication apprehension is common among college students. Jennifer S. Priem and Denise Haunani Solomon, "Comforting Apprehensive Communicators: The Effects of Reappraisal and Distraction on Cortisol Levels among Students in a Public Speaking Class," Communication Quarterly 57, no. 3 (2009): 260. **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. Jennifer S. Priem and Denise Haunani Solomon, "Comforting Apprehensive Communicators: The Effects of Reappraisal and Distraction on Cortisol Levels among Students in a Public Speaking Class," Communication Quarterly 57, no. 3 (2009): 260–61. **Public speaking anxiety** is type of CA that produces physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions in people when faced with a real or imagined presentation. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 72. Research on public speaking anxiety has focused on three key ways to address this common

issue: systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 86–92. 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." Mike Allen, John E. Hunter, and William A. Donohue, "Meta-analysis of Self-Report Data on the Effectiveness of Public Speaking Anxiety Treatment Techniques," Communication Education 38, no. 1 (2009): 54–76. 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 10 "Delivering a Speech". While you should feel free to read ahead to that chapter, you can also manage your anxiety by following some of the following tips.

Top Ten Ways to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

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

Key Takeaways

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.

Levels of communication competence include unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and unconscious competence.

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

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?

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?

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.

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, I could form an impression of who you are as a student. 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. As a professor who teaches others how to teach, I instruct my student-teachers 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.

2.1 Perception Process

Learning Objectives

Define perception.

Discuss how salience influences the selection of perceptual information.

Explain the ways in which we organize perceptual information.

Discuss the role of schemata in the interpretation of perceptual information.

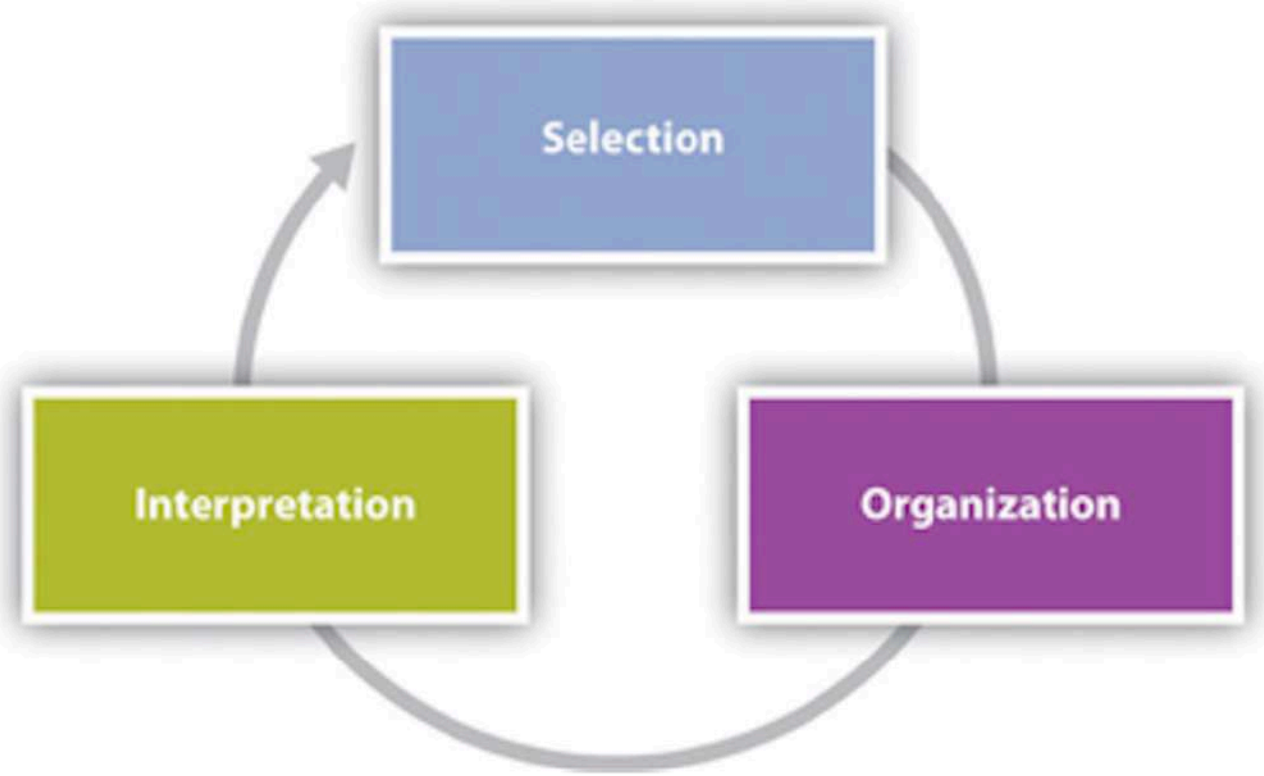
Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. This process, which is shown in Figure 2.1 “The Perception Process”, includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filters, are organized into our existing structures and patterns, and are then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

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. So, as information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues on through the perception process. Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, Social Cognition, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 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. **Salience** is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, a person's identity as a Native American may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver, Colorado. Or a bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of salience depends on three features. Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, Social Cognition, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1991), 186. 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 salience.

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.

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 otfen 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. Stanley Coren, "Principles of Perceptual Organization and Spatial Distortion: The Gestalt Illusions," Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance 6, no. 3 (1980): 404–12. 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.

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. Allan L. Sillars, "Attributions and Communication in Roommate Conflicts," Communication Monographs 47, no. 3 (1980): 180–200. 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. Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas, and Don D. Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1967), 56. 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.

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.

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. Richard M. Rozelle and James C. Baxter, "Impression Formation and Danger Recognition in Experienced Police Officers," Journal of Social Psychology 96 (1975): 54. 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. B. Keith Payne, "Prejudice and Perception: The Role of Automatic and Controlled Processes in Misperceiving a Weapon," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 81, no. 2 (2001): 181–92. 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.

What communication skills do you think are key for a law enforcement officer to have in order to do their job effectively and why?

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?

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

2.2 Perceiving Others

Learning Objectives

Differentiate between internal and external attributions.

Explain two common perceptual errors: the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias.

Discuss how the primacy and recency effects relate to first and last impressions.

Recognize the roles that culture plays 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. Charles C. Ballew II and Alexander Todorov, "Predicting Political Elections from Rapid and Unreflective Face Judgments," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 104, no. 46 (2007): 17948. 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

I'm sure you 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.

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. Allan L. Sillars, "Attributions and

Communication in Roommate Conflicts," Communication Monographs 47, no. 3 (1980): 183. For example, when I worked at an urban college in Denver, Colorado, I often had students come into class irritated, saying, "I got a parking ticket! I can't believe those people. 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 relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. I have often heard students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. I have also heard professors 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 students gets a good grade on a paper, they 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 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

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 280. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 281. 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.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

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

Culture

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.

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. Maa de la Baume, "First Lady without a Portfolio (or a Ring) Seeks Her Own Path," The New York Times, May 15, 2012, accessed June 6, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/16/world/europe/frances-first-lady-valerie-trierweiler-seeks-her-own-path.html?pagewanted=all. 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. Marilynn B. Brewer, "The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love or Outgroup Hate?" Journal of Social Issues 55, no. 3 (1999): 429–44. 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.

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. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 93. 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.

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.

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.

Exercises

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?

Describe a situation in which you believe the primacy and/or recency effect influenced your perceptions of a person or event.

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?

2.3 Perceiving and Presenting Self

Learning Objectives

Define self-concept and discuss how we develop our self-concept.

Define self-esteem and discuss how we develop self-esteem.

Explain how social comparison theory and self-discrepancy theory influence self-perception.

Discuss how social norms, family, culture, and media influence self-perception.

Define self-presentation and discuss common self-presentation strategies.

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

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks he or she is. If I said, "Tell me who you are," your

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

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

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. **Social comparison theory** states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 261. In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself to be more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation isn't necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group isn't appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

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

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. Barbara M. Byrne, Measuring Self-Concept across the Life Span: Issues and Instrumentation (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1996), 5. 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. Joel Brockner, Self-Esteem at Work (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988), 11. More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.

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. Joel Brockner, Self-Esteem at Work (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988), 2. 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. Albert Bandura, Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control (New York, NY: W. H. Freeman, 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 99. 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. Tory Higgins, "Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect," Psychological Review 94, no. 3 (1987): 320–21. 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.

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. E. Tory Higgins, "Self-Discrepancy: A Theory Relating Self and Affect," Psychological Review 94, no. 3 (1987): 322–23. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 99. 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.

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 105–7.

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. Anna Wierzbicka, "The English Expressions Good Boy and Good Girl and Cultural Models of Child Rearing," Culture and Psychology 10, no. 3 (2004): 251–78. 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. Wendy Morgan and Steven R. Wilson, "Explaining Child Abuse as a Lack of Safe Ground," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 341. 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. Steve Loughnan et al., "Economic Inequality Is Linked to Biased Self-Perception," Psychological Science 22, no. 10 (2011): 1254. 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. Steve Loughnan et al., "Economic Inequality Is Linked to Biased Self-Perception," Psychological Science 22, no. 10 (2011): 1257.

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. Michelle B. Stockton et al., "Self-Perception and Body Image Associations with Body Mass Index among 8–10-Year-Old African American Girls," Journal of Pediatric Psychology 34, no. 10 (2009): 1144. 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. Dorcas D. Bowles, "Biracial Identity: Children Born to African-American and White Couples," Clinical Social Work Journal 21, no. 4 (1993): 418–22. 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.

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 105. In terms of actual and ideal selves, men and women in a variety of countries both described their ideal self as more masculine. Deborah L. Best and Jennifer J. Thomas, "Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Perspectives," in The Psychology of Gender, 2nd ed., eds. Alice H. Eagly, Anne E. Beall, and Robert J. Sternberg (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2004), 296–327. 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. Gordon L. Patzer, Looks: Why They Matter More than You Ever Imagined (New York, NY: AMACOM, 2008), 147. 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. Gordon L. Patzer, Looks: Why They Matter More than You Ever Imagined (New York, NY: AMACOM, 2008), 147–48. 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." Shari L. Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs, Body Panic (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 2. 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.

How do you think the media influences your self-perception and body image?

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?

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. Lauren J. Human et al., "Your Best Self Helps Reveal Your True Self: Positive Self-Presentation Leads to More Accurate Personality Impressions," Social Psychological and Personality Sciences 3, no. 1 (2012): 23. 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. Lauren Webber and Melissa Korn, "Yahoo's CEO among Many Notable Resume Flaps," Wall Street Journal Blogs, May 7, 2012, accessed June 9, 2012, http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2012/05/07/yahoos-ceo-among-many-notable-resume-flaps. 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. Lauren J. Human et al., "Your Best Self Helps Reveal Your True Self: Positive Self-Presentation Leads to More Accurate Personality Impressions," Social Psychological and Personality Sciences 3, no. 1 (2012): 27. 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. John J. Sosik, Bruce J. Avolio, and Dong I. Jung, "Beneath the Mask: Examining the Relationship of Self-Presentation Attributes and Impression Management to Charismatic Leadership," The Leadership Quarterly 13 (2002): 217. 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." Style Me Hired," accessed June 6, 2012, http://www.stylemehired.com.

There are two main types of self-presentation: prosocial and self-serving. John J. Sosik, Bruce J. Avolio, and Dong I. Jung, "Beneath the Mask: Examining the Relationship of Self-Presentation Attributes and Impression Management to Charismatic Leadership," The Leadership Quarterly 13 (2002): 217. **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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 99–100. 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. John J. Sosik, Bruce J. Avolio, and Dong I. Jung, "Beneath the Mask: Examining the Relationship of Self-Presentation Attributes and Impression Management to Charismatic Leadership," The Leadership Quarterly 13 (2002): 236.

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

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?

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?

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.

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.

2.4 Improving Perception

Learning Objectives

Discuss strategies for improving self-perception.

Discuss strategies for improving perception of others.

Employ perception checking to improve perception of self and others.

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive others and ourselves. Now we will turn to a discussion of how to improve our perception. Our self-perception can be improved by becoming aware

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

Improving Self-Perception

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

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

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. 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. Mandy Katz, "Tossing Out the Diet and Embracing the Fat," The New York Times, July 16, 2009, accessed June 6, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/health/nutrition/16skin.html. 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. "About Us," NAAFA: the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, accessed June 6, 2012, http://www.naafaonline.com/dev2/about/index.html. 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.

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. Brian E. Armenta and Jennifer S. Hunt, "Responding to Societal Devaluation: Effects of Perceived Personal and Group Discrimination on the Ethnic Group Identification and Personal Self-Esteem of Latino/Latina Adolescents," Group Processes and Intergroup Relations 12, no. 1 (2009): 11–12. 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. Ax Guyll et al., "The Potential Roles of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies, Stigma Consciousness, and Stereotype Threat in Linking Latino/a Ethnicity and Educational Outcomes," Social Issues 66, no. 1 (2010): 116. 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. Danu Anthony Stinson et al., "Rewriting the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Social Rejection: Self-Affirmation Improves Relational Security and Social Behavior up to 2 Months Later," Psychological Science 20, no. 10 (2011): 2.

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.

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.

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. Max Guyll et al., "The Potential Roles of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies, Stigma Consciousness, and Stereotype Threat in Linking Latino/a Ethnicity and Educational Outcomes," Social Issues 66, no. 1 (2010): 117. Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

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

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

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

Engage in Self-Reflection

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

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

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

Checking Perception

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

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. 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 use Step 1 and

3, describing the behavior (without judging Patrick) and asking 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.

Getting integrated: Give an example of how perception checking might be useful to you in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

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

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?

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?

Recount a recent communication encounter in which perception checking may have led to a more positive result. What could you have done differently?

Chapter 3

Verbal Communication

In my junior year of college, I took a course in semantics, which focused on verbal language and solidified my interest in language. I love learning about the history of words, learning new words, and seeing how language changes over time and from one context to the next. Judging from the recent explosion of interest in word game apps like Words with Friends and Scrabble with Friends, I'm not alone in my love of language. In this chapter, we'll learn about the relationship between language and meaning, how we come to know the content and rules of verbal communication, the functions of language, how to use words well, and the relationship between language and culture.

3.1 Language and Meaning

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Explain how the triangle of meaning describes the symbolic nature of language.

Distinguish between denotation and connotation.

Discuss the function of the rules of language.

The relationship between language and meaning is not a straightforward one. One reason for this complicated relationship is the limitlessness of modern language systems like English. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 8–9. Language is productive in the sense that there are an infinite number of utterances we can make by connecting existing words in new ways. In addition, there is no limit to a language's vocabulary, as new words are coined daily. Of course, words aren't the only things we need to communicate, and although verbal and nonverbal communication are closely related in terms of how we make meaning, nonverbal communication is not productive and limitless. Although we can only make a few hundred physical signs, we have about a million words in the English language. So with all this possibility, how does communication generate meaning?

You'll recall that "generating meaning" was a central part of the definition of communication we learned earlier. We arrive at meaning through the interaction between our nervous and sensory systems and some stimulus outside of them. It is here, between what the communication models we discussed earlier labeled as encoding and decoding, that meaning is generated as sensory information is interpreted. The indirect and sometimes complicated relationship between language and meaning can lead to confusion, frustration, or even humor. We may even experience a little of all three, when we stop to think about how there are some twenty-five definitions available to tell us the meaning of word meaning! David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 187. Since language and symbols are the primary vehicle for our communication, it is important that we not take the components of our verbal communication for granted.

Language Is Symbolic

Our language system is primarily made up of symbols. A **symbol** is something that stands in for or represents something else. Symbols can be communicated verbally (speaking the word hello), in writing (putting the letters H-E-L-L-O together), or nonverbally (waving your hand back and forth). In any case, the symbols we use

stand in for something else, like a physical object or an idea; they do not actually correspond to the thing being referenced in any direct way. Unlike hieroglyphics in ancient Egypt, which often did have a literal relationship between the written symbol and the object being referenced, the symbols used in modern languages look nothing like the object or idea to which they refer.

The symbols we use combine to form language systems or codes. **Codes** are culturally agreed on and ever-changing systems of symbols that help us organize, understand, and generate meaning. Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, Semiotics and Communication: Signs, Codes, Cultures (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993), 53. There are about 6,000 language codes used in the world, and around 40 percent of those (2,400) are only spoken and do not have a written version. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 17, 24. Remember that for most of human history the spoken word and nonverbal communication were the primary means of communication. Even languages with a written component didn't see widespread literacy, or the ability to read and write, until a little over one hundred years ago.

The symbolic nature of our communication is a quality unique to humans. Since the words we use do not have to correspond directly to a "thing" in our "reality," we can communicate in abstractions. This property of language is called **displacement** and specifically refers to our ability to talk about events that are removed in space or time from a speaker and situation. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 10. Animals do communicate, but in a much simpler way that is only a reaction to stimulus. Further, animal communication is very limited and lacks the productive quality of language that we discussed earlier.

As I noted in Chapter 1 "Introduction to Communication Studies", the earliest human verbal communication was not very symbolic or abstract, as it likely mimicked sounds of animals and nature. Such a simple form of communication persisted for thousands of years, but as later humans turned to settled agriculture and populations grew, things needed to be more distinguishable. More terms (symbols) were needed to accommodate the increasing number of things like tools and ideas like crop rotation that emerged as a result of new knowledge about and experience with farming and animal domestication. There weren't written symbols during this time, but objects were often used to represent other objects; for example, a farmer might have kept a pebble in a box to represent each chicken he owned. As further advancements made keeping track of objects-representing-objects more difficult, more abstract symbols and later written words were able to stand in for an idea or object. Despite the fact that these transitions occurred many thousands of years ago, we can trace some words that we still use today back to their much more direct and much less abstract origins.

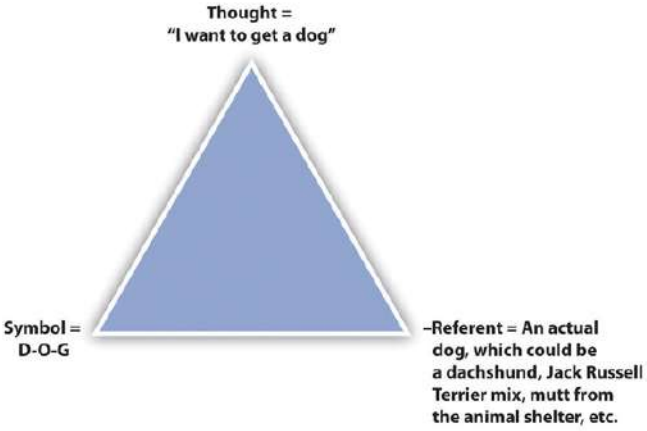
For example, the word *calculate* comes from the Latin word *calculus*, which means "pebble." But what does a pebble have to do with calculations? Pebbles were used, very long ago, to calculate things before we developed verbal or written numbering systems. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 87. As I noted earlier, a farmer may have kept, in a box, one pebble for each of his chickens. Each pebble represented one chicken, meaning that each symbol (the pebble) had a direct correlation to another thing out in the world (its chicken). This system allowed the farmer to keep track of his livestock. He could periodically verify that each pebble had a corresponding chicken. If there was a discrepancy, he would know that a chicken was lost, stolen, or killed. Later, symbols were developed that made accounting a little easier. Instead of keeping track of boxes of pebbles, the farmer could record a symbol like the word five or the numeral 15 that could stand in for five or fifteen pebbles. This demonstrates how our symbols have evolved and how some still carry that ancient history with them, even though we are unaware of it. While this evolution made communication easier in some ways, it also opened up room for misunderstanding, since the relationship between symbols and the objects or ideas they represented became less straightforward. Although the root of calculate means "pebble," the word calculate today has at least six common definitions.

The Triangle of Meaning

The **triangle of meaning** is a model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and referent. Ivor A. Richards and Charles K. Ogden, The Meaning of Meaning (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Tubner, 1923). As you can see in Figure 3.1 "Triangle of Meaning", the thought is the concept or idea a person references. The symbol is the word that represents the thought, and the referent is the object or idea to which the symbol refers. This model is useful for us as communicators because when we are aware of the indirect relationship between symbols and referents, we are aware of how common misunderstandings occur, as the following example illustrates: Jasper and Abby have

been thinking about getting a new dog. So each of them is having a similar thought. They are each using the same symbol, the word dog, to communicate about their thought. Their referents, however, are different. Jasper is thinking about a small dog like a dachshund, and Abby is thinking about an Australian shepherd. Since the word dog doesn't refer to one specific object in our reality, it is possible for them to have the same thought, and use the same symbol, but end up in an awkward moment when they get to the shelter and fall in love with their respective referents only to find out the other person didn't have the same thing in mind.

Figure 3.1 Triangle of Meaning



Source: Adapted from Ivor A. Richards and Charles K. Ogden, The Meaning of Meaning *(London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Tubner, 1923).*

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

Definitions

Definitions help us narrow the meaning of particular symbols, which also narrows a symbol's possible referents. They also provide more words (symbols) for which we must determine a referent. If a concept is abstract and the words used to define it are also abstract, then a definition may be useless. Have you ever been caught in a verbal maze as you look up an unfamiliar word, only to find that the definition contains more unfamiliar words? Although this can be frustrating, definitions do serve a purpose.

Words have denotative and connotative meanings. **Denotation** refers to definitions that are accepted by the language group as a whole, or the dictionary definition of a word. For example, the denotation of the word cowboy is a man who takes care of cattle. Another denotation is a reckless and/or independent person. A more abstract word, like change, would be more difficult to understand due to the multiple denotations. Since both cowboy and change have multiple meanings, they are considered polysemic words. Monosemic words have only one use in a language, which makes their denotation more straightforward. Specialized academic or scientific words, like monosemic, are often monosemic, but there are fewer commonly used monosemic words, for example, handkerchief. As you might guess based on our discussion of the complexity of language so far, monosemic words are far outnumbered by polysemic words.

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

experience, other people's connotations may be more influenced by popular cultural symbolism like that seen in westerns.

Language Is Learned

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

The Rules of Language

Any language system has to have rules to make it learnable and usable. **Grammar** refers to the rules that govern how words are used to make phrases and sentences. Someone would likely know what you mean by the question "Where's the remote control?" But "The control remote where's?" is likely to be unintelligible or at least confusing. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 180. Knowing the rules of grammar is important in order to be able to write and speak to be understood, but knowing these rules isn't enough to make you an effective communicator. As we will learn later, creativity and play also have a role in effective verbal communication. Even though teachers have long enforced the idea that there are right and wrong ways to write and say words, there really isn't anything inherently right or wrong about the individual choices we make in our language use. Rather, it is our collective agreement that gives power to the rules that govern language.

Some linguists have viewed the rules of language as fairly rigid and limiting in terms of the possible meanings that we can derive from words and sentences created from within that system. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974). Others have viewed these rules as more open and flexible, allowing a person to make choices to determine meaning. Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976). Still others have claimed that there is no real meaning and that possibilities for meaning are limitless. Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978). For our purposes in this chapter, we will take the middle perspective, which allows for the possibility of individual choice but still acknowledges that there is a system of rules and logic that guides our decision making.

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

Key Takeaways

Denotation refers to the agreed on or dictionary definition of a word. Connotation refers to definitions that are based on emotion- or experience-based associations people have with a word.

The rules of language help make it learnable and usable. Although the rules limit some of the uses of language, they still allow for the possibility of creativity and play.

Exercises

Apply the triangle of meaning to a recent message exchange you had in which differing referents led to misunderstanding. What could you have done to help prevent or correct the misunderstanding?

Think of some words that have strong connotations for you. How does your connotation differ from the denotation? How might your connotation differ from another person's?

3.2 Functions of Language

Learning Objectives

Identify and discuss the four main types of linguistic expressions.

Discuss the power of language to express our identities, affect our credibility, control others, and perform actions.

Explain how neologisms and slang contribute to the dynamic nature of language.

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

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 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 166.

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." David Abram, Spell of the Sensuous (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1997), 89. This statement encapsulates many of the powerful features of language. Next, we will discuss how language expresses our identities, affects our credibility, serves as a means of control, and performs actions.

Language Expresses Our Identities

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

The power of language to express our identities varies depending on the origin of the label (self-chosen or other imposed) and the context. People are usually comfortable with the language they use to describe their own identities but may have issues with the labels others place on them. In terms of context, many people express their "Irish" identity on St. Patrick's Day, but they may not think much about it over the rest of the year. There are many examples of people who have taken a label that was imposed on them, one that usually has negative connotations, and intentionally used it in ways that counter previous meanings. Some country music singers and comedians have reclaimed the label redneck, using it as an identity marker they are proud of rather than a pejorative term. Other examples of people reclaiming identity labels is the "black is beautiful" movement of the 1960s that repositioned black as a positive identity marker for African Americans and the "queer" movement of the 1980s and '90s that reclaimed queer as a positive identity marker for some gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Even though some people embrace reclaimed words, they 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. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 67.

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. George Brown, "Explaining," in The Handbook of Communication Skills, ed. Owen Hargie (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 220.

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. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 277. 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

Judges routinely use commisives as they declare innocence or guilt and sentence offenders. Brian Turner – My Trusty Gavel – CC BY 2.0

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."

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 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." David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 225. 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. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 226. 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. "All of the Words of the Year 1990 to Present," American Dialect Society, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.americandialect.org/woty/all-of-the-words-of-the-_year-1990-to-present. 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. Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 69–71. 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. Lily Huang, "Technology: Textese May Be the Death of English," Newsweek, August 2011, 8. Some critics say textese is "destroying" language by "pillaging punctuation" and "savaging our sentences." John Humphrys, "I h8 txt msgs: How Texting Is Wrecking Our Language," Daily Mail, September 24, 2007, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-483511/I-h8-txt-msgs-How-texting-wrecking-language.html?printingPage=true. A relatively straightforward tks 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. Lily Huang, "Technology: Textese May Be the Death of English," Newsweek, August 2011, 8.

What effects, if any, do you think textese has had on your non-text-message communication?

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.

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. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 237. 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. David Crystal, How

Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 423. 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. Nancy C. Dorian, "Abrupt Transmission Failure in Obsolescing Languages: How Sudden the 'Tip' to the Dominant Language in Communities and Families?" Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society (1986): 72. 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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 251–52. 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, "Lesson 4: 1939–1942, Persecution and Segregation," accessed June 9, 2012, http://www.hhrecny.org/index.php?submenu=testimony&src=gendocs&ref=DownloadCurriculum&category=testimony.

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. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 48.

Common Types of Unsupportive Messages

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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 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.

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

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.

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.)

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?

3.3 Using Words Well

Learning Objectives

Discuss how the process of abstraction and the creation of whole messages relate to language clarity.

Employ figurative and evocative language.

Identify strategies for using language ethically.

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

Using Words Clearly

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

Level of Abstraction

The ladder of abstraction is a model used to illustrate how language can range from concrete to abstract. As we follow a concept up the ladder of abstraction, more and more of the "essence" of the original object is lost or left out, which leaves more room for interpretation, which can lead to misunderstanding. This process of abstracting, of leaving things out, allows us to communicate more effectively because it serves as a shorthand that keeps us from having a completely unmanageable language filled with millions of words—each referring to one specific thing. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 85–86. 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". S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 85. 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. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 88–89. 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. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 30–40. **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. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 37–39. 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. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 75. 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.

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. Marina Yaguello, Language through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 130. 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. Thomas H. Olbricht, Informative Speaking (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1968), 81.

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. Ronald H. Carpenter, Choosing Powerful Words: Eloquence That Works (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), 84. Some communication scholars argue that metaphors serve a much larger purpose and function to structure our human thought processes. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 6. 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. Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31–34. 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.

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, "NCA Credo for Ethical Communication," accessed May 18, 2012, http://natcom.org/Tertiary.aspx?id=2119&terms=ethical %20credo. 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 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. Rowland S. Miller, "Breaches of Propriety," in Behaving Badly: Aversive Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 42. 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. Rowland S. Miller, "Breaches of Propriety," in Behaving Badly: Aversive Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 30–31. 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. Rowland S. Miller, "Breaches of Propriety," in Behaving Badly: Aversive Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 33–35.

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. Deborah Jordan Brooks and John G. Greer, "Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate," American Journal of Political Science 51, no. 1 (2007): 1–16. Other scholars of communication and democracy have not as readily labeled such communication "uncivil." Bart Cammaerts, "Radical Pluralism and Free Speech in Online Public Spaces: The Case of North Belgian Extreme Right Discourses," International Journal of Cultural Studies 12, no. 6 (2009): 555–75. It has long been argued that civility is important for the functioning and growth of a democracy. Mark Kingwell, A Civil Tongue: Justice, Dialogue, and the Politics of Pluralism (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 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. Lincoln Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic: From Consensus to Contestation," New Media & Society 9, no. 5 (2007): 827–47. 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. Sarah Sobieraj and Jeffrey Berry, "From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News," Political Communication 28 (2011): 19–41. 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: Rowland S. Miller, "Breaches of Propriety," in Behaving Badly: Aversive

Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 35–42.

- **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. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 112–24. 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. Yehuda Baruch and Stuart Jenkins, "Swearing at Work and Permissive Leadership Culture: When Anti-social Becomes Social and Incivility Is Acceptable," Leadership and Organization Development Journal 28, no. 6 (2007): 495–96. 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. Yehuda Baruch and Stuart Jenkins, "Swearing at Work and Permissive Leadership Culture: When Anti-social Becomes Social and Incivility Is Acceptable," Leadership and Organization Development Journal 28, no. 6 (2007): 494. 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. Adam Liptak, "Supreme Court Rejects F.C.C. Fines for Indecency," NYTimes.com, June 21, 2012, accessed September 20, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/business/media/justices-reject-indecency-fines-on-narrow-grounds.html?_r=0. 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). "Cuss Control Academy," James V. O'Connor, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.cusscontrol.com. Although swearing is often viewed as negative and uncivil, some scholars argue for its positive effects. Yehuda Baruch and Stuart Jenkins, "Swearing at Work and Permissive Leadership Culture: When Anti-social Becomes Social and Incivility Is Acceptable," Leadership and Organization Development Journal 28, no. 6 (2007): 492–93. 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. Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 78.

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. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 22–32. **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). William V. Haney, Communication and Interpersonal Relations, 6th ed. (Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1992), 236–37. 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

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

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.

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."

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.

3.4 Language, Society, and Culture

Learning Objectives

Identify some of the ways in which language varies based on cultural context.

Explain the role that accommodation and code-switching play in communication.

Discuss cultural bias in relation to specific cultural identities.

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. Such a cyclical relationship can be difficult to understand, but many of the examples throughout this chapter and examples from our own lives help illustrate this point. One of the best ways to learn about society, culture, and language is to seek out opportunities to go beyond our typical comfort zones. 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 there are many rituals in English that may be just as foreign to someone else.

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. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 224–25.

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. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 84.

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. David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 188. 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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 222–24.

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." "Results of Poor Cross Cultural Awareness," Kwintessential Limited, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/cultural-services/articles/Results of Poor Cross Cultural Awareness.html. 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. "Cross Cultural Business Blunders," Kwintessential Limited, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/cultural-services/articles/crosscultural-blunders.html. 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. Anna Wierzbicka, "The English Expressions Good Boy and Good Girl and Cultural Models of Child Rearing," Culture and Psychology 10, no. 3 (2004): 251–78. 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. Subodh Varma, "Arbitrary? 92% of All Injuries Termed Minor," The Times of India, June 20, 2010, accessed June 7, 2012, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-06-20/india/28309628_1_injuries-gases-cases.

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. Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication across Cultures, 2nd ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 199–200. 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.

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." David Crystal, How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 276. 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. Patricia J. Wetzel, "Are 'Powerless' Communication Strategies the Japanese Norm?" Language in Society 17, no. 4 (1988): 555–64.

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. Kathryn Dindia and Mike Allen, "Sex Differences in Self-Disclosure: A Meta Analysis," Psychological Bulletin 112, no. 1 (1992): 106–24. 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. Kathryn Dindia, "The Effect of Sex of Subject and Sex of Partner on Interruptions," Human Communication Research 13, no. 3 (1987): 345–71. 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. Howard Giles, Donald M. Taylor, and Richard Bourhis, "Toward a Theory of Interpersonal Accommodation through Language: Some Canadian Data," Language and Society 2, no. 2 (1973): 177–92. 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.

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

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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 249. 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.

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. Amitabh Pal, "Indian by Day, American by Night," The Progressive, August 2004, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.progressive.org/mag_pal0804. 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. Shehzad Nadeem, "Accent Neutralisation and a Crisis of Identity in India's Call Centres," The Guardian, February 9, 2011, accessed June 7, 2012,http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/feb/09/india-call-centres-accent-neutralisation. 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. Amelia Gentleman, "Indiana Call Staff Quit over Abuse on the Line," The Guardian, May 28, 2005, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/may/29/india.ameliagentleman. 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, 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, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 71–76. 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, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 71–76. 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, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 71–76. Referring to people over the age of eighteen as *boys* or *girls* isn't typically viewed as appropriate.

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. "Supplemental Material: Writing Clearly and Concisely," American Psychological Association, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.apastyle.org/manual/supplement/redirects/pubman-ch03.13.aspx. 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, 6th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 71–76. 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. Michael Waltman and John Haas, The Communication of Hate (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 33. 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. Michael Waltman and John Haas, The Communication of Hate (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 33–34. 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. Michael Waltman and John Haas, The Communication of Hate (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 3. 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." "Regulation of Fighting Words and Hate Speech," Exploring Constitutional Conflicts, accessed June 7, 2012, http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/hatespeech.htm.

Do you think the First Amendment of the Constitution, guaranteeing free speech to US citizens, should protect hate speech? Why or why not?

Visit the Southern Poverty Law Center's "Hate Map" "Hate Map," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed June 7, 2012, http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map. (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

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

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?

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?

Chapter 4

Nonverbal Communication

When we think about communication, we most often focus on how we exchange information using words. While verbal communication is important, humans relied on nonverbal communication for thousands of years before we developed the capability to communicate with words. **Nonverbal communication** is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words. Rather than thinking of nonverbal communication as the opposite of or as separate from verbal communication, it's more accurate to view them as operating side by side—as part of the same system. Yet, as part of the same system, they still have important differences, including how the brain processes them. For instance, nonverbal communication is typically governed by the right side of the brain and verbal, the left. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 2–8. This hemispheric distinction has been clearly evidenced, as people who suffer trauma to the right side of their brain lose the ability to recognize facial expressions but can still process verbal communication. Conversely, people whose left hemisphere of the brain is damaged lose the ability to speak, read, and understand language. Interestingly, a person with damage to the left hemisphere of the brain who loses the ability to speak can often still sing since the creation, but not the reading, of music is governed by the right brain. The content and composition of verbal and nonverbal communication also differs. In terms of content, nonverbal communication tends to do the work of communicating emotions more than verbal. In terms of composition, although there are rules of grammar that structure our verbal communication, no such official guides govern our use of nonverbal signals. Likewise, there aren't dictionaries and thesauruses of nonverbal communication like there are with verbal symbols. Finally, whereas we humans are unique in our capacity to abstract and transcend space and time using verbal symbols, we are not the only creatures that engage in nonverbal communication. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 49. These are just some of the characteristics that differentiate verbal communication from nonverbal, and in the remainder of this chapter we will discuss in more detail the principles, functions, and types of nonverbal communication and conclude with some guidance on how to improve our nonverbal communication competence.

4.1 Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

Define nonverbal communication.

Compare and contrast verbal communication and nonverbal communication.

Discuss the principles of nonverbal communication.

Provide examples of the functions of nonverbal communication.

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

To further define nonverbal communication, we need to distinguish between vocal and verbal aspects of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication include both vocal and nonvocal elements, and Table 4.1

shows the relationship among vocal, nonvocal, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication. A vocal element of verbal communication is spoken words—for example, “Come back here.” A vocal element of nonverbal communication is **paralanguage**, which is the vocalized but not verbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and pitch. Nonvocal elements of verbal communication include the use of unspoken symbols to convey meaning. Writing and American Sign Language (ASL) are nonvocal examples of verbal communication and are not considered nonverbal communication. Nonvocal elements of nonverbal communication include body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Gestures are nonvocal and nonverbal since most of them do not refer to a specific word like a written or signed symbol does.

Table 4.1 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 17. 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. Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006): 2. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 47. 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.

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." Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 21.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 18. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 51. 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. Harriet Oster, Douglas Hegley, and Linda Nagel, "Adult Judgments and Fine-Grained Analysis of Infant Facial Expressions: Testing the Validity of A Priori Coding Formulas," Developmental Psychology 28, no. 6 (1992): 1115–31. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 52. Persistent mixed messages can lead to relational distress and hurt a person's credibility in professional settings.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 276. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 53. 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. Walid A. Afifi and Michelle L. Johnson, "The Nature and Function of Tie-Signs," in The Sourcebook of Nonverbal Measures: Going beyond Words, ed. Valerie Manusov (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005): 190. 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. Peter A. Andersen and Janis F. Andersen, "Measures of Perceived Nonverbal Immediacy," in The Sourcebook of Nonverbal Measures: Going beyond Words, ed. Valerie Manusov (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005): 113–26. **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. Mark E. Comadena, Stephen K. Hunt, and Cheri J. Simonds, "The Effects of Teacher Clarity, Nonverbal Immediacy, and Caring on Student Motivation, Affective and Cognitive Learning," Communication Research Reports 24, no. 3 (2007): 241. 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. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 12. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 27. 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. Virginia P. Richmond, Derek R. Lane, and James C. McCroskey, "Teacher Immediacy and the Teacher-Student Relationship," in Handbook of Instructional Communication: Rhetorical and Relational Perspectives, eds. Timothy P. Mottet, Virginia P. Richmond, and James C. McCroskey (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 168. Immediacy behaviors are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators. Mark E. Comadena, Stephen K. Hunt, and Cheri J. Simonds, "The Effects of Teacher Clarity, Nonverbal Immediacy, and Caring on Student Motivation, Affective and Cognitive Learning," Communication Research Reports 24, no. 3 (2007): 241. 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. Virginia P. Richmond, Derek R. Lane, and James C. McCroskey, "Teacher Immediacy and the Teacher-Student Relationship," in Handbook of Instructional Communication: Rhetorical and Relational Perspectives, eds. Timothy P. Mottet, Virginia P. Richmond, and James C. McCroskey (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2006), 169, 184–85. 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.

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.

Think about the teachers that you listed in the previous question. Discuss how their behaviors affected your learning and your relationship.

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

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.

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?

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?

4.2 Types of Nonverbal Communication

Learning Objectives

Define kinesics.

Define haptics.

Define vocalics.

Define proxemics.

Define chronemics.

Provide examples of types of nonverbal communication that fall under these categories.

Discuss the ways in which personal presentation and environment provide nonverbal cues.

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

Kinesics

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

Gestures

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 36. **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. My personal weakness is object adaptors. Specifically, I subconsciously gravitate toward metallic objects like paper clips or staples holding my notes together and catch myself bending them or fidgeting with them while I'm speaking. Other people play with dry-erase markers, their note cards, 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."

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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 121.

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

Head Movements and Posture

I group head movements and posture together because they are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is a universal sign of acknowledgement in cultures where the formal bow is no longer used as a greeting. In these cases, the head nod essentially serves as an abbreviated bow. An innate and universal head movement is the headshake 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 232. 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 232–34.

There are four general human postures: standing, sitting, squatting, and lying down. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 63. 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 243–44.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 40. 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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 276.

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 oculesics 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. Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006): 176. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 40–41.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 35. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 35. 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. Dylan Evans, Emotion: The Science of Sentiment (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 107. 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.

We will learn more about competent encoding and decoding of facial expressions in Section 4.3 "Nonverbal Communication Competence", 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 46.

There are several types of touch, including functional-professional, social-polite, friendship-warmth, love-intimacy, and sexual-arousal touch. Richard Heslin and Tari Apler, "Touch: A Bonding Gesture," in Nonverbal Interaction, eds. John M. Weimann and Randall Harrison (London: Sage, 1983), 47–76. 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). Stanley E. Jones, "Communicating with Touch," in The Nonverbal Communication Reader: Classic and Contemporary Readings, 2nd ed., eds. Laura K. Guerrero, Joseph A. Devito, and Michael L. Hecht (Prospect Heights, IL:

Waveland Press, 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?

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 4. 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.

I find hugging behavior particularly interesting, perhaps because of my experiences growing up in a very hug-friendly environment in the Southern United States and then living elsewhere where there are different norms. 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. Kory Floyd, Communicating Affection: Interpersonal Behavior and Social Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33–34. 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. I 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." I observe that these hugs are most often between 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.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 69–70.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 26.

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. David B. Buller and Judee K. Burgoon, "The Effects of Vocalics and Nonverbal Sensitivity on Compliance," Human Communication Research 13, no. 1 (1986): 126–44. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 71. 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).

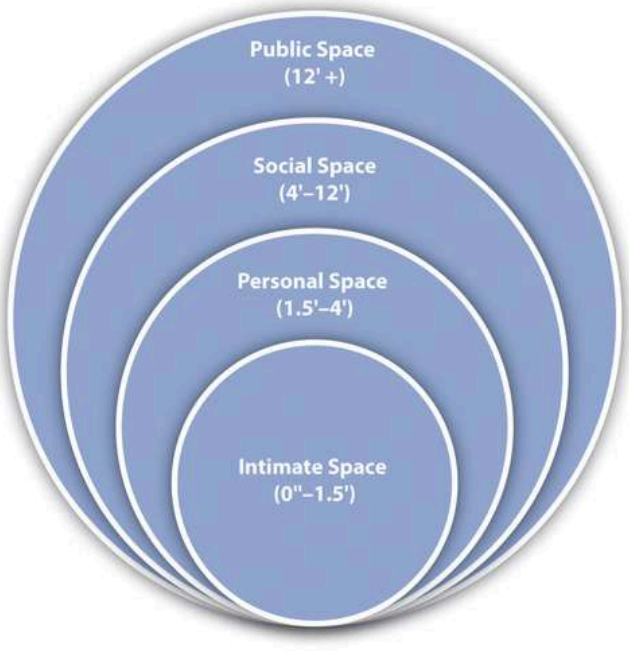
Proxemics

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." Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 44. 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. Edward T. Hall, "Proxemics," Current Anthropology 9, no. 2 (1968): 83–95. 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. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 59. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 70–71. 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, I don't notice students moving much voluntarily. When someone else takes a student's regular desk, she or he is typically annoyed. I do classroom observations for the graduate teaching assistants I supervise, which means I come into the classroom toward the middle of the semester and take a seat in the back to evaluate the class session. Although I don't intend to take someone's seat, on more than one occasion, I've been met by the confused or even glaring eyes of a student whose routine is suddenly interrupted when they see me sitting in "their seat."

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 65–66. 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. I have taught fifty-minute classes that seemed to drag on forever and three-hour classes that zipped 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 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?" I can distinctly remember two times in my life when I made pretty big changes in how I presented myself in terms of clothing and accessories. In high school, at the height of the "thrift store" craze, I started wearing clothes from the local thrift store daily. Of course, most of them were older clothes, so I was basically going for a "retro" look, which I thought really suited me at the time. Then in my junior year of college, as graduation finally seemed on the horizon and I felt myself entering a new stage of adulthood, I started wearing 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 me. 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.

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.

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 oculesics 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

Provide some examples of how eye contact plays a role in your communication throughout the day.

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."

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.

4.3 Nonverbal Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

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

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

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency of children to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 125. 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. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 23. 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.

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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 21. **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. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 54.

As your nonverbal encoding competence increases, you can strategically manipulate your behaviors. During my years as a restaurant server I got pretty good at knowing what tables to engage with and "schmooze" a little more to get a better tip. Restaurant servers, bartenders, car salespeople, realtors, 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. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 12. 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 251. 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.

Last summer, during a backyard game of "corn hole" with my family, my mom and sister were standing at the other board and kept whispering to each other and laughing at my dad and me. Corn hole, which is also called "bags," involves throwing a cloth sack filled with corn toward another team's board with the goal of getting it in the hole or on the board to score points. They later told us that they were amazed at how we stood, threw our bags, and shifted position between rounds in unison. Although my dad and I didn't realize we were doing it, our subconscious mirroring was obviously noticeable to others. Mirroring is largely innate and subconscious, but we can more consciously use it and a variety of other nonverbal signals, like the immediacy behaviors we discussed earlier, to help create social bonds and mutual liking.

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. Timothy P. Mottet, Steven A. Beebe, Paul C. Raffeld, and Michelle L. Paulsel, "The Effects of Student Verbal and Nonverbal Responsiveness on Teachers' Liking of Students and Willingness to Comply with Student Requests," Communication Quarterly 52, no. 1 (2004): 27–38.

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. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 15.

There Is No Nonverbal Dictionary

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.

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. Peter J. DePaulo, "Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Research in Marketing and Management," Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 64. Rather than using a list of specific rules, I suggest people develop more general tools that will be useful in and adaptable to a variety of contexts.

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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 22. A person wouldn't likely perform all those signals simultaneously. Instead, he or she would likely start with one and then layer more cues on as the feelings intensified. If we notice that a person is starting to build related signals like the ones above onto one another, we might be able to intervene in the negative reaction that is building. Of course, as nonverbal cues are layered on, they may contradict other signals, in which case we can turn to context clues to aid our interpretation.

Read Nonverbal Cues in Context

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

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 293.

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 52. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 288.

"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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 296. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 297. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 284.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 282–83.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 283.

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?

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.

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

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.

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

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?

4.4 Nonverbal Communication in Context

Learning Objectives

Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in relational contexts.

Discuss the role of nonverbal communication in professional contexts.

Provide examples of cultural differences in nonverbal communication.

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. Ronald E. Riggio, "Social Interaction Skills and Nonverbal Behavior," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 15.

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.

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. Peter J. DePaulo, "Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Research in Marketing and Management," Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 63. 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. Kristin Byron, Sophia Terranova, and Stephen Nowicki Jr., "Nonverbal Emotion Recognition and Salespersons: Linking Ability to Perceived and Actual Success," Journal of Applied Social Psychology 37, no. 11 (2007): 2600–2619. 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. Peter J. DePaulo, "Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Research in Marketing and Management," in Applications of Nonverbal Behavior Theories and Research, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 71–73.

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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 271. 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 112–13. 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 108. I could fairly 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 finder 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.

How you use your hands can also get you into trouble if you're unaware of cultural differences. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 110–11. 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.

Video Clip 4.1

Soccer Player Directs Insult Gesture to Referee
(click to see video)

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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 114. 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. Allan Pease and Barbara Pease, The Definitive Book of Body Language (New York, NY: Bantam, 2004), 115.

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 loud to many cultures that are used to less personal space. I have personally experienced both sides of this while traveling abroad. One time, my friends and I were asked to leave a restaurant in Sweden because another table complained that we were being loud. Another time, at a restaurant in Argentina, I was disturbed, as were the others dining around me, by a "loud" table of Americans seated on the other side of the dining area. In this case, even though we were also Americans, we were bothered by the lack of cultural awareness being exhibited by the other Americans at the restaurant. These examples show how proxemics and vocalics can combine to make for troubling, but hopefully informative, nonverbal intercultural encounters.

Proxemics

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

Chronemics

The United States and many northern and western European countries have a **monochronic** orientation to time, meaning time is seen as a commodity that can be budgeted, saved, spent, and wasted. Events are to be scheduled in advance and have set beginning and ending times. Countries like Spain and Mexico have a **polychronic** orientation to time. Appointments may be scheduled at overlapping times, making an "orderly" schedule impossible. People may also miss appointments or deadlines without offering an apology, which would be considered very rude by a person with a monochronic orientation to time. People from cultures with a monochronic orientation to time are frustrated when people from polychromic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations. Conversely, people from polychromic cultures feel that US Americans, for example, follow their schedules at the expense of personal relationships. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 278.

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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 106. 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 I will reiterate 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 118–21. 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. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 125.

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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 274. 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.

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

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.

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?

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.

5.1 Understanding How and Why We Listen

Learning Objectives

Describe the stages of the listening process.

Discuss the four main types of listening.

Compare and contrast the four main listening styles.

Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this section we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

The Listening Process

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

Receiving

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through

auditory and visual channels. Although we don't often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in e-mail, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.

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

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music interfere with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interfere primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and in turn listen, by trying to minimize noise.

Interpreting

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

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 189–99. Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 184.

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit doesn't provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. **Short-term memory** is a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. **Long-term memory** is a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing schema and in which

information can be stored indefinitely. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 184. **Working memory** is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind and process it and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there isn't a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities and can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle, who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, "Are you listening?" Belle inevitably replies, "Yes," since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, "Well, what did I just say?"

Evaluating

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker's statements are correct and/or true. In terms of completeness, we try to "read between the lines" and evaluate the message in relation to what we know about the topic or situation being discussed. We evaluate the worth of a message by making a value judgment about whether we think the message or idea is good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable. All these aspects of evaluating require critical thinking skills, which we aren't born with but must develop over time through our own personal and intellectual development.

Studying communication is a great way to build your critical thinking skills, because you learn much more about the taken-for-granted aspects of how communication works, which gives you tools to analyze and critique messages, senders, and contexts. Critical thinking and listening skills also help you take a more proactive role in the communication process rather than being a passive receiver of messages that may not be credible, complete, or worthwhile. One danger within the evaluation stage of listening is to focus your evaluative lenses more on the speaker than the message. This can quickly become a barrier to effective listening if we begin to prejudge a speaker based on his or her identity or characteristics rather than on the content of his or her message. We will learn more about how to avoid slipping into a person-centered rather than message-centered evaluative stance later in the chapter.

Responding

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

We send verbal and nonverbal feedback while another person is talking and after they are done. **Back-channel cues** are the verbal and nonverbal signals we send while someone is talking and can consist of verbal cues like "uh-huh," "oh," and "right," and/or nonverbal cues like direct eye contact, head nods, and leaning forward. Back-channel cues are generally a form of positive feedback that indicates others are actively listening. People also

send cues intentionally and unintentionally that indicate they aren't listening. If another person is looking away, fidgeting, texting, or turned away, we will likely interpret those responses negatively.

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. Wendy S. Zabava and Andrew D. Wolvin, "The Differential Impact of a Basic Communication Course on Perceived Communication Competencies in Class, Work, and Social Contexts," Communication Education 42 (1993): 215–17. In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills including listening are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys. National Association of Colleges and Employers, Job Outlook 2011 (2010): 25.

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving. Vincent S. DiSalvo, "A Summary of Current Research Identifying Communication Skills in Various Organizational Contexts," Communication Education 29 (1980), 283–90. Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can help us expand our self and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and by helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate. Robert M. Milardo and Heather Helms-Erikson, "Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 37. The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

The main purposes of listening are: Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 182.

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people's communication;
- to critically evaluate other people's messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and

- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel "heard" and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively. Graham D. Bodie and William A. Villaume, "Aspects of Receiving Information: The Relationships between Listening Preferences, Communication Apprehension, Receiver Apprehension, and Communicator Style," International Journal of Listening 17, no. 1 (2003): 48. The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic. Kittie W. Watson, Larry L. Barker, and James B. Weaver III, "The Listening Styles Profile (LS-16): Development and Validation of an Instrument to Assess Four Listening Styles," International Journal of Listening 9 (1995): 1–13.

Discriminative Listening

Discriminative listening is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 185. In the absence of a hearing impairment, we have an innate and physiological ability to engage in discriminative listening. Although this is the most basic form of listening, it provides the foundation on which more intentional listening skills are built. This type of listening can be refined and honed. Think of how musicians, singers, and mechanics exercise specialized discriminative listening to isolate specific aural stimuli and how actors, detectives, and sculptors discriminate visual cues that allow them to analyze, make meaning from, or recreate nuanced behavior. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, "A Listening Taxonomy," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 18–19.

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining information. This type of listening is not evaluative and is common in teaching and learning contexts ranging from a student listening to an informative speech to an out-of-towner listening to directions to the nearest gas station. We also use informational listening when we listen to news reports, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college, but will be expected to have mastered once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college. Most college professors provide detailed instructions and handouts with assignments so students can review them as needed, but many supervisors and managers will expect you to take the initiative to remember or record vital information. Additionally, many bosses are not as open to questions or requests to repeat themselves as professors are.

Critical Listening

Critical listening entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various

persuasive appeals and faulty logic (known as fallacies), 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

Empathetic listening is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening. While the word empathy means to "feel into" or "feel with" another person, sympathy means to "feel for" someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy. Tom Bruneau, "Empathy and Listening," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 188. Empathetic listening is other oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It's often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback isn't actually desired.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position. An excellent example of critical and empathetic listening in action is the international Truth and Reconciliation movement. The most well-known example of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) occurred in South Africa as a way to address the various conflicts that occurred during apartheid. Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012,http://www.justice.gov.za/trc. The first TRC in the United States occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, as a means of processing the events and aftermath of November 3, 1979, when members of the Ku Klux Klan shot and killed five members of the Communist Worker's Party during a daytime confrontation witnessed by news crews and many bystanders. The goal of such commissions is to allow people to tell their stories, share their perspectives in an open environment, and be listened to. The Greensboro TRC states its purpose as such: "About," Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission website, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.greensborotrc.org/truth_reconciliation.php.

> The truth and reconciliation process seeks to heal relations between opposing sides by uncovering all pertinent facts, distinguishing truth from lies, and allowing for 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.

Key Takeaways

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.

Exercises

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?

Getting integrated: Identify how critical listening might be useful for you in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.

Listening scholars have noted that empathetic listening is the most difficult type of listening. Do you agree? Why or why not?

5.2 Barriers to Effective Listening

Learning Objectives

Discuss some of the environmental and physical barriers to effective listening.

Explain how cognitive and personal factors can present barriers to effective listening.

Discuss common bad listening practices.

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 200. At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental and Physical Barriers to Listening

Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. You may recall from Chapter 4 "Nonverbal Communication" that when group members are allowed to choose a leader, they often choose the person who is sitting at the center or head of the table. Peter A. Andersen, Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1999), 57–58. Even though the person may not have demonstrated any leadership abilities, people subconsciously gravitate toward speakers that are nonverbally accessible. The ability to effectively see and hear a person increases people's confidence in their abilities to receive and process information. Eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise. As we learned in Chapter 1 "Introduction to Communication Studies", environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm can obviously interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

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

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

Cognitive and Personal Barriers to Listening

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

Difference between Speech and Thought Rate

Our ability to process more information than what comes from one speaker or source creates a barrier to effective listening. While people speak at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, we can process between 400 and 800 words per minute. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 195. This gap between speech rate and thought rate gives us an opportunity to side-process any number of thoughts that can be distracting from a more important message. Because of this gap, it is impossible to give one message our "undivided attention," but we can occupy other channels in our minds with thoughts related to the central message. For example, using some of your extra cognitive processing abilities to repeat, rephrase, or reorganize messages coming from one source allows you to use that extra capacity in a way that reinforces the primary message.

The difference between speech and thought rate connects to personal barriers to listening, as personal concerns are often the focus of competing thoughts that can take us away from listening and challenge our ability to concentrate on others' messages. Two common barriers to concentration are self-centeredness and lack of motivation. Judi Brownell, "Listening Environment: A Perspective," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 245. For example, when our self-consciousness is raised, we may be too busy thinking about how we look, how we're sitting, or what others think of us to be attentive to an incoming message. Additionally, we are often challenged when presented with messages that we do not find personally relevant. In general, we employ **selective attention**, which refers to our tendency to pay attention to the messages that benefit us in some way and filter others out. So the student who is checking his or her Twitter feed during class may suddenly switch his or her attention back to the previously ignored professor when the following words are spoken: "This will be important for the exam."

Another common barrier to effective listening that stems from the speech and thought rate divide is response preparation. **Response preparation** refers to our tendency to rehearse what we are going to say next while a speaker is still talking. Rehearsal of what we will say once a speaker's turn is over is an important part of the listening process that takes place between the recalling and evaluation and/or the evaluation and responding stage. Rehearsal becomes problematic when response preparation begins as someone is receiving a message and hasn't

had time to engage in interpretation or recall. In this sense, we are listening with the goal of responding instead of with the goal of understanding, which can lead us to miss important information that could influence our response.

"Getting Plugged In"

Technology, Multitasking, and Listening

Do you like to listen to music while you do homework? Do you clean your apartment while talking to your mom on the phone? Do you think students should be allowed to use laptops in all college classrooms? Your answers to these questions will point to your preferences for multitasking. If you answered "yes" to most of them, then you are in line with the general practices of the "net generation" of digital natives for whom multitasking, especially with various forms of media, is a way of life. Multitasking is a concept that has been around for a while and emerged along with the increasing expectation that we will fill multiple role demands throughout the day. Multitasking can be pretty straightforward and beneficial—for example, if we listen to motivating music while working out. But multitasking can be very inefficient, especially when one or more of our concurrent tasks are complex or unfamiliar to us. Fleura Bardhi, Andres J. Rohm, and Fareena Sultan, "Tuning in and Tuning out: Media Multitasking among Young Consumers," Journal of Consumer Behaviour 9 (2010): 318.

Media multitasking specifically refers to the use of multiple forms of media at the same time, and it can have positive and negative effects on listening. Fleura Bardhi, Andres J. Rohm, and Fareena Sultan, "Tuning in and Tuning out: Media Multitasking among Young Consumers," Journal of Consumer Behaviour 9 (2010): 322. The negative effects of media multitasking have received much attention in recent years, as people question the decreasing attention span within our society. Media multitasking may promote inefficiency, because it can lead to distractions and plays a prominent role for many in procrastination. The numerous options for media engagement that we have can also lead to a feeling of chaos as our attention is pulled in multiple directions, creating a general sense of disorder. And many of us feel a sense of enslavement when we engage in media multitasking, as we feel like we can't live without certain personal media outlets.

Media multitasking can also give people a sense of control, as they use multiple technologies to access various points of information to solve a problem or complete a task. An employee may be able to use her iPad to look up information needed to address a concern raised during a business meeting. She could then e-mail that link to the presenter, who could share it with the room through his laptop and a LCD projector. Media multitasking can also increase efficiency, as people can carry out tasks faster. The links to videos and online articles that I've included in this textbook allow readers like you to quickly access additional information about a particular subject to prepare for a presentation or complete a paper assignment. Media multitasking can also increase engagement. Aside from just reading material in a textbook, students can now access information through an author's blog or Twitter account.

Media multitasking can produce an experience that feels productive, but is it really? What are the consequences of our media- and technology-saturated world? Although many of us like to think that we're good multitaskers, some research indicates otherwise. For example, student laptop use during class has been connected to lower academic performance. Carrie B. Fried, "In-Class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning," Computers and Education 50 (2008): 906–14. This is because media multitasking has the potential to interfere with listening at multiple stages of the process. The study showed that laptop use interfered with receiving, as students using them reported that they paid less attention to the class lectures. This is because students used the laptops for purposes other than taking notes or exploring class content. Of the students using laptops, 81 percent checked e-mail during lectures, 68 percent used instant messaging, and 43 percent surfed the web. Students using laptops also had difficulty with the interpretation stage of listening, as they found less clarity in the parts of the lecture they heard and did not understand the course material as much as students who didn't use a laptop. The difficulties with receiving and interpreting obviously create issues with recall that can lead to lower academic performance in the class. Laptop use also negatively affected the listening abilities of students not using laptops. These students reported that they were distracted, as their attention was drawn to the laptop screens of other students.

What are some common ways that you engage in media multitasking? What are some positive and negative consequences of your media multitasking?

What strategies do you or could you use to help minimize the negative effects of media multitasking?

Should laptops, smartphones, and other media devices be used by students during college classes? Why or why not? What restrictions or guidelines for use could instructors provide that would capitalize on the presence of such media to enhance student learning and help minimize distractions?

Lack of Listening Preparation

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

Bad Messages and/or Speakers

Bad messages and/or speakers also present a barrier to effective listening. Sometimes our trouble listening originates in the sender. In terms of message construction, poorly structured messages or messages that are too vague, too jargon filled, or too simple can present listening difficulties. In terms of speakers' delivery, verbal fillers, monotone voices, distracting movements, or a disheveled appearance can inhibit our ability to cognitively process a message. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 196. As we will learn in Section 5.3 "Bad Listening Practices", speakers can employ particular strategies to create listenable messages that take some of the burden off the listener by tailoring a message to be heard and processed easily. Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech" also discusses many strategies for creating messages tailored for oral delivery, including things like preview and review statements, transitions, and parallel wording. Listening also becomes difficult when a speaker tries to present too much information. Information overload is a common barrier to effective listening that good speakers can help mitigate by building redundancy into their speeches and providing concrete examples of new information to help audience members interpret and understand the key ideas.

Prejudice

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

We exhibit prejudice in our listening in several ways, some of which are more obvious than others. For example, we may claim to be in a hurry and only selectively address the parts of a message that we agree with or that aren't

controversial. We can also operate from a state of denial where we avoid a subject or person altogether so that our views are not challenged. Prejudices that are based on a person's identity, such as race, age, occupation, or appearance, may lead us to assume that we know what he or she will say, essentially closing down the listening process. Keeping an open mind and engaging in perception checking can help us identify prejudiced listening and hopefully shift into more competent listening practices.

Bad Listening Practices

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

Interrupting

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

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

Distorted Listening

Distorted listening occurs in many ways. Sometimes we just get the order of information wrong, which can have relatively little negative effects if we are casually recounting a story, annoying effects if we forget the order of turns (left, right, left or right, left, right?) in our driving directions, or very negative effects if we recount the events of a crime out of order, which leads to faulty testimony at a criminal trial. Rationalization is another form of distorted listening through which we adapt, edit, or skew incoming information to fit our existing schemata. We may, for example, reattribute the cause of something to better suit our own beliefs. If a professor is explaining to a student why he earned a "D" on his final paper, the student could reattribute the cause from "I didn't follow the paper guidelines" to "this professor is an unfair grader." Sometimes we actually change the words we hear to make them better fit what we are thinking. This can easily happen if we join a conversation late, overhear part of a conversation, or are being a lazy listener and miss important setup and context. Passing along distorted information can lead to negative consequences ranging from starting a false rumor about someone to passing along incorrect medical instructions from one health-care provider to the next. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 191. Last, the addition of material to a message is a type of distorted listening that actually goes against our normal pattern of listening, which involves reducing the amount of information and losing some meaning as we take it in. The metaphor of "weaving a tall

tale" is related to the practice of distorting through addition, as inaccurate or fabricated information is added to what was actually heard. Addition of material is also a common feature of gossip. An excellent example of the result of distorted listening is provided by the character Anthony Crispino on *Saturday Night Live*, who passes along distorted news on the "Weekend Update" segment. In past episodes, he has noted that Lebron James turned down the *Cleveland Show* to be on *Miami Vice* (instead of left the Cleveland Cavaliers to play basketball for the Miami Heat) and that President Obama planned on repealing the "Bush haircuts" (instead of the Bush tax cuts).

Eavesdropping

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

People eavesdrop for a variety of reasons. People might think another person is talking about them behind their back or that someone is engaged in illegal or unethical behavior. Sometimes people eavesdrop to feed the gossip mill or out of curiosity. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 208. In any case, this type of listening is considered bad because it is a violation of people's privacy. Consequences for eavesdropping may include an angry reaction if caught, damage to interpersonal relationships, or being perceived as dishonest and sneaky. Additionally, eavesdropping may lead people to find out information that is personally upsetting or hurtful, especially if the point of the eavesdropping is to find out what people are saying behind their back.

Aggressive Listening

Aggressive listening is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention in order to attack something that a speaker says. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 209. Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers in order to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behavior often results from built-up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening. Take the following exchange between long-term partners:

Deb:	I've been thinking about making a salsa garden next to the side porch. I think it would be really good to be able to go pick our own tomatoes and peppers and cilantro to make homemade salsa.
Summer:	Really? When are you thinking about doing it?
Deb:	Next weekend. Would you like to help?
Summer:	I won't hold my breath. Every time you come up with some "idea of the week" you get so excited about it. But do you ever follow through with it? No. We'll be eating salsa from the store next year, just like we are now.

Although Summer's initial response to Deb's idea is seemingly appropriate and positive, she asks the question because she has already planned her upcoming aggressive response. Summer's aggression toward Deb isn't about a salsa garden; it's about a building frustration with what Summer perceives as Deb's lack of follow-through on her ideas. Aside from engaging in aggressive listening because of built-up frustration, such listeners may also attack others' ideas or mock their feelings because of their own low self-esteem and insecurities.

Narcissistic Listening

Narcissistic listening is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 212. Narcissistic listeners redirect the focus of the conversation to them by interrupting or changing the topic. When the focus is taken off them, narcissistic listeners

may give negative feedback by pouting, providing negative criticism of the speaker or topic, or ignoring the speaker. A common sign of narcissistic listening is the combination of a "pivot," when listeners shift the focus of attention back to them, and "one-upping," when listeners try to top what previous speakers have said during the interaction. You can see this narcissistic combination in the following interaction:

Bryce:	My boss has been really unfair to me lately and hasn't been letting me work around my class schedule. I think I may have to quit, but I don't know where I'll find another job.
Toby:	Why are you complaining? I've been working with the same stupid boss for two years. He doesn't even care that I'm trying to get my degree and work at the same time. And you should hear the way he talks to me in front of the other employees.

Narcissistic listeners, given their self-centeredness, may actually fool themselves into thinking that they are listening and actively contributing to a conversation. We all have the urge to share our own stories during interactions, because other people's communication triggers our own memories about related experiences. It is generally more competent to withhold sharing our stories until the other person has been able to speak and we have given the appropriate support and response. But we all shift the focus of a conversation back to us occasionally, either because we don't know another way to respond or because we are making an attempt at empathy. Narcissistic listeners consistently interrupt or follow another speaker with statements like "That reminds me of the time…," "Well, if I were you…," and "That's nothing…" Michael P. Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1995), 68–72. As we'll learn later, matching stories isn't considered empathetic listening, but occasionally doing it doesn't make you a narcissistic listener.

Pseudo-listening

Do you have a friend or family member who repeats stories? If so, then you've probably engaged in pseudo-listening as a politeness strategy. **Pseudo-listening** is behaving as if you're paying attention to a speaker when you're actually not. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 208. Outwardly visible signals of attentiveness are an important part of the listening process, but when they are just an "act," the pseudo-listener is engaging in bad listening behaviors. She or he is not actually going through the stages of the listening process and will likely not be able to recall the speaker's message or offer a competent and relevant response. Although it is a bad listening practice, we all understandably engage in pseudo-listening from time to time. If a friend needs someone to talk but you're really tired or experiencing some other barrier to effective listening, it may be worth engaging in pseudo-listening as a relational maintenance strategy, especially if the friend just needs a sounding board and isn't expecting advice or guidance. We may also pseudo-listen to a romantic partner or grandfather's story for the fifteenth time to prevent hurting their feelings. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should definitely avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being "found out," which could have negative relational consequences.

Key Takeaways

Cognitive barriers to effective listening include the difference between speech and thought rate that allows us "extra room" to think about other things while someone is talking and limitations in our ability or willingness to concentrate or pay attention. Personal barriers to effective listening include a lack of listening preparation, poorly structured and/or poorly delivered messages, and prejudice.

Interruptions that are unintentional or serve an important or useful purpose are not considered bad listening. When interrupting becomes a habit or is used in an attempt to dominate a conversation, then it is a barrier to effective listening.

Eavesdropping is a planned attempt to secretly listen to a conversation, which is a violation of the speakers' privacy.

Narcissistic listening is self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them by interrupting, changing the subject, or drawing attention away from others.

Pseudo-listening is “fake listening,” in that people behave like they are paying attention and listening when they actually are not.

Exercises

We are capable of thinking faster than the speed at which the average person speaks, which allows us some room to put mental faculties toward things other than listening. What typically makes your mind wander?

Bad speakers and messages are a common barrier to effective listening. Describe a time recently when your ability to listen was impaired by the poor delivery and/or content of another person.

Of the bad listening practices listed, which do you use the most? Why do you think you use this one more than the others? What can you do to help prevent or lessen this barrier?

5.3 Improving Listening Competence

Learning Objectives

Identify strategies for improving listening competence at each stage of the listening process.

Summarize the characteristics of active listening.

Apply critical-listening skills in interpersonal, educational, and mediated contexts.

Practice empathetic listening skills.

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: Alice Ridge, “A Perspective of Listening Skills,” in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 5–6.

To improve listening at the receiving stage,

- prepare yourself to listen,
- discern between intentional messages and noise,
- concentrate on stimuli most relevant to your listening purpose(s) or goal(s),
- be mindful of the selection and attention process as much as possible,

- pay attention to turn-taking signals so you can follow the conversational flow, and
- avoid interrupting someone while they are speaking in order to maintain your ability to receive stimuli and listen.

To improve listening at the interpreting stage,

- identify main points and supporting points;
- use contextual clues from the person or environment to discern additional meaning;
- be aware of how a relational, cultural, or situational context can influence meaning;
- be aware of the different meanings of silence; and
- note differences in tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues that influence meaning.

To improve listening at the recalling stage,

- use multiple sensory channels to decode messages and make more complete memories;
- repeat, rephrase, and reorganize information to fit your cognitive preferences; and
- use mnemonic devices as a gimmick to help with recall.

To improve listening at the evaluating stage,

- separate facts, inferences, and judgments;
- be familiar with and able to identify persuasive strategies and fallacies of reasoning;
- assess the credibility of the speaker and the message; and
- be aware of your own biases and how your perceptual filters can create barriers to effective listening.

To improve listening at the responding stage,

- ask appropriate clarifying and follow-up questions and paraphrase information to check understanding,
- give feedback that is relevant to the speaker's purpose/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." Greg Toppo, "Colleges Start Offering 'Midnight Classes' for Offbeat Needs," USA Today, October 27, 2011, accessed July 13, 2012,http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2011–10–26/college-midnight-classes/50937996/1. 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. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley, "A Listening Taxonomy," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 19. 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: Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 193.

- **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. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 192. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 190. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 197.

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 207.

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. James J. Floyd, Listening, a Practical Approach (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1985), 39–40. 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 critcally 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. S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 22–32. 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. Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, "The Effects of Involvement on Responses to Argument Quantity and Quality:

Central and Peripheral Routes to Persuasion," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 46, no. 1 (1984): 69–81. So keep a check on your emotional involvement to be aware of how it may be influencing your evaluation. Also, be aware that how likable, attractive, or friendly you think a person is may also lead you to more positively evaluate his or her messages.

Other Tips to Help You Become a Better Critical Listener

- Ask questions to help get more information and increase your critical awareness when you get answers like "Because that's the way things are," "It's always been like that," "I don't know; I just don't like it," "Everyone believes that," or "It's just natural/normal." These are not really answers that are useful in your critical evaluation and may be an indication that speakers don't really know why they reached the conclusion they did or that they reached it without much critical thinking on their part.
- Be especially critical of speakers who set up "either/or" options, because they artificially limit an issue or situation to two options when there are always more. Also be aware of people who overgeneralize, especially when those generalizations are based on stereotypical or prejudiced views. For example, the world is not just Republican or Democrat, male or female, pro-life or pro-choice, or Christian or atheist.
- Evaluate the speaker's message instead of his or her appearance, personality, or other characteristics. Unless someone's appearance, personality, or behavior is relevant to an interaction, direct your criticism to the message.
- Be aware that critical evaluation isn't always quick or easy. Sometimes you may have to withhold judgment because your evaluation will take more time. Also keep in mind your evaluation may not be final, and you should be open to critical reflection and possible revision later.
- Avoid mind reading, which is assuming you know what the other person is going to say or that you know why they reached the conclusion they did. This leads to jumping to conclusions, which shortcuts the critical evaluation process.

Becoming a Better Empathetic Listener

A prominent scholar of empathetic listening describes it this way: "Empathetic listening is to be respectful of the dignity of others. Empathetic listening is a caring, a love of the wisdom to be found in others whoever they may be." Tom Bruneau, "Empathy and Listening," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 194. 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. Graham D. Bodie, "The Active-Empathetic Listening Scale (AELS): Conceptualization and Evidence of Validity within the Interpersonal Domain," Communication Quarterly 59, no. 3 (2011): 278. 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. Graham D. Bodie, "The Active-Empathetic Listening Scale (AELS): Conceptualization and Evidence of Validity within the Interpersonal Domain," Communication Quarterly 59, no. 3 (2011): 278. 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. Tom Bruneau, "Empathy and Listening," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 188. Therapists, for example, are often taught to adopt a posture and tone similar to their patients in order to build rapport and project empathy.

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." Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research,

Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 205. 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. Tom Bruneau, "Empathy and Listening," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 195. 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. Jan Flynn, Tuula-Riitta Valikoski, and Jennie Grau, "Listening in the Business Context: Reviewing the State of Research," The International Journal of Listening 22 (2008): 143. 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. Ron Alsop, Wall Street Journal-Eastern Edition 240, no. 49 (2002): R4. 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. Jan Flynn, Tuula-Riitta Valikoski, and Jennie Grau, "Listening in the Business Context: Reviewing the State of Research," The International Journal of Listening 22 (2008): 144–46. 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. Judi Brownell, "Listening Environment: A Perspective," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 243. 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. Judi Brownell, “Listening Environment: A Perspective,” in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 245–54. 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, Dr. Rick Listen-Coach, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.listen-coach.com. 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. “CLP Training Program,” International Listening Association, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.listen.org/CLPFAQs. There are also training programs to help with empathetic listening that are offered through the Compassionate Listening Project. “Training,” The Compassionate Listening Project, accessed July 13, 2012, http://www.compassionatelistening.org/trainings. 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 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 178.. 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.

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?

What do you think has contributed to the perceived shortage of listening skills in professional contexts?

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. Richard Nelson-Jones, Human Relationship Skills, 4th ed. (East Sussex: Routledge, 2006), 37–38. 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. Richard Nelson-Jones, Human

Relationship Skills, 4th ed. (East Sussex: Routledge, 2006), 34–35. 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.

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.

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. Michael P. Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1995), 25.

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. Michael P. Nichols, The Lost Art of Listening (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1995), 32. 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. Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication across Cultures, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2006), 110–14. 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. Steven McCornack, Reflect and Relate: An Introduction to Interpersonal Communication (Boston, MA: Bedford/St Martin's, 2007), 205. 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. Kathryn Dindia, "The Effect of Sex of Subject and Sex of Partner on Interruptions," Human Communication Research 13, no. 3 (1987): 345–71. 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

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 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.

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 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

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?

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.

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?

5.4 Listenable Messages and Effective Feedback

Learning Objectives

List strategies for creating listenable messages.

Evaluate messages produced by others using competent feedback.

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. Donald L. Rubin, "Listenability = Oral-based Discourse + Considerateness," in Perspectives on Listening, eds. Andrew D. Wolvin and Carolyn Gwynn Coakley (Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 1993), 269. 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.

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

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 yourself, identify strengths and weaknesses, evaluate yourself within the contexts of the task or assignment, set goals for next time, and revisit goals to access progress.

Exercises

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?

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?

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.

Chapter 6

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.

6.1 Principles of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

Define interpersonal communication.

Discuss the functional aspects of interpersonal communication.

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. Mark R. Leary, “Toward a Conceptualization of Interpersonal Rejection,” in Interpersonal Rejection, ed. Mark R. Leary (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–20. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 2. In fact, prolonged isolation has been shown to severely damage a human. Kipling D. Williams and Lisa Zadro, “Ostracism: On Being Ignored, Excluded, and Rejected,” in Interpersonal Rejection, ed. Mark R. Leary (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21–54. 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. Douglas K. Candland, Feral Children and Clever Animals: Reflections on Human Nature (New York: Oxford University Press, 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. Sharon Shalev, "Solitary Confinement and Supermax Prisons: A Human Rights and Ethical Analysis," Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice 11, no. 2 (2011): 151.

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, Job Outlook 2011 (2010): 25. 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. Brant R. Burleson, Sandra Metts, and Michael W. Kirch, "Communication in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 247. 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).

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. Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Anchor Books, 1959). Indeed, competent communicators can successfully manage how others perceive them by adapting to situations and contexts. A parent may perform the role of stern head of household, supportive shoulder to cry on, or hip and culturally aware friend to his or her child. A newly hired employee may initially perform the role of serious and agreeable coworker. Sometimes people engage in communication that doesn't necessarily present them in a positive way. For example, Haley, the oldest daughter in the television show *Modern Family*, often presents herself as incapable in order to get her parents to do her work. In one episode she pretended she didn't know how to crack open an egg so her mom Claire would make the brownies for her school bake sale. Here are some other examples of communicating to meet self-presentation goals:

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

As if managing instrumental, relational, and self-presentation goals isn't difficult enough when we consider them individually, we must also realize that the three goal types are always working together. In some situations we may privilege instrumental goals over relational or self-presentation goals. For example, if your partner is offered

a great job in another state and you decided to go with him or her, which will move you away from your job and social circle, you would be focusing on relational goals over instrumental or self-presentation goals. When you're facing a stressful situation and need your best friend's help and call saying, "Hurry and bring me a gallon of gas or I'm going to be late to work!" you are privileging instrumental goals over relational goals. Of course, if the person really is your best friend, you can try to smooth things over or make up for your shortness later. However, you probably wouldn't call your boss and bark a request to bring you a gallon of gas so you can get to work, because you likely want your boss to see you as dependable and likable, meaning you have focused on self-presentation goals.

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

Cultural Aspects of Interpersonal Communication

Aside from functional aspects of interpersonal communication, communicating in relationships also helps establish relationship cultures. Just as large groups of people create cultures through shared symbols (language), values, and rituals, people in relationships also create cultures at a smaller level. **Relationship cultures** are the climates established through interpersonal communication that are unique to the relational partners but based on larger cultural and social norms. We also enter into new relationships with expectations based on the schemata we have developed in previous relationships and learned from our larger society and culture. Think of **relationship schemata** as blueprints or plans that show the inner workings of a relationship. Just like a schematic or diagram for assembling a new computer desk helps you put it together, relationship schemata guide us in how we believe our interpersonal relationships should work and how to create them. So from our life experiences in our larger cultures, we bring building blocks, or expectations, into our relationships, which fundamentally connect our relationships to the outside world. Brant R. Burleson, Sandra Metts, and Michael W. Kirch, "Communication in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 252. 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 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. Walter R. Fisher, "Narration as Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument," Communication Monographs 51, no. 1 (1985): 1–22. 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.{Author's name retracted as requested by work's original creator or licensee}, "Drag Queens, Drama Queens, and Friends: Drama and Performance as a Solidarity Building Function in a Gay Male

Friendship Circle," Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research 6, no. 1 (2007): 61–84.

We also create personal idioms in our relationships. R. A. Bell and J. G. Healey, "Idiomatic Communication and Interpersonal Solidarity in Friends' Relational Cultures," Human Communication Research 18 (1992): 307–35. 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. Robert A. Bell and Jonathan G. Healey, "Idiomatic Communication and Interpersonal Solidarity in Friends' Relational Cultures," Human Communication Research 18, no. 3 (1992): 312–13. 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. Anthony Benigno, "Jersey Shore Glossary: This Dictionary of Terms Will Get You (Fist) Pumped for Season Two," N.Y. Daily News, July 28, 2010, http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/jersey-shore-glossary-dictionary-terms-fist-pumped-season-article-1.200467. 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. Brant R. Burleson, Sandra Metts, and Michael W. Kirch, "Communication in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 254–55. 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. Carol J. S. Bruess and Judy C. Pearson, "Interpersonal Rituals in Marriage and Adult Friendship," Communication Monographs 64, no. 1 (1997): 35.

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. Brant R. Burleson, Sandra Metts, and Michael W. Kirch, "Communication in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 255–56. 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

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?

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?

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?

6.2 Conflict and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

Define interpersonal conflict.

Compare and contrast the five styles of interpersonal conflict management.

Explain how perception and culture influence interpersonal conflict.

List strategies for effectively managing conflict.

Who do you have the most conflict with right now? Your answer to this question probably depends on the various contexts in your life. If you still live at home with a parent or parents, you may have daily conflicts with your family as you try to balance your autonomy, or desire for independence, with the practicalities of living under your family's roof. If you've recently moved 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."

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. Howard J. Markman, Mari Jo Renick, Frank J. Floyd, Scott M. Stanley, and Mari Clements, "Preventing Marital Distress through Communication and Conflict Management Training: A 4- and 5-Year Follow-Up," Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 61, no. 1 (1993): 70–77. Additionally, when conflict is well managed, it has the potential to lead to more rewarding and satisfactory relationships. Daniel J. Canary and Susan J. Messman, "Relationship Conflict," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 261–70.

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. Steve Gates, "Time to Take Negotiation Seriously," Industrial and Commercial Training 38 (2006): 238–41. 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*. "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. 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 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. Maria Reese-Weber and Suzanne Bartle-Haring, "Conflict Resolution Styles in Family Subsystems and Adolescent Romantic Relationships," Journal of Youth and Adolescence 27, no. 6 (1998): 735–52.

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. Allan L. Sillars, "Attributions and Communication in Roommate Conflicts," Communication Monographs 47, no. 3 (1980): 180–200.

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

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

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

Competing

The **competing** style indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to "win" the conflict, potentially at the expense or "loss" of the other person. One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other person. For example, if D'Shaun gives Casey extra money behind Rosa's back, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a "win" for him because he got his way. The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be noncoercive or coercive. Allan L. Sillars, "Attributions and Communication in Roommate Conflicts," Communication Monographs 47, no. 3 (1980): 180–200. 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. Kristen Linnea Johnson and Michael E. Roloff, "Correlates of the Perceived Resolvability and Relational Consequences of Serial Arguing in Dating Relationships: Argumentative Features and the Use of Coping Strategies," Journal of Social and Personal

Relationships 17, no. 4–5 (2000): 677–78. 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. Kathryn Dindia and Leslie A. Baxter, "Strategies for Maintaining and Repairing Marital Relationships," Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 4, no. 2 (1987): 143–58. And although we may think that competitiveness is gendered, research has often shown that women are just as competitive as men. Susan J. Messman and Rebecca L. Mikesell, "Competition and Interpersonal Conflict in Dating Relationships," Communication Reports 13, no. 1 (2000): 32.

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.

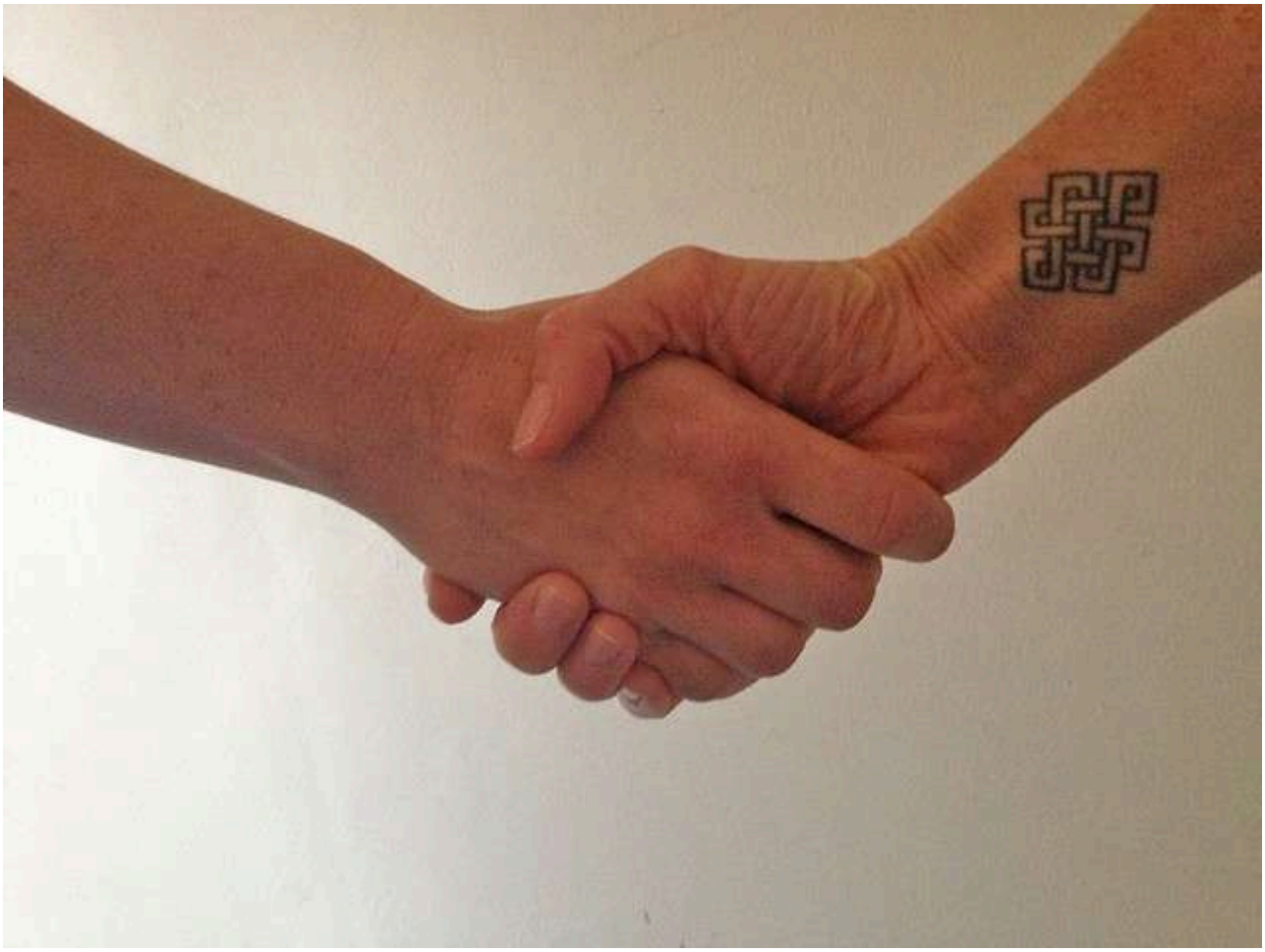
Accommodating

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. Lionel Bobot, "Conflict Management in Buyer-Seller Relationships," Conflict Resolution Quarterly 27, no. 3 (2010): 296. 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. Myra Warren Isenhart and Michael Spangle, Collaborative Approaches to Resolving Conflict (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 26. 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. Deborah A. Cai and Edward L. Fink, "Conflict Style Differences between Individualists and Collectivists," Communication Monographs69, no. 1 (2002): 67–87. 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. Gerrard Macintosh and Charles Stevens, "Personality, Motives, and Conflict Strategies in Everyday Service Encounters," International Journal of Conflict Management 19, no. 2 (2008): 115.



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: Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 406–7, 430.

- 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, "Roommate Conflicts," accessed June 16, 2001, http://cms.bsu.edu/campuslife/housing/roomsignup/roommates. 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. John Oetzel, Adolfo J. Garcia, and Stella Ting-Toomey, "An Analysis of the Relationships among Face Concerns and Facework Behaviors in Perceived Conflict Situations: A Four-Culture Investigation," International Journal of Conflict Management 19, no. 4 (2008): 382–403. 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. John G. Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey, "Face Concerns in Interpersonal Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Test of the Face Negotiation Theory," Communication Research 30, no. 6 (2003): 600. 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. Mararet U. Dsilva and Lisa O. Whyte, "Cultural Differences in Conflict Styles: Vietnamese Refugees and Established Residents," Howard Journal of Communication 9 (1998): 59. 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. John G. Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey, "Face Concerns in Interpersonal Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Test of the Face Negotiation Theory," Communication Research 30, no. 6 (2003): 603. 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). John Oetzel, Adolfo J. Garcia, and Stella Ting-Toomey, "An Analysis of the Relationships among Face Concerns and Facework Behaviors in Perceived Conflict Situations: A Four-Culture Investigation," International Journal of Conflict Management 19, no. 4 (2008): 385.

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. John G. Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey, "Face Concerns in Interpersonal Conflict: A Cross-Cultural Empirical Test of the Face Negotiation Theory," Communication Research 30, no. 6 (2003): 599–624. 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. Andrew Christensen and Neil S. Jacobson, Reconcilable Differences (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 17–20. 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. Kristen Linnea Johnson and Michael E. Roloff, “Correlates of the Perceived Resolvability and Relational Consequences of Serial Arguing in Dating Relationships: Argumentative Features and the Use of Coping Strategies,” Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 17, no. 4–5 (2000): 676–86. 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. Andrew Christensen and Neil S. Jacobson, Reconcilable Differences (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 116–17. 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. John M. Gottman, What Predicts Divorce?:

The Relationship between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994). **One-upping** is a quick reaction to communication from another person that escalates the conflict. If Sam comes home late from work and Nicki says, "I wish you would call when you're going to be late" and Sam responds, "I wish you would get off my back," the reaction has escalated the conflict. **Mindreading** is communication in which one person attributes something to the other using generalizations. If Sam says, "You don't care whether I come home at all or not!" she is presuming to know Nicki's thoughts and feelings. Nicki is likely to respond defensively, perhaps saying, "You don't know how I'm feeling!" One-upping and mindreading are often reactions that are more reflexive than deliberate. 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.

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. John M. Gottman, What Predicts Divorce?: The Relationship between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 408–22.

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

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?

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?

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?

6.3 Self-Disclosure and Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

Define self-disclosure.

Explain the connection between social penetration theory, social comparison theory, and self-disclosure.

Discuss the process of self-disclosure, including how we make decisions about what, where, when, and how to disclose.

Explain how self-disclosure affects relationships.

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

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

Theories of Self-Disclosure

Social penetration theory states that as we get to know someone, we engage in a reciprocal process of self-disclosure that changes in breadth and depth and affects how a relationship develops. Depth refers to how personal

or sensitive the information is, and breadth refers to the range of topics discussed. Kathryn Greene, Valerian J. Derlega, and Alicia Mathews, "Self-Disclosure in Personal Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 412–13. 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.

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. Kathryn Greene, Valerian J. Derlega, and Alicia Mathews, "Self-Disclosure in Personal Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 410. 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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 261. 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. Joseph Luft, Of Human Interaction (Palo Alto, CA: National Press Books, 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 (Note: This diagram should show "Known to self" above the left column and "Not known to self" above the the right column. "Known to others" should label the top row and "Not known to others" should label the bottom row.)

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. Janet Kornblum, "Privacy? That's Old-School: Internet Generation Views Openness in a Different Way," USA Today, 1D, October 23, 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. Michelle J. Nealy, "The New Rules of Engagement," Diverse: Issues in Higher Education 26, no. 3 (2009): 13. 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.

How do you manage your privacy and self-disclosures online?

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?

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. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 241.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. Sidney Jourard, The Transparent Self (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 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. Michael A. Stefanone and Derek Lakaff, "Reality Television as a Model for Online

Behavior: Blogging, Photo, and Video Sharing," Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 14 (2009): 964–87. 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. Kathryn Greene, Valerian J. Derlega, and Alicia Mathews, "Self-Disclosure in Personal Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 415–16.

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. Kathryn Greene, Valerian J. Derlega, and Alicia Mathews, "Self-Disclosure in Personal Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 419–20. 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. L. Crystal Jiang, Natalie N. Bazarova, and Jeffrey T. Hancock, "The Disclosure-Intimacy Link in Computer-Mediated Communication: An Attributional Extension of the Hyperpersonal Model," Human Communication Research 37 (2011): 63. 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. Valerian J. Derlega, Sandra Metts, Sandra Petronio, and Stephen T. Margulis, Self-Disclosure (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 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! Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 270. 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. Kathryn Greene, Valerian J. Derlega, and Alicia Mathews, "Self-Disclosure in Personal Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 421.

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

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?

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?

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?

Relationship Dialectics

Relationship dialectics

The original text can be found at Wikibooks in the Survey of Communication Study. http://en.wikibooks.org/w/index.php?title=Survey_of_Communication_Study/Chapter_9_-_Interpersonal_Communication&oldid=2699379 . This work is shared via Creative Commons Share-alike license 3.0. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/

One way we can better understand our personal relationships is by understanding the notion of **relational dialectics**. Baxter (1990) describes three relational dialectics that are constantly at play in interpersonal relationships. Essentially, they are a continuum of needs for each participant in a relationship that must be negotiated by those involved. Let's take a closer look at the three primary relational dialectics that are at work in all interpersonal relationships.

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

Novelty-Predictability is the idea that "we desire predictability as well as spontaneity in our relationships". In every relationship, we take comfort in a certain level of routine as a way of knowing what we can count on the other person in the relationship. At the same time, too much routine gets boring so we like to mix it up a bit. Friends who get together every Saturday for brunch, and make a commitment to always try new restaurants, are balancing these opposing tensions; they have both novelty and predictability.

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

[Note: Openness-closedness is also discussed in Chapter 6 Section 4 as part of social penetration theory.]

How We Handle Relational Dialectics

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

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

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

When people decide to divide their lives into spheres they are practicing **segmentation**. For example, your

extended family may be very close and choose to spend religious holidays together. However, members of your extended family might reserve other special days such as birthdays for celebrating with friends. This approach divides needs according to the different segments of your life.

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

In general, there is no one right way to understand and manage dialectical tensions. However, to always satisfy one need and ignore the other may be a sign of trouble in the relationship (Baxter, 1990). It is important to remember that relational dialectics are a natural part of our relationships and that we have a lot of choice, freedom, and creativity in how we work them out with our relational partners. It is also important to remember that dialectical tensions are negotiated differently in each relationship. The ways we self-disclose and manage dialectical tensions contribute greatly to what we call the communication climate in relationships.

References

Baxter, L. A. (1990). Dialectical contradictions in relational development. Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7, 69-88.

Chapter 7

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.

7.1 Foundations of Relationships

Learning Objectives

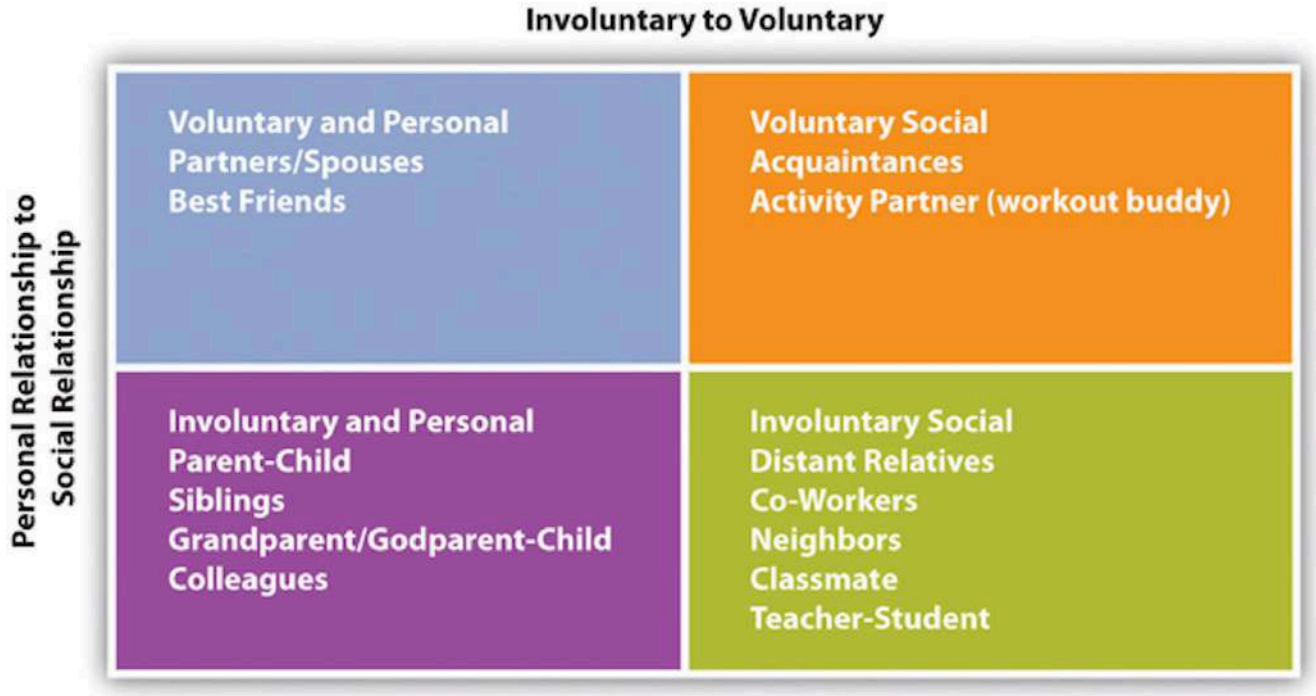
Distinguish between personal and social relationships.

Describe stages of relational interaction.

Discuss social exchange theory.

We can begin to classify key relationships we have by distinguishing between our personal and our social relationships. 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. **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 7.1Types of Relationships



Source: Adapted from C. Arthur VanLear, AscanKoerner, 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. Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 32–51.

There are ten established stages of interaction that can help us understand how relationships come together and come apart. Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 32–51. 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. Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 38–39. 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. Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 39.

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.

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, accessed September 13, 2011, https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/circumscribe. 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.”). Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 46–47. 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. John H. Harvey and Amy Wenzel, “Theoretical Perspectives in the Study of Close Relationships,” in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38–39. 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. John H. Harvey and Amy Wenzel, “Theoretical Perspectives in the Study of Close Relationships,” in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40.

We can be cautioned, though, to not view social exchange theory as a tit-for-tat accounting of costs and rewards. Patricia Noller, “Bringing It All Together: A Theoretical Approach,” in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 770. 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. John H. Harvey and Amy Wenzel, “Theoretical Perspectives in the Study of Close Relationships,” in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 38. 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. Patricia Noller, “Bringing It All Together: A Theoretical Approach,” in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 770. 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

Personal relationships are close, intimate, and interdependent, meeting many of our interpersonal needs.

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

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?

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?

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?

7.2 Communication and Friends

Learning Objectives

Compare and contrast different types of friendships.

Describe the cycle of friendship from formation to maintenance to dissolution/deterioration.

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. William K. Rawlins, Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1992), 11–12. 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. Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 2. 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. William K. Rawlins, Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1992), 271.

Although friendships vary across the life span, three types of friendships are common in adulthood: reciprocal, associative, and receptive. 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. **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 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.

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. Justin J. Lehmiller, Laura E. VanderDrift, and Janice R. Kelly, "Sex Differences in Approaching Friends with Benefits Relationships," Journal of Sex Research 48, no. 2–3 (2011): 276. 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. Melissa A. Bisson and Timothy R. Levine, "Negotiating a Friends with Benefits Relationship," Archives of Sexual Behavior 38 (2009): 67. 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. Justin J. Lehmiller, Laura E. VanderDrift, and Janice R. Kelly, "Sex Differences in Approaching Friends with Benefits Relationships," Journal of Sex Research 48, no. 2–3 (2011): 276. 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. Justin J. Lehmiller, Laura E. VanderDrift, and Janice R. Kelly, "Sex Differences in Approaching Friends with Benefits Relationships," Journal of Sex Research 48, no. 2–3 (2011): 280. 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. Amy Janan Johnson, Elaine Wittenberg, Melinda Morris Villagran, Michelle Mazur, and Paul Villagran, "Relational Progression as a Dialectic: Examining Turning Points in Communication among Friends," Communication Monographs 70, no. 3 (2003): 245.

The formation process of friendship development involves two people moving from strangers toward acquaintances and potentially friends. Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 15. Several factors influence the formation of friendships, including environmental, situational, individual, and interactional factors. Beverly Fehr, "The Life Cycle of Friendship," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 71–74. 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.

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. Beverly Fehr, "The Life Cycle of Friendship," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000),

72. 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. Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 15. 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). Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 16. 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. Beverly Fehr, "The Life Cycle of Friendship," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 78. 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.

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. Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 20. 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. Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 69. 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. Michael Monsour, "Communication and Gender among Adult Friends," in The Sage Handbook of Gender and Communication, eds. Bonnie J. Dow and Julia T. Wood (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 63.

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. William K. Rawlins, Friendship Matters: Communication, Dialectics, and the Life Course (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1992), 182. 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. Panayotis Halatsis and Nicolas Christakis, "The Challenge of Sexual Attraction within Heterosexuals' Cross-Sex Friendship," Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 26, no. 6–7 (2009): 920. 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. Rosemary Bleiszner and Rebecca G. Adams, Adult Friendship (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), 68. Similarly, women reported that they enjoyed the activity-oriented friendships they had with men. Panayotis Halatsis and Nicolas Christakis, "The Challenge of Sexual Attraction within Heterosexuals' Cross-Sex Friendship," Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 26, no. 6–7 (2009): 920.

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

Friendship formation, maintenance, and deterioration/dissolution are influenced by environmental, situational, and interpersonal factors.

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

Exercises

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?

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.

7.3 Romantic Relationships

Learning Objectives

Discuss the influences on attraction and romantic partner selection.

Discuss the differences between passionate, companionate, and romantic love.

Explain how social networks affect romantic relationships.

Explain how sexual orientation and race and ethnicity affect romantic relationships.

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. Chris Segrin and Jeanne Flora, Family Communication (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 106. 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. Inge Seiffge-Krenke, Shmuel Shulman, and Nicolai Kiessinger, "Adolescent Precursors of Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood," Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 18, no.

3 (2001): 327–46. 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. Chris Segrin and Jeanne Flora, Family Communication (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 107. 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. Elaine Walster, Vera Aronson, Darcy Abrahams, and Leon Rottman, "Importance of Physical Attractiveness in Dating Behavior," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 4, no. 5 (1966): 508–16. 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. Chris Segrin and Jeanne Flora, Family Communication (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 112.

"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. Jane E. Myers, Jayamala Madathil, and Lynne R. Tingle, "Marriage Satisfaction and Wellness in India and the United States: A Preliminary Comparison of Arranged Marriages and Marriages of Choice," Journal of Counseling and Development 83 (2005): 183–87. 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.

Do you think arranged marriages are ethical? Why or why not?

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?

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. Susan S. Hendrick and Clyde Hendrick, "Romantic Love," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 204–5. **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.

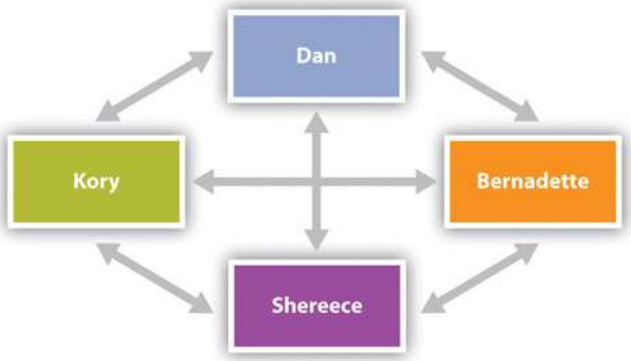
There are many ways in which sexuality relates to romantic relationships and many opinions about the role that sexuality should play in relationships, but this discussion focuses on the role of sexuality in attraction and relational satisfaction. Compatibility in terms of sexual history and attitudes 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. Susan Sprecher and Pamela C. Regan, "Sexuality in a Relational Context," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 217–19. 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. Susan Sprecher and Pamela C. Regan, "Sexuality in a Relational Context," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 221. 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. Susan Sprecher and Pamela C. Regan, "Sexuality in a Relational Context," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 222. 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. Robert M. Milardo and Heather Helms-Erikson, "Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 33. 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 7.3Social Network Overlap

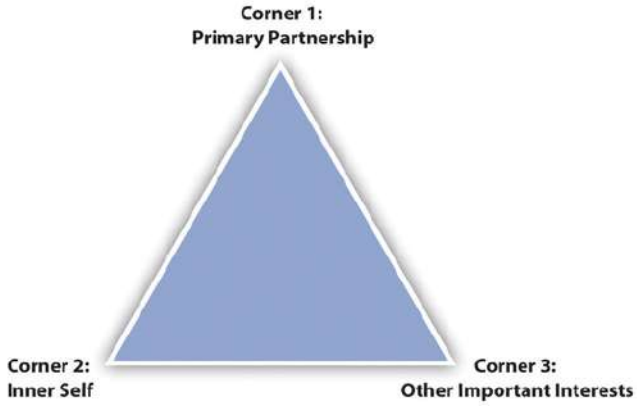


Network overlap creates some structural and interpersonal elements that affect relational outcomes. Friends and family who are invested in both relational partners may be more likely to support the couple when one or both parties need it. In general, having more points of connection to provide instrumental 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. Robert M. Milardo and Heather Helms-Erikson, "Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 37.

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. Robert M. Milardo and Heather Helms-Erikson, "Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships," in Close Relationships: A Sourcebook, eds. Clyde Hendrick and Susan S. Hendrick (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 39. 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.

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). Stephen R. Marks, Three Corners: Exploring Marriage and the Self (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986), 5.

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

Family background, values, physical attractiveness, and communication styles influence our attraction to and selection of romantic partners.

Network overlap is an important predictor of relational satisfaction and success.

Exercises

In terms of romantic attraction, which adage do you think is more true and why? "Birds of a feather flock together" or "Opposites attract."

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?

Social network overlap affects a romantic relationship in many ways. What are some positives and negatives of network overlap?

7.4 The Dark Side of Relationships

Learning Objectives

Define the dark side of relationships.

Explain how lying affects relationships.

Explain how sexual and emotional cheating affects relationships.

Define the various types of interpersonal violence and explain how they are similar and different.

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. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach, "Disentangling the Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 5. 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. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach, "Disentangling the Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 5–6. 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. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach, "Disentangling the Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 15. 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. Mark L. Knapp, "Lying and Deception in Close Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 519. 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. Mark L. Knapp, "Lying and Deception in Close Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 519. 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?

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. Mark L. Knapp, "Lying and Deception in Close Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 520. 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. Mark L. Knapp, "Lying and Deception in Close Relationships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 524. 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. M. E. Comadena, "Accuracy in Detecting Deception: Intimate and Friendship Relationships," in Communication Yearbook 6, ed. M. Burgoon (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1982), 446–72. 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. Melissa Ann Tafoya and Brian H. Spitzberg, "The Dark Side of Infidelity: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Communicative Functions," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 207.

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. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach, "Disentangling the Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 16. 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. Melissa Ann Tafoya and Brian H. Spitzberg, "The Dark Side of Infidelity: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Communicative Functions," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 227.

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. Abraham P. Buunk and Pieternel Dijkstra, "Temptation and Threat: Extradyadic Relations and Jealousy," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 540. 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. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach, "Disentangling the Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 9–13; Occupational Safety and Health and Safety Administration, "Workplace Violence," accessed September 13, 2011, http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence. 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. Michael P. Johnson, "Violence and Abuse in Personal Relationships: Conflict, Terror, and Resistance in Intimate Partnerships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 557. 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. Michael P. Johnson, "Violence and Abuse in Personal Relationships: Conflict, Terror, and Resistance in Intimate Partnerships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 558. 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. Michael P. Johnson, "Violence and Abuse in Personal Relationships: Conflict, Terror, and Resistance in Intimate Partnerships," in The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, eds. Anita L. Vangelisti and Daniel Perlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 567. 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. Wendy Morgan and Steven R. Wilson, "Explaining Child Abuse as a Lack of Safe Ground," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 327. 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. Wendy Morgan and Steven R. Wilson, "Explaining Child Abuse as a Lack of Safe Ground," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 341. 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. Nancy Eckstein, "Adolescent-to-Parent Abuse: Exploring the Communicative Patterns Leading to Verbal, Physical, and Emotional Abuse," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 366. 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.

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. René M. Dailey, Carmen M. Lee, and Brian H. Spitzberg, "Communicative Aggression: Toward a More Interactional

View of Psychological Abuse," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 298. 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: René M. Dailey, Carmen M. Lee, and Brian H. Spitzberg, "Communicative Aggression: Toward a More Interactional View of Psychological Abuse," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 303–5.

- 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. René M. Dailey, Carmen M. Lee, and Brian H. Spitzberg, "Communicative Aggression: Toward a More Interactional View of Psychological Abuse," in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication, eds. Brian H. Spitzberg and William R. Cupach (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 299. 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. Lauren Petrecca, "Bullying by the Boss Is Common but Hard to Fix," USA Today, December 27, 2010, accessed September 13, 2011, http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2010-12-28-bullyboss28_CV_N.htm. 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. 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.

How can you distinguish between a boss who is demanding or a perfectionist and a boss who is a bully?

If you were being bullied by someone at work, what would you do?

Key Takeaways

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.

There are three main types of intimate partner violence (IPV).

Violent resistance (VR) is usually a response or reaction to violence from an intimate terrorist.

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

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?

How do you think technology has affected extradyadic romantic activity?

Getting integrated: In what ways might the "dark side of relationships" manifest in your personal relationships in academic contexts, professional contexts, and civic contexts?

Chapter 8

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.

8.1 Foundations of Culture and Identity

Learning Objectives

Define culture.

Define personal, social, and cultural identities.

Summarize nondominant and dominant identity development.

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. Beverly Daniel Tatum, "The Complexity of Identity: 'Who Am I?'" in Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, eds. Maurianne Adams, Warren J. Blumfeld, Rosie Casteneda, Heather W. Hackman, Madeline L. Peters, Ximena Zuniga (New York: Routledge, 2000), 9. 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. Janet Spreckels and Helga Kotthoff, “Communicating Identity in Intercultural Communication,” in Handbook of Intercultural Communication, eds. Helga Kotthoff and Helen Spencer-Oatey (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009), 415–19. **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.

Source: Photo courtesy of Jim.henderson, http://www.flickr.com/photos/rj_schmidt/5557376295.

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

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. Gust A. Yep, “My Three Cultures: Navigating the Multicultural Identity Landscape,” in Intercultural Communication: Experiences and Contexts,

eds. Judith N. Martin, Lisa A. Flores, and Thomas K. Nakayama (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 61. 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. Mary Jane Collier, "Communication Competence Problematics in Ethnic Friendships," Communication Monographs 63, no. 4 (1996): 318. 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. Mary Jane Collier, "Communication Competence Problematics in Ethnic Friendships," Communication Monographs 63, no. 4 (1996): 316. 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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 166. 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. Tim Shipman, "Nerds Get Their Revenge as at Last It's Hip to Be Square," The Sunday Telegraph, July 22, 2007, 35. 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." Gust A. Yep, "My Three Cultures: Navigating the Multicultural Identity Landscape," in Intercultural Communication: Experiences and Contexts, eds. Judith N. Martin, Lisa A. Flores, and Thomas K. Nakayama (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 60–62. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 4. **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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 173–76. 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. "Communicating Queer Identities through Personal Narrative and Intersectional Reflexivity" (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2009), 130–32. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 148.

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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 177–80. 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. "Communicating Queer Identities through Personal Narrative and Intersectional Reflexivity" (PhD diss., University of Denver, 2009), 127.

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. Source: Photo courtesy of Jason Reidy, http://www.flickr.com/photos/jason-riedy/4066374264.

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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 14. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference

Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 32. 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. Arlette Saenz, "Census Data Shows a Changed American Landscape," ABC News, March 21, 2011, accessed October 9, 2011,http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/census-data-reveals-changed-american-landscape/story?id=13206427. By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 5. 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? Shankar Vedantam, "Most Diversity Training Ineffective, Study Finds," The Washington Post, January 20, 2008, accessed October 5, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/19/AR2008011901899_pf.html. 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." Lisa Takeuchi Cullen, "Employee Diversity Training Doesn't Work," Time, April 26, 2007, accessed October 5, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1615183,00.html. 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, "Guidelines for Conducting Diversity Training," Training and Development Policy, accessed October 16, 2011,http://www.opm.gov/hrd/lead/policy/divers97.asp#PART%20B. With these suggestions in mind, the increasingly common "real-world" event of diversity training is more likely to succeed.

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?

Do you think diversity training should be mandatory or voluntary? Why?

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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 6–10. 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

Each of us has personal, social, and cultural identities.

Social identities are components of self that are derived from our involvement in social groups to which we are interpersonally invested.

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.

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

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?

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?

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.

8.2 Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

Learning Objectives

Define the social constructionist view of culture and identity.

Trace the historical development and construction of the four cultural identities discussed.

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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 12. 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." Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 77. Therefore, we'll define **race** as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.

Race didn't become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter skinned Europeans above darker skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including the plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans, often calling them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Western "scientists" used these differences as "proof" that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 66. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 65. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 61–72. 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." Mulatto was one black and one white parent, quadroon was one-quarter African blood, and octoroon was one-eighth.
1830–1940	The term color was used instead of race.
1900	Racial categories included white, black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Census takers were required to check one of these boxes based on visual cues. Individuals did not get to select a racial classification on their own until 1970.
1950	The term color was dropped and replaced by race.
1960, 1970	Both race and color were used on census forms.
1980–2010	Race again became the only term.
2000	Individuals were allowed to choose more than one racial category for the first time in census history.
2010	The census included fifteen racial categories and an option to write in races not listed on the form.

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. Bernadette Marie Calafell, Latina/o Communication Studies: Theorizing Performance (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 1–9. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 65. 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. George Yancy, "The Scholar Who Coined the Term Ebonics: A Conversation with Dr. Robert L. Williams," Journal of Language, Identity, and Education 10, no. 1 (2011): 41–51. 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. Barbara Lynn Speicher, "Problems with English-Only Policies," Management Communication Quarterly 15, no. 4 (2002): 621. This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the United States.

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. Michael A. Zuckerman, "Constitutional Clash: When English-Only Meets Voting Rights," Yale Law and Policy Review 28 (2010): 353–54. 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, "Resolution: English Only," December 28, 1986, accessed October 12, 2011, http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/resolution-english-only. Interracial communication presents some additional verbal challenges.

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.

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. George Yancy, "The Scholar Who Coined the Term Ebonics: A Conversation with Dr. Robert L. Williams," Journal of Language, Identity, and Education 10, no. 1 (2011): 46. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 87. 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. Linsey Davis and Susan Donaldson James, "Canadian Mother Raising Her 'Genderless' Baby, Storm, Defends Her Family's Decision," ABC News, May 30, 2011, accessed October 12, 2011, http://abcnews.go.com/Health/genderless-baby-controversy-mom -defends-choice-reveal-sex/story?id=13718047. 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. Julia T. Wood, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 19. 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. Julia T. Wood, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 51.

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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 43. 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. Julia T. Wood, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 99. 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. Julia T. Wood, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 62. 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?" Julia T. Wood, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 63. 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?"
(click to see video)

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: Julia T. Wood, Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005), 4–5.

> 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 47–52. 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, "Wage Gap over Time," accessed October 12, 2011, http://www.pay-equity.org/info-time.html. 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, "Equal Pay Day," accessed October 12, 2011, http://www.pay-equity.org/day.html.

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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 115–34. 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 heterosexuality is coined to refer a form of "sexual perversion" in which people engage in sexual acts for reasons other than reproduction.
1897	Dr. Magnus Hirschfield founds the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin. It is the first gay rights organization.
1900–1930	Doctors "treat" homosexuality with castration, 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 heterosexuality and homosexuality appear in Webster's dictionary with generally the same meaning the terms hold today.
1948	American sexologist Alfred Kinsey's research reveals that more people than thought have engaged in same-sex sexual activity. His research highlights the existence of bisexuality.
1969	On June 27, patrons at the Stonewall Inn in New York City fight back as police 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." Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 141–42. An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological." Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 142. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 142. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 139. 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 disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to "political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm." They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the "scientific" category of "feeblemindedness," which led them to be institutionalized. Licia Carlson, "Cognitive Ableism and Disability Studies: Feminist Reflections on the History of Mental Retardation," Hypatia 16, no. 4 (2001): 127. 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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2005), 145. 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. Garland E. Allen, "Social Origins of Eugenics," Eugenics Archive, accessed October 16, 2011, http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list2.pl. A sterilization law written in 1914 "proposed to authorize sterilization of the socially inadequate," which included the "feebleminded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, and dependent." Paul Lombardo, "Eugenic Sterilization Laws," Eugenics Archive, accessed October 16, 2011, http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list2.pl. During the eugenics movement in the United States, more than sixty thousand people in thirty-three states were involuntarily sterilized. Garland E. Allen, "Social Origins of Eugenics," Eugenics Archive, accessed October 16, 2011, http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list2.pl. 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." Byron Spice, "Duquesne Focuses on the Perils of Modern 'Eugenics'" Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, February 7, 2005, accessed October 16, 2011, http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05038/453781.stm.

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. Paul K. Longmore, Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays on Disability (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003), 114. 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: "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.

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign-language interpreter.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read your lips. Not all people who are deaf can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Key Takeaways

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

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?

What comes to mind when you hear the word feminist? How did you come to have the ideas you have about feminism?

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?

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?

8.3 Intercultural Communication Competence

Learning Objectives

Define intercultural communication competence.

Explain how motivation, self- and other-knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty relate to intercultural communication competence.

Summarize the three ways to cultivate intercultural communication competence that are discussed.

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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 465. 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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 468. 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. Margaret D. Pusch, "The Interculturally Competent Global Leader," in The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence, ed. Darla K. Deardorff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 69. **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. Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, Intercultural Communication in Contexts, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 469. 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. Margaret D. Pusch, "The Interculturally Competent Global Leader," in The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence, ed. Darla K. Deardorff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 69. 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. Furio Bednarz, "Building Up Intercultural Competences: Challenges and Learning Processes," in Building Intercultural Competencies: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Social Work, and Health Care, eds. Maria Giovanna Onorati and Furio Bednarz (Leuven, Belgium: Acco, 2010), 39. 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. Janet M. Bennett, "Cultivating Intercultural Competence," in The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence, ed. Darla K. Deardorff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 127–34. 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. Paul Martin Opdal, "Curiosity, Wonder, and Education Seen as Perspective," Studies in Philosophy and Education 20 (2001): 331–44. 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." Janet M. Bennett, "Cultivating Intercultural Competence," in The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence, ed. Darla K. Deardorff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 129. 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. Richard E. Nisbett, The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently…and Why (New York: Free Press, 2003), 44–45. 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. Janet M. Bennett, "Cultivating Intercultural Competence," in The Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence, ed. Darla K. Deardorff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 132. 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. Furio Bednarz, "Building Up Intercultural Competences: Challenges and Learning Processes," in Building Intercultural Competencies: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Social Work, and Health Care, eds. Maria Giovanna Onorati and Furio Bednarz (Leuven, Belgium: Acco, 2010), 47. 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. "Putting Privilege into Practice through 'Intersectional Reflexivity': Ruminations, Interventions, and Possibilities," Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping 16, no. 1 (2010): 122. 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. Furio Bednarz, "Building Up Intercultural Competences: Challenges and Learning Processes," in Building Intercultural Competencies: A Handbook for Professionals in Education, Social Work, and Health Care, eds. Maria Giovanna Onorati and Furio Bednarz (Leuven, Belgium: Acco, 2010), 47–51.

"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. Brenda J. Allen, Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2011), 9, 65, 186–87. 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:

What triggers you to TUI?

Where did these influences on your thought come from?

What concepts from this chapter can you apply to change your thought processes?

Key Takeaways

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

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?

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.

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.

Cultural Characteristics

from Chapter 2 of Leading with Cultural Intelligence

The original text can be found at The Saylor Foundation. http://www.saylor.org/site/textbooks/Leading%20with%20Cultural%20Intelligence.pdf . This work is shared by Creative Commons BY-NC 3.0 License. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/

2.11 Value Dimensions of Culture

The work of Geert Hofstede, while employed at IBM in the late 1960s to early 1970s, still stands as one of the most comprehensive studies of cultural values on leadership in the workplace. From his data collected from over 30 countries and 100,000 individuals, Hofstede created a model of value dimensions that speak to the ways that cultures tend to operate. Although this study is generalized to specific countries, his work on cultural value dimensions is helpful to any business doing global and multicultural work.

According to Hofstede, the five main dimensions are *identity, power, gender, uncertainty*, and *time*. You can think about cultural value dimensions on a scale or a continuum, where one aspect of the value lies on one side of the scale and the other extreme lies at the other end of the scale. Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Table 2.2 Five Cultural Value Dimensions

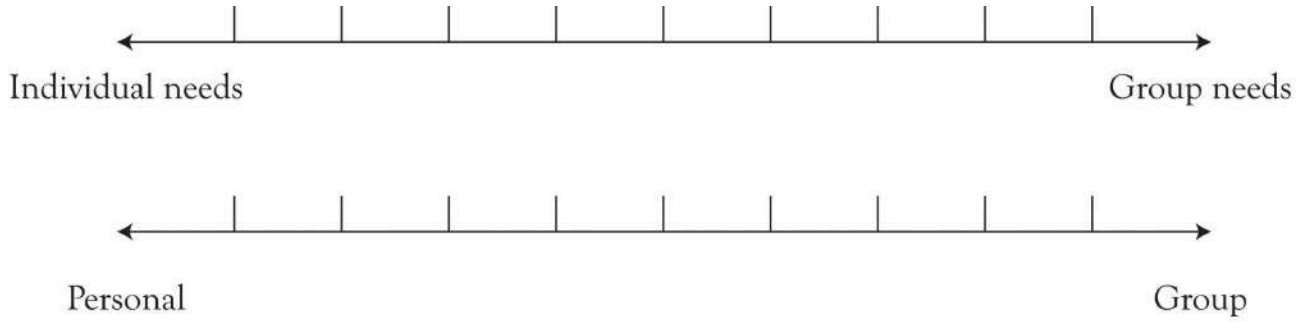
Value Dimensions	One Extreme	Other Extreme
Identity	Group	Individual
Power	Egalitarian	Hierarchal
Gender	Feminine	Masculine
Uncertainty	Ambiguity	Structure
Time	Relationship	Task

Cultural value dimensions help you to understand culture and to be able to make sense of culture. These dimensions provide you with a perspective of culture for yourself as well as a perspective of how others perceive their culture. All cultures experience these dimensions of difference in many ways, and different cultures solve these differences in many ways. Becoming aware of these concepts helps you to figure out the experiences you have in relation to your culture. It helps to make that experience less ambiguous and threatening. Cultural value dimensions provide clarity and a starting place for cultural awareness. However, they are often seen as intangible and under the waterline, but once you adapt to the cultural dimensions, you become more comfortable and do not see the cultural difference.

Identity

The value dimension of identity refers to the attention of groups or individuals toward group needs versus individual needs as well as toward individual achievement and interpersonal relationships. On a continuum, you see the identity value dimension expressed as such in Figure 2.5 "Dimension of Identity".

Figure 2.5 Dimension of Identity



On one spectrum, there is an expectation of doing things for the group rather than for oneself. On the other side, achievements and needs are individualized. Hofstede found that cultures placing a high value on individualism and a low value on collectivism valued individual rights; cultures placing a high value on collectivism valued relationships and harmony. This orientation, he argued, can have a large affect on managing organizations and people. Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

For example, in many Latino cultures, the concept of family, *la familia*, is critical to their cultural history and social systems. *La familia* is the most important social unit and includes extended family members. Decision making, conflict resolution, and negotiation are based on group needs rather than individual preferences; through paying attention to group and collective needs, harmony and relationships are intact. Alternatively, in individualistic cultures, the need of the individual comes first. U.S. culture teaches this to children at a young age. The following is an example that illustrates the differences between individualist and collectivist cultures:

Mary takes her eight year old, Johnny, to the store to buy ice-cream. She asks him to choose what ice-cream flavor he would like. Over time he learns to tell his mother about his personal likes and dislikes. Every time his mother responds to his decisions with encouragement. Over time he learns that he can and should be able to express himself.

By encouraging her child to make decisions and choices on his own, Mary raises a child that considers his personal needs and wants. If Johnny was in a group that operated more collectively, he might become quite upset when told that the whole group must agree to a specific ice cream flavor, that is, that his personal choice does not matter in the group decision.

The following is another example of individual and collective cultures:

A history teacher gives a lesson on the Bill of Rights to her students. She explains that everyone has individual rights and liberties. Sahara is a student in the class. She is thirteen years old and a recent immigrant from Somali. She learns that she has individual rights and to the disappointment and frustration of her parents, her behaviors begin to change at home. She comes home late from school, she stops doing her chores, and she talks back to her mother. She says, "I can do whatever I want. In this country, I am free!"

Sahara comes from a culture that is collective and tribal in nature. Her parents express confusion when they hear her say, "I can do whatever I want." They do not understand what she means and why she says what she says. They begin to think that she is losing her cultural values.

The following is another example that illustrates the value differences between collectivist and individualist cultures:

Tabitha is 22 years old and moves in with her college boyfriend, Randy, to an apartment near her parents. Tom and Susan, Tabitha's parents, are excited that she is able to be independent and to live on her own.

Xioli is Tabitha and Randy's friend from college. She is Chinese American and wants to move out of her parents' house. Randy and Tabitha have offered the second bedroom space for Xioli in their apartment. Xioli's parents think she is too young to live on her own. They also think it is a sign of disrespect to them if she, as a single woman, lives with a man.

Power

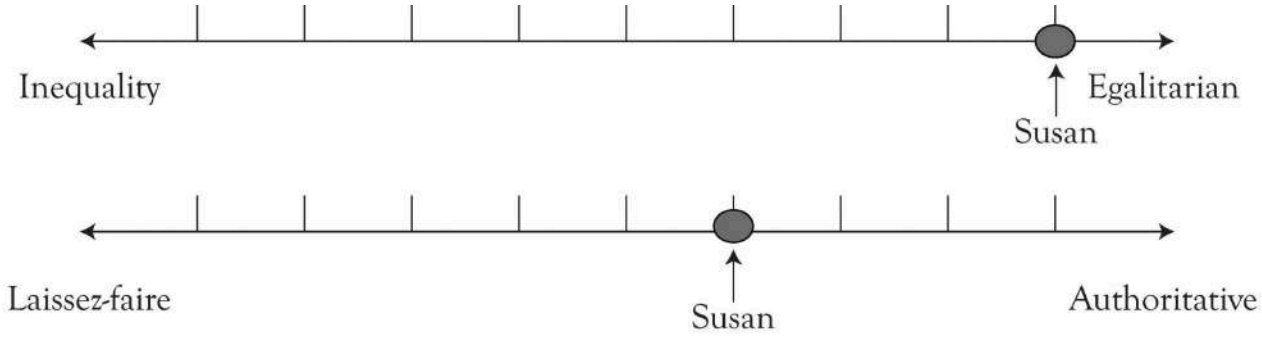
Hofstede defined power distance dimensions as maintaining strict rules that establish the types of relationships individuals have with one another. Power represents the level of inequality and equality, as well as the level of hierarchy and upward mobility, within a cultural group. In regard to leadership, power dimension can also represent a culture's tendencies toward authority, on one end, and one's orientation toward laissez-faire leadership, on the other. Hofstede found that low-power-distance cultures emphasized equality and minimized power and status. The following is an example of this:

Susan is the president of a large manufacturing business. Although she is in a position of leadership and

authority, she takes a "hands off management approach" to her employees, and in meetings provides a participatory, democratic engagement process.

Susan's dimension of power is illustrated in Figure 2.6 "Power Value Dimension".

Figure 2.6 Power Value Dimension



Gender

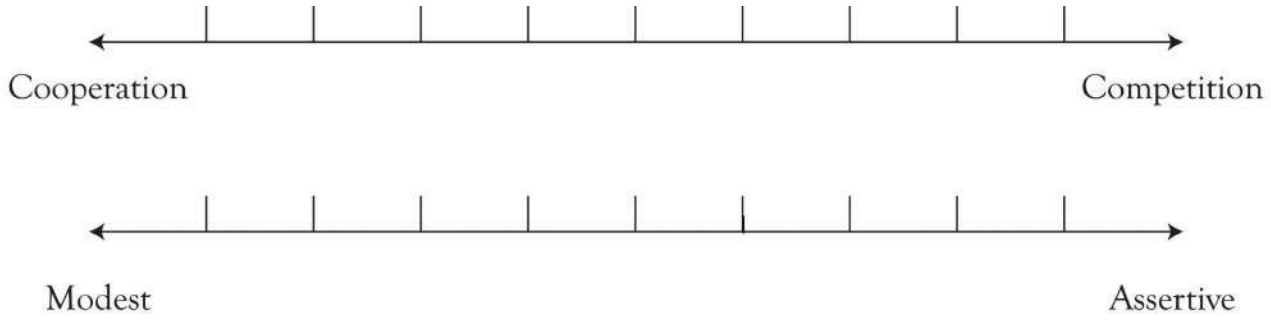
Hofstede describes the value dimension of gender as representing two paradigms of thinking and practice about the world in relation to traditional values associated with gender roles. Gender refers to the culture's tendencies or orientation toward enforcing or reinforcing masculine and feminine roles in work. Masculine cultures tend to emphasize ambition, control, competition, assertiveness, and achievement, whereas feminine cultures emphasize nurture, care, sharing, quality of life, and relationships. Sometimes these values are expressed as the "quantity of life" and the "quality of life."

In his findings, Hofstede indicated that cultures that rate high in masculinity, such as Japan, Austria, Venezuela, and Italy, revealed a high proportion of males in dominant structures; in low masculine cultures, such as Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, and Sweden, women were treated more equally in their social systems.

It is important that you recognize that these values are not associated with being male or female. In other words, this does not mean that men cannot be part of feminine cultures or that women do not orient themselves toward "masculine" cultural values. Finally, like other value dimensions, gender dimensions can vary greatly within any culture. Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

You can think about the value dimension of gender in the ways displayed in Figure 2.7 "Gender Dimensions".

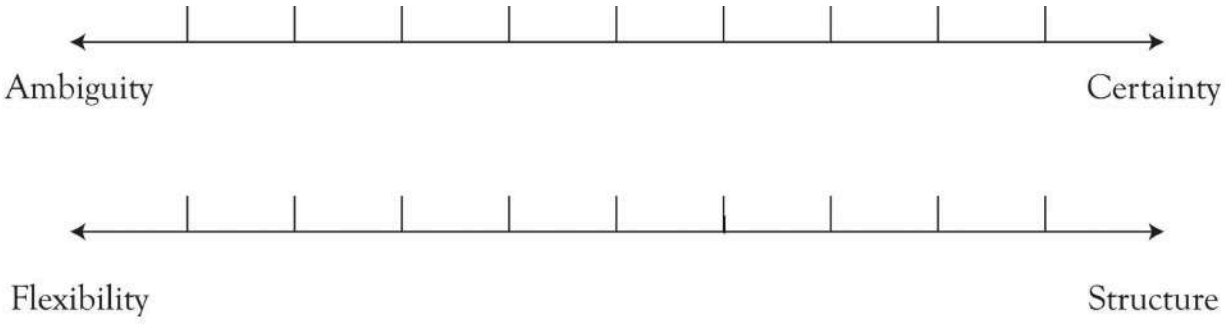
Figure 2.7 Gender Dimensions



Uncertainty

The dimension of uncertainty emphasizes cultures that are either oriented toward uncertainty or toward creating certainty and stability. Hofstede described this as a society's tolerance for ambiguity. Societies that are in *high uncertainty avoidance* are rule-bound and pay more attention to written procedures, rules, or goals. Individuals who have a higher need for formalized structures, procedures, or diplomacy tend to minimize their uncertainty levels in order to cope with the unknowns of their situations. Someone who is on the other extreme of the dimension is more relaxed about the rules and procedures; they are more flexible in their attitudes toward rules and policies. The value dimension can be expressed in the ways shown in Figure 2.8 "Uncertainty Value Dimension". Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Figure 2.8 Uncertainty Value Dimension



This dimension also speaks to a culture's orientation toward directness and honesty. Edward Hall popularized the terms "high-context" culture and "low-context" culture to describe cultural differences between two different types of societies. The ideas are often used to describe the ways in which cultures communicate and to understand what cultural constructs underlie the communication.

High-context cultures are societies in which people often make inferences; they leave things unsaid, knowing that the other person would understand what was implied in the communication. People in these societies tend to rely on groups for support. Low-context cultures are societies that are explicit and direct in their communication. They generally are more comfortable relying on themselves, as individuals, and working out solutions to problems. Like high-context cultures, relationships are important to low-context societies; the difference is in the longevity of the relationships. Generally, low-context societies have many relationships that are less intimate and close than those of high-context cultures. Hall, E. T. (1981). Beyond culture. New York, NY: Random House. Both types of cultural differentiations are illustrated in Table 2.3 "High and Low Context Culture Descriptors".

Table 2.3 High and Low Context Culture Descriptors

<table>
<tr><th>Cultural Context</th><th>Countries/ Cultures</th><th>Descriptors</th><th>How They Perceive the Other Context</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="8">High context</td><td>Spain</td><td rowspan="8">-Less verbally explicit communication
-Implied meanings
-Long-term relationships
-Decisions and activities focus around personal, face-to-face relationships</td><td rowspan="8">Low-context cultures are…

-relationship-avoidant
-too aggressive
-focused too much on tasks and goals</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mexico</td></tr>
<tr><td>Greece</td></tr>
<tr><td>Middle East</td></tr>
<tr><td>China</td></tr>
<tr><td>Japan</td></tr>
<tr><td>Korean</td></tr>
<tr><td>Thailand</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Low context</td><td>United States</td><td rowspan="4">-Rule-oriented
-Knowledge is public and accessible
-Short-term relationships
-Task-centered</td><td rowspan="4">High-context cultures…

-are too ambiguous
-are quiet and modest
-ask a lot of questions</td></tr>
<tr><td>Germany</td></tr>
<tr><td>Great Britain</td></tr>
<tr><td>Australia</td></tr>
</table>

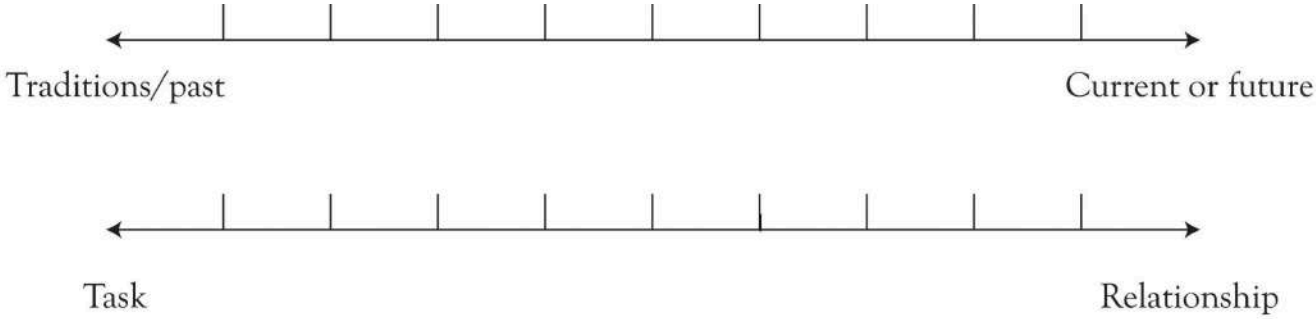
Time

The dimension of time speaks to how communities are oriented toward space and time, including their tendencies toward traditions and the past, and their orientation toward the future and the present. In many cultural systems, holding on to traditions is important in current day-to-day operations and relationships. Some societies will refer to traditions to preserve and maintain cultural norms, that is, to protect what currently exists.

Time is also a reference to a culture's orientation toward tasks or relationships. For example, a manager from the United States who travels to India to negotiate a business contract needs to know that meetings will occur

whenever people show up to the meeting, which could be hours after it is scheduled. A task-oriented leader is certain to be frustrated when he meets up with an Indian who is more time-oriented toward relationships. In the American perspective, promptness is professionalism; yet, in the other perspective, the concept of time is more loose and flexible. The value of time is illustrated in Figure 2.9 “Time Value Dimension”.

Figure 2.9 Time Value Dimension



Understanding these five value dimensions and their impact in different cultural systems will be helpful to your work in cultural intelligence. Like any cultural model, you need to recognize that cultural factors in leadership and organizations, as indicated by Taylor Cox, differ “across gender, nationality, and racial/ethnic groups as it relates to time and space orientation, leadership style orientations, individualism versus collectivism, competitive versus cooperative behavior, locus of control, and communication styles.” You must recognize that *microcultures* exist within *macrocultures*; this is significant in working effectively on a cross-cultural level. Cox, T. (1994). Cultural diversity in organizations: Theory, research, and practice. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Chapter 9.1 and 9.2

Preparing a Speech

Ancient Greek educators and philosophers wrote the first public speaking texts about 2,400 years ago. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* covers many of the same topics addressed in this unit of the book, including speech organization, audience analysis, and persuasive appeals. Even though these principles have been around for thousands of years and have been taught to millions of students, it's still a challenge to get students to see the value of public speaking. Some students think they already know everything they need to know about speaking in public. In response I remind them that even the best speakers still don't know everything there is to know about public speaking. Other students don't think they'll engage in public speaking very often, if at all. To them, I mention that oral communication and presentation skills are integral to professional and personal success. Last, some students are anxious or even scared by the thought of speaking in front of an audience. To them, I explain that speaking anxiety is common and can be addressed. Learning about and practicing public speaking fosters transferable skills that will help you organize your thoughts, outline information, do research, adapt to various audiences, and utilize and understand persuasive techniques. These skills will be useful in other college classes, your career, your personal relationships, and your civic life.

9.1 Selecting and Narrowing a Topic

Learning Objectives

Employ audience analysis.

Determine the general purpose of a speech.

List strategies for narrowing a speech topic.

Compose an audience-centered, specific purpose statement for a speech.

Compose a thesis statement that summarizes the central idea of a speech.

There are many steps that go into the speech-making process. Many people do not approach speech preparation in an informed and systematic way, which results in many poorly planned or executed speeches that are not pleasant to sit through as an audience member and don't reflect well on the speaker. Good speaking skills can help you stand out from the crowd in increasingly competitive environments. While a polished delivery is important and will be discussed more in Chapter 10 "Delivering a Speech", good speaking skills must be practiced much earlier in the speech-making process.

Analyze Your Audience

Audience analysis is key for a speaker to achieve his or her speech goal. One of the first questions you should ask yourself is "Who is my audience?" While there are some generalizations you can make about an audience, a competent speaker always assumes there is a diversity of opinion and background among his or her listeners. You can't assume from looking that everyone in your audience is the same age, race, sexual orientation, religion, or many other factors. Even if you did have a fairly homogenous audience, with only one or two people who don't match up, you should still consider those one or two people. When I have a class with one or two older students, I still consider the different age demographics even though twenty other students are eighteen to twenty-two years old. In short, a good speaker shouldn't intentionally alienate even one audience member. Of course, a speaker

could still unintentionally alienate certain audience members, especially in persuasive speaking situations. While this may be unavoidable, speakers can still think critically about what content they include in the speech and the effects it may have.

Even though you should remain conscious of the differences among audience members, you can also focus on commonalities. When delivering a speech in a college classroom, you can rightfully assume that everyone in your audience is currently living in the general area of the school, is enrolled at the school, and is currently taking the same speech class. In professional speeches, you can often assume that everyone is part of the same professional organization if you present at a conference, employed at the same place or in the same field if you are giving a sales presentation, or experiencing the nervousness of starting a new job if you are leading an orientation or training. You may not be able to assume much more, but that's enough to add some tailored points to your speech that will make the content more relevant.

Demographic Audience Analysis

Demographics are broad sociocultural categories, such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, education level, religion, ethnicity, and nationality that are used to segment a larger population. Since you are always going to have diverse demographics among your audience members, it would be unwise to focus solely on one group over another. As a speaker, being aware of diverse demographics is useful in that you can tailor and vary examples to appeal to different groups of people. As you can read in the "Getting Real" feature in this chapter, engaging in audience segmentation based on demographics is much more targeted in some careers.

Psychological Audience Analysis

Psychological audience analysis considers your audience's psychological dispositions toward the topic, speaker, and occasion and how their attitudes, beliefs, and values inform those dispositions. When considering your audience's disposition toward your topic, you want to assess your audience's knowledge of the subject. You wouldn't include a lesson on calculus in an introductory math course. You also wouldn't go into the intricacies of a heart transplant to an audience with no medical training. A speech on how to give a speech would be redundant in a public speaking class, but it could be useful for high school students or older adults who are going through a career transition. Students in my class recently had to theme their informative speeches around the topic of renewable energy. They were able to tie their various topics to a new renewable energy production plant that opened that semester on our campus. They had to be careful not to overrun their speech with scientific jargon. One student compared the concept of biogasification to the natural gas production that comes from living creatures like humans and cows. This comparison got a laugh from the audience and also made the seemingly complex concept more understandable.

The audience may or may not have preconceptions about you as a speaker. One way to positively engage your audience is to make sure you establish your credibility. In terms of **credibility**, you want the audience to see you as competent, trustworthy, and engaging. If the audience is already familiar with you, they may already see you as a credible speaker because they've seen you speak before, have heard other people evaluate you positively, or know that you have credentials and/or experience that make you competent. If you know you have a reputation that isn't as positive, you will want to work hard to overcome those perceptions. To establish your trustworthiness, you want to incorporate good supporting material into your speech, verbally cite sources, and present information and arguments in a balanced, noncoercive, and nonmanipulative way. To establish yourself as engaging, you want to have a well-delivered speech, which requires you to practice, get feedback, and practice some more. Your verbal and nonverbal delivery should be fluent and appropriate to the audience and occasion. We will discuss speech delivery more in Chapter 10 "Delivering a Speech".

The circumstances that led your audience to attend your speech will affect their view of the occasion. A **captive audience** includes people who are required to attend your presentation. Mandatory meetings are common in workplace settings. Whether you are presenting for a group of your employees, coworkers, classmates, or even residents in your dorm if you are a resident advisor, you shouldn't let the fact that the meeting is required give you license to give a half-hearted speech. In fact, you may want to build common ground with your audience to overcome any potential resentment for the required gathering. In your speech class, your classmates are captive audience members.

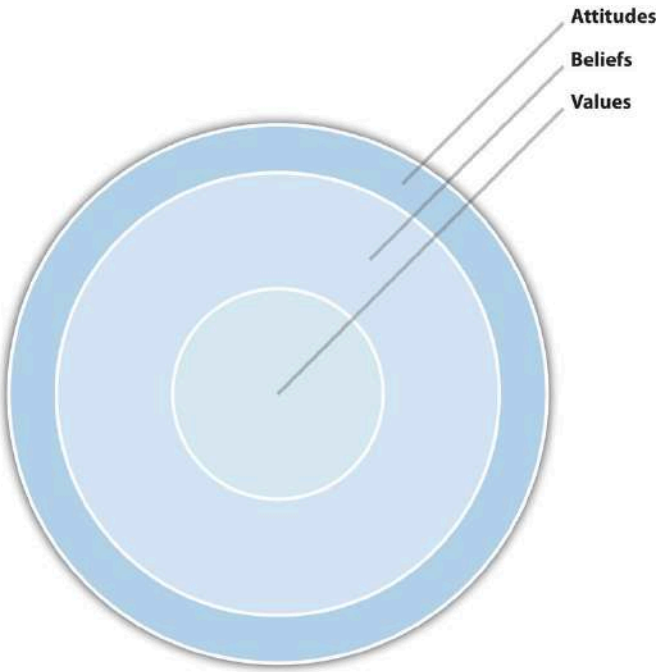
View having a captive classroom audience as a challenge, and use this space as a public speaking testing laboratory. You can try new things and push your boundaries more, because this audience is very forgiving and

understanding since they have to go through the same things you do. In general, you may have to work harder to maintain the attention of a captive audience. Since coworkers may expect to hear the same content they hear every time this particular meeting comes around, and classmates have to sit through dozens and dozens of speeches, use your speech as an opportunity to stand out from the crowd or from what's been done before.

A **voluntary audience** includes people who have decided to come hear your speech. This is perhaps one of the best compliments a speaker can receive, even before they've delivered the speech. Speaking for a voluntary audience often makes me have more speaking anxiety than I do when speaking in front of my class or my colleagues, because I know the audience may have preconceived notions or expectations that I must live up to. This is something to be aware of if you are used to speaking in front of captive audiences. To help adapt to a voluntary audience, ask yourself what the audience members expect. Why are they here? If they've decided to come and see you, they must be interested in your topic or you as a speaker. Perhaps you have a reputation for being humorous, being able to translate complicated information into more digestible parts, or being interactive with the audience and responding to questions. Whatever the reason or reasons, it's important to make sure you deliver on those aspects. If people are voluntarily giving up their time to hear you, you want to make sure they get what they expected.

A final aspect of psychological audience analysis involves considering the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and values, as they will influence all the perceptions mentioned previously. As you can see in Figure 9.1 "Psychological Analysis: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values", we can think of our attitudes, beliefs, and values as layers that make up our perception and knowledge.

Figure 9.1 Psychological Analysis: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values



At the outermost level, attitudes are our likes and dislikes, and they are easier to influence than beliefs or values because they are often reactionary. If you've ever followed the approval rating of a politician, you know that people's likes and dislikes change frequently and can change dramatically based on recent developments. This is also true interpersonally. For those of you who have siblings, think about how you can go from liking your sisters or brothers, maybe because they did something nice for you, to disliking them because they upset you. This seesaw of attitudes can go up and down over the course of a day or even a few minutes, but it can still be useful for a speaker to consider. If there is something going on in popular culture or current events that has captured people's attention and favor or disfavor, then you can tap into that as a speaker to better relate to your audience.

When considering beliefs, we are dealing with what we believe "is or isn't" or "true or false." We come to hold our beliefs based on what we are taught, experience for ourselves, or have faith in. Our beliefs change if we encounter new information or experiences that counter previous ones. As people age and experience more, their beliefs are likely to change, which is natural.

Our values deal with what we view as right or wrong, good or bad. Our values do change over time but usually as a result of a life transition or life-changing event such as a birth, death, or trauma. For example, when many people leave their parents' control for the first time and move away from home, they have a shift in values that occurs as they make this important and challenging life transition. In summary, audiences enter a speaking situation with various psychological dispositions, and considering what those may be can help speakers adapt their messages and better meet their speech goals.

Situational Audience Analysis

Situational audience analysis considers the physical surroundings and setting of a speech. It's always a good idea to visit the place you will be speaking ahead of time so you will know what to expect. If you expect to have

a lectern and arrive to find only a table at the front of the room, that little difference could end up increasing your anxiety and diminishing your speaking effectiveness. I have traveled to many different universities, conference facilities, and organizations to speak, and I always ask my host to show me the room I will be speaking in. I take note of the seating arrangement, the presence of technology and its compatibility with what I plan on using, the layout of the room including windows and doors, and anything else that's relevant to my speech. Knowing your physical setting ahead of time allows you to alter the physical setting, when possible, or alter your message or speaking strategies if needed. Sometimes I open or close blinds, move seats around, plug my computer in to make sure it works, or even practice some or all of my presentation. I have also revised a speech to be more interactive and informal when I realized I would speak in a lounge rather than a classroom or lecture hall.

Determine Your Purpose, Topic, and Thesis

General Purpose

Your speeches will usually fall into one of three categories. In some cases we speak to inform, meaning we attempt to teach our audience using factual objective evidence. In other cases, we speak to persuade, as we try to influence an audience's beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors. Last, we may speak to entertain or amuse our audience. In summary, the **general purpose** of your speech will be to inform, to persuade, or to entertain.

You can see various topics that may fit into the three general purposes for speaking in Table 9.1 "General Purposes and Speech Topics". Some of the topics listed could fall into another general purpose category depending on how the speaker approached the topic, or they could contain elements of more than one general purpose. For example, you may have to inform your audience about your topic in one main point before you can persuade them, or you may include some entertaining elements in an informative or persuasive speech to help make the content more engaging for the audience. There should not be elements of persuasion included in an informative speech, however, since persuading is contrary to the objective approach that defines an informative general purpose. In any case, while there may be some overlap between general purposes, most speeches can be placed into one of the categories based on the overall content of the speech.

Table 9.1 General Purposes and Speech Topics

To Inform	To Persuade	To Entertain
Civil rights movement	Gun control	Comedic monologue
Renewable energy	Privacy rights	My craziest adventure
Reality television	Prison reform	A "roast"

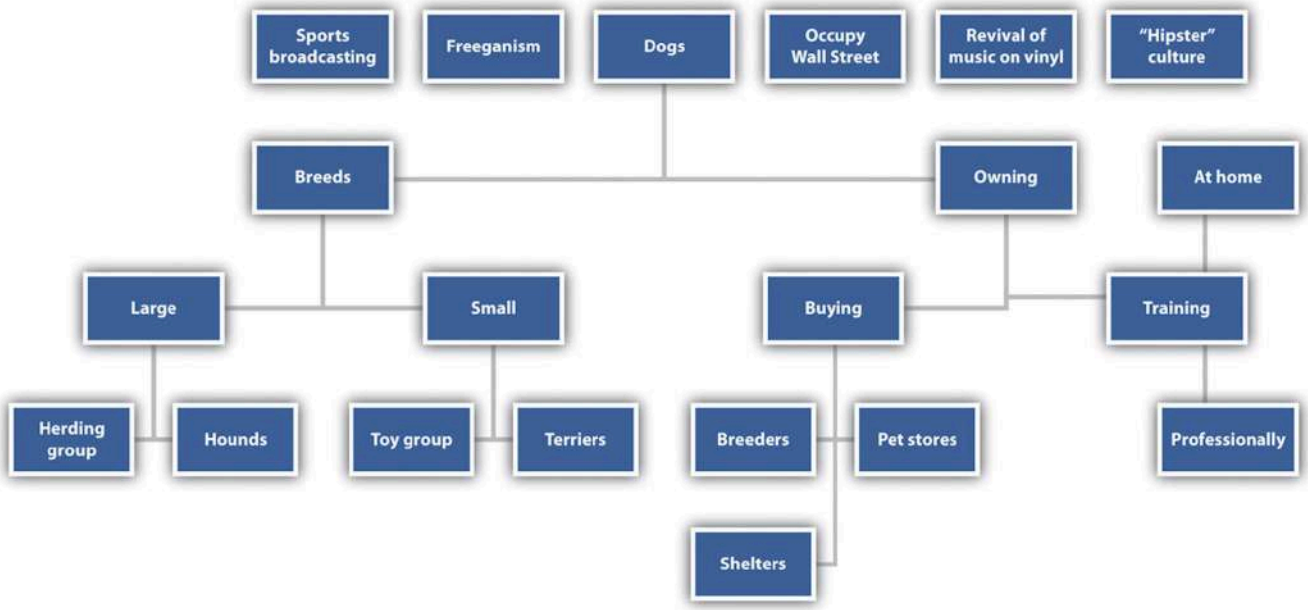
Choosing a Topic

Once you have determined (or been assigned) your general purpose, you can begin the process of choosing a topic. In this class, you may be given the option to choose any topic for your informative or persuasive speech, but in most academic, professional, and personal settings, there will be some parameters set that will help guide your topic selection. Speeches in future classes will likely be organized around the content being covered in the class. Speeches delivered at work will usually be directed toward a specific goal such as welcoming new employees, informing about changes in workplace policies, or presenting quarterly sales figures. We are also usually compelled to speak about specific things in our personal lives, like addressing a problem at our child's school by speaking out at a school board meeting. In short, it's not often that you'll be starting from scratch when you begin to choose a topic.

Whether you've received parameters that narrow your topic range or not, the first step in choosing a topic is brainstorming. **Brainstorming** involves generating many potential topic ideas in a fast-paced and nonjudgmental manner. Brainstorming can take place multiple times as you narrow your topic. For example, you may begin by brainstorming a list of your personal interests that can then be narrowed down to a speech topic. It makes sense that you will enjoy speaking about something that you care about or find interesting. The research and writing

will be more interesting, and the delivery will be easier since you won't have to fake enthusiasm for your topic. Speaking about something you're familiar with and interested in can also help you manage speaking anxiety. While it's good to start with your personal interests, some speakers may get stuck here if they don't feel like they can make their interests relevant to the audience. In that case, you can look around for ideas. If your topic is something that's being discussed in newspapers, on television, in the lounge of your dorm, or around your family's dinner table, then it's likely to be of interest and be relevant since it's current. Figure 9.1 "Psychological Analysis: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values" shows how brainstorming works in stages. A list of topics that interest the speaker are on the top row. The speaker can brainstorm subtopics for each idea to see which one may work the best. In this case, the speaker could decide to focus his or her informative speech on three common ways people come to own dogs: through breeders, pet stores, or shelters.

Figure 9.2 Brainstorming and Narrowing a Topic



Overall you can follow these tips as you select and narrow your topic:

- Brainstorm topics that you are familiar with, interest you, and/or are currently topics of discussion.
- Choose a topic appropriate for the assignment/occasion.
- Choose a topic that you can make relevant to your audience.
- Choose a topic that you have the resources to research (access to information, people to interview, etc.).

Specific Purpose

Once you have brainstormed, narrowed, and chosen your topic, you can begin to draft your specific purpose statement. *Your **specific purpose** is a one-sentence statement that includes the objective you want to accomplish in your speech. You do not speak aloud your specific purpose during your speech; you use it to guide your researching, organizing, and writing. A good specific purpose statement is audience centered, agrees with the general purpose, addresses one main idea, and is realistic.*

An audience-centered specific purpose statement usually contains an explicit reference to the audience—for example, "my audience" or "the audience." Since a speaker may want to see if he or she effectively met his or her specific purpose, the objective should be written in such a way that it could be measured or assessed, and since a speaker actually wants to achieve his or her speech goal, the specific purpose should also be realistic. You won't be able to teach the audience a foreign language or persuade an atheist to Christianity in a six- to nine-minute speech. The following is a good example of a good specific purpose statement for an informative speech: "By the end of my speech, the audience will be better informed about the effects the green movement has had on schools." The statement is audience centered and matches with the general purpose by stating, "The audience will be better

informed." The speaker could also test this specific purpose by asking the audience to write down, at the end of the speech, three effects the green movement has had on schools.

Thesis Statement

Your **thesis statement** is a one-sentence summary of the central idea of your speech that you either explain or defend. You would explain the thesis statement for an informative speech, since these speeches are based on factual, objective material. You would defend your thesis statement for a persuasive speech, because these speeches are argumentative and your thesis should clearly indicate a stance on a particular issue. In order to make sure your thesis is argumentative and your stance clear, it is helpful to start your thesis with the words "I believe." When starting to work on a persuasive speech, it can also be beneficial to write out a counterargument to your thesis to ensure that it is arguable.

The thesis statement is different from the specific purpose in two main ways. First, the thesis statement is content centered, while the specific purpose statement is audience centered. Second, the thesis statement is incorporated into the spoken portion of your speech, while the specific purpose serves as a guide for your research and writing and an objective that you can measure. A good thesis statement is declarative, agrees with the general and specific purposes, and focuses and narrows your topic. Although you will likely end up revising and refining your thesis as you research and write, it is good to draft a thesis statement soon after drafting a specific purpose to help guide your progress. As with the specific purpose statement, your thesis helps ensure that your research, organizing, and writing are focused so you don't end up wasting time with irrelevant materials. Keep your specific purpose and thesis statement handy (drafting them at the top of your working outline is a good idea) so you can reference them often. The following examples show how a general purpose, specific purpose, and thesis statement match up with a topic area:

Topic: My Craziest Adventure

General purpose: To Entertain

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will appreciate the lasting memories that result from an eighteen-year-old visiting New Orleans for the first time.

Thesis statement: New Orleans offers young tourists many opportunities for fun and excitement.

Topic: Renewable Energy

General purpose: To Inform

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will be able to explain the basics of using biomass as fuel.

Thesis statement: Biomass is a renewable resource that releases gases that can be used for fuel.

Topic: Privacy Rights

General purpose: To Persuade

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, my audience will believe that parents should not be able to use tracking devices to monitor their teenage child's activities.

Thesis statement: I believe that it is a violation of a child's privacy to be electronically monitored by his or her parents.

Key Takeaways

Demographic, psychographic, and situational audience analysis help tailor your speech content to your audience.

Brainstorm to identify topics that fit within your interests, and then narrow your topic based on audience analysis and the guidelines provided.

A thesis statement summarizes the central idea of your speech and will be explained or defended using supporting material. Referencing your thesis statement often will help ensure that your speech is coherent.

Exercises

Getting integrated: Why do some people dread public speaking or just want to avoid it? Identify some potential benefits of public speaking in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts that might make people see public speaking in a different light.

Conduct some preliminary audience analysis of your class and your classroom. What are some demographics that might be useful for you to consider? What might be some attitudes, beliefs, and values people have that might be relevant to your speech topics? What situational factors might you want to consider before giving your speech?

Pay attention to the news (in the paper, on the Internet, television, or radio). Identify two informative and two persuasive speech topics that are based in current events.

9.2 Researching and Supporting Your Speech

Learning Objectives

Identify appropriate methods for conducting college-level research.

Distinguish among various types of sources.

Evaluate the credibility of sources.

Identify various types of supporting material.

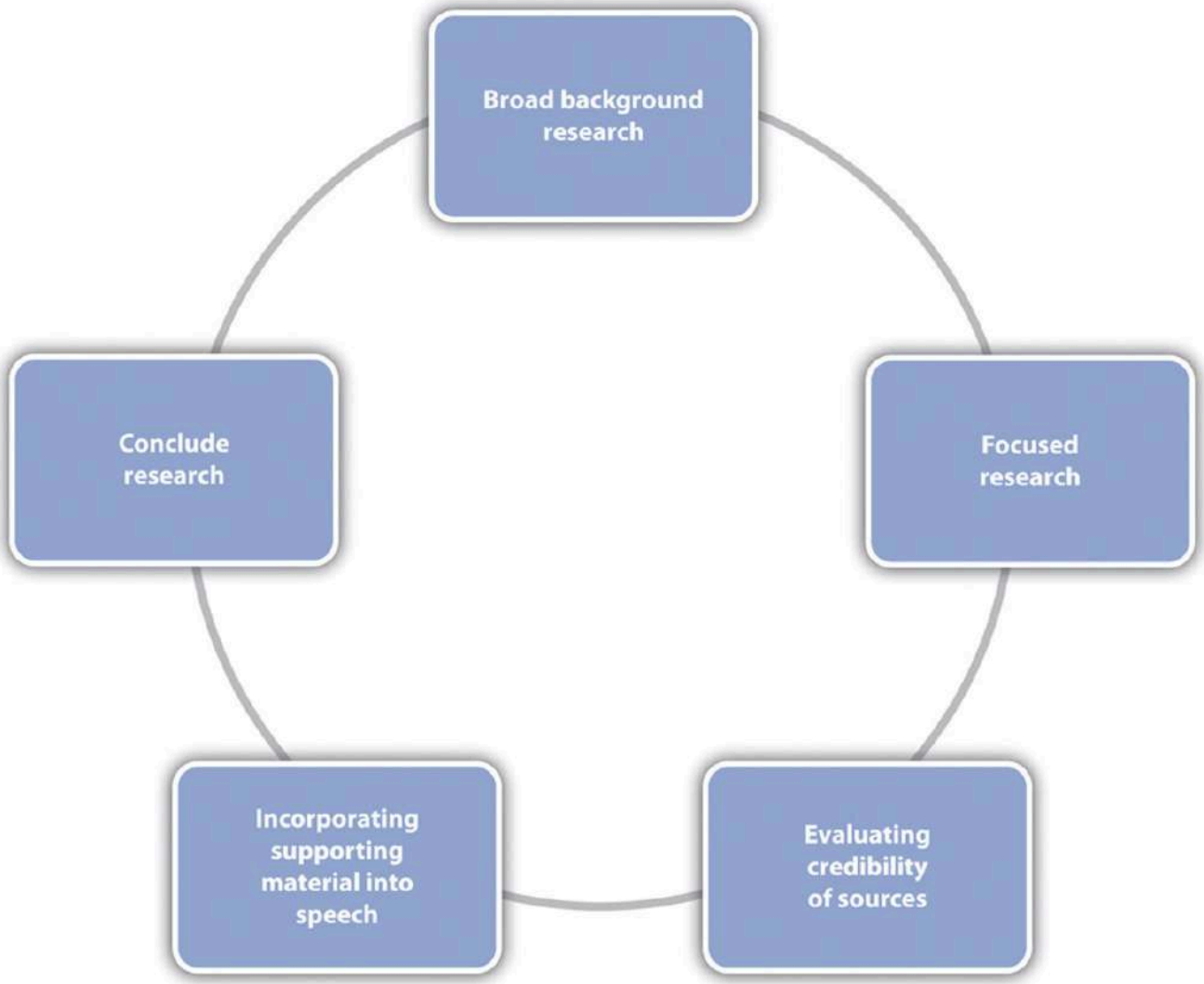
Employ visual aids that enhance a speaker's message.

We live in an age where access to information is more convenient than ever before. The days of photocopying journal articles in the stacks of the library or looking up newspaper articles on microfilm are over for most. Yet, even though we have all this information at our fingertips, research skills are more important than ever. Our challenge now is not accessing information but discerning what information is credible and relevant. Even though it may sound inconvenient to have to physically go to the library, students who did research before the digital revolution did not have to worry as much about discerning. If you found a source in the library, you could be assured of its credibility because a librarian had subscribed to or purchased that content. When you use Internet resources like Google or Wikipedia, you have no guarantees about some of the content that comes up.

Finding Supporting Material

As was noted in Section 9.1 "Selecting and Narrowing a Topic", it's good to speak about something you are already familiar with. So existing knowledge forms the first step of your research process. Depending on how familiar you are with a topic, you will need to do more or less background research before you actually start incorporating sources to support your speech. Background research is just a review of summaries available for your topic that helps refresh or create your knowledge about the subject. It is not the more focused and academic research that you will actually use to support and verbally cite in your speech. Figure 9.3 "Research Process" illustrates the research process. Note that you may go through some of these steps more than once.

Figure 9.3 Research Process



I will reiterate several times in this chapter that your first step for research in college should be library resources, not Google or Bing or other general search engines. In most cases, you can still do your library research from the comfort of a computer, which makes it as accessible as Google but gives you much better results. Excellent and underutilized resources at college and university libraries are reference librarians. **Reference librarians** are not like the people who likely staffed your high school library. They are information-retrieval experts. At most colleges and universities, you can find a reference librarian who has at least a master's degree in library and information sciences, and at some larger or specialized schools, reference librarians have doctoral degrees. I liken research to a maze, and reference librarians can help you navigate the maze. There may be dead ends, but there's always another way around to reach the end goal. Unfortunately, many students hit their first dead end and give up or assume that there's not enough research out there to support their speech. Trust me, if you've thought of a topic to do your speech on, someone else has thought of it, too, and people have written and published about it. Reference librarians can help you find that information. I recommend that you meet with a reference librarian face-to-face and take your assignment sheet and topic idea with you. In most cases, students report that they came away with more information than they needed, which is good because you can then narrow that down to the best information. If you can't meet with a reference librarian face-to-face, many schools now offer the option to do a live chat with a reference librarian, and you can also contact them by e-mail or phone.

Aside from the human resources available in the library, you can also use electronic resources such as library databases. Library databases help you access more credible and scholarly information than what you will find using general Internet searches. These databases are quite expensive, and you can't access them as a regular citizen without paying for them. Luckily, some of your tuition dollars go to pay for subscriptions to these databases that you can then access as a student. Through these databases, you can access newspapers, magazines,

journals, and books from around the world. Of course, libraries also house stores of physical resources like DVDs, books, academic journals, newspapers, and popular magazines. You can usually browse your library's physical collection through an online catalog search. A trip to the library to browse is especially useful for books. Since most university libraries use the Library of Congress classification system, books are organized by topic. That means if you find a good book using the online catalog and go to the library to get it, you should take a moment to look around that book, because the other books in that area will be topically related. On many occasions, I have used this tip and gone to the library for one book but left with several.

Although Google is not usually the best first stop for conducting college-level research, Google Scholar is a separate search engine that narrows results down to scholarly materials. This version of Google has improved much over the past few years and has served as a good resource for my research, even for this book. A strength of Google Scholar is that you can easily search for and find articles that aren't confined to a particular library database. Basically, the pool of resources you are searching is much larger than what you would have using a library database. The challenge is that you have no way of knowing if the articles that come up are available to you in full-text format. As noted earlier, most academic journal articles are found in databases that require users to pay subscription fees. So you are often only able to access the abstracts of articles or excerpts from books that come up in a Google Scholar search. You can use that information to check your library to see if the article is available in full-text format, but if it isn't, you have to go back to the search results. When you access Google Scholar on a campus network that subscribes to academic databases, however, you can sometimes click through directly to full-text articles. Although this resource is still being improved, it may be a useful alternative or backup when other search strategies are leading to dead ends.

Types of Sources

There are several different types of sources that may be relevant for your speech topic. Those include periodicals, newspapers, books, reference tools, interviews, and websites. It is important that you know how to evaluate the credibility of each type of source material.

Periodicals

Periodicals include magazines and journals, as they are published periodically. There are many library databases that can access periodicals from around the world and from years past. A common database is Academic Search Premiere (a similar version is Academic Search Complete). Many databases, like this one, allow you to narrow your search terms, which can be very helpful as you try to find good sources that are relevant to your topic. You may start by typing a key word into the first box and searching. Sometimes a general search like this can yield thousands of results, which you obviously wouldn't have time to look through. In this case you may limit your search to results that have your keyword in the **abstract**, which is the author-supplied summary of the source. If there are still too many results, you may limit your search to results that have your keyword in the title. At this point, you may have reduced those ten thousand results down to a handful, which is much more manageable.

Within your search results, you will need to distinguish between magazines and academic journals. In general, academic journals are considered more scholarly and credible than magazines because most of the content in them is peer reviewed. The **peer-review process** is the most rigorous form of review, which takes several months to years and ensures that the information that is published has been vetted and approved by numerous experts on the subject. Academic journals are usually affiliated with professional organizations rather than for-profit corporations, and neither authors nor editors are paid for their contributions. For example, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* is one of the oldest journals in communication studies and is published by the National Communication Association.

The National Communication Association publishes several peer-reviewed academic journals.

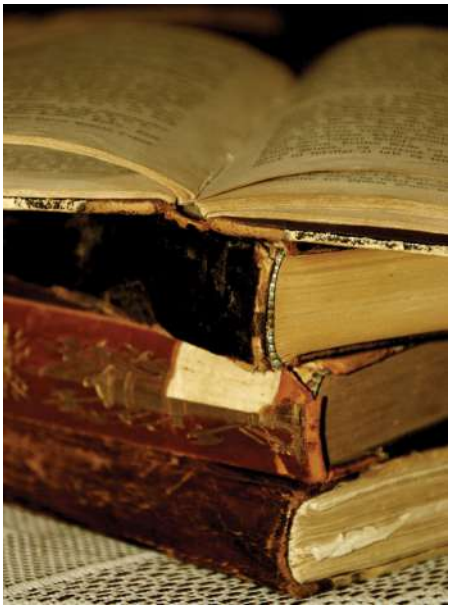
Source: Courtesy of the National Communication Association.

If your instructor wants you to have sources from academic journals, you can often click a box to limit your search results to those that are "peer reviewed." There are also subject-specific databases you can use to find periodicals. For example, *Communication and Mass Media Complete* is a database that includes articles from hundreds of journals related to communication studies. It may be acceptable for you to include magazine sources in your speech, but you should still consider the credibility of the source. Magazines like *Scientific American* and *Time* are generally more credible and reliable than sources like *People* or *Entertainment Weekly*.

Newspapers and Books

Newspapers and books can be excellent sources but must still be evaluated for relevance and credibility. Newspapers are good for topics that are developing quickly, as they are updated daily. While there are well-known newspapers of record like the *New York Times*, smaller local papers can also be credible and relevant if your speech topic doesn't have national or international reach. You can access local, national, and international newspapers through electronic databases like LexisNexis. If a search result comes up that doesn't have a byline with an author's name or an organization like the Associated Press or Reuters cited, then it might be an editorial. Editorials may also have bylines, which make them look like traditional newspaper articles even though they are opinion based. It is important to distinguish between news articles and editorials because editorials are usually not objective and do not go through the same review process that a news story does before it's published. It's also important to know the background of your paper. Some newspapers are more tabloid focused or may be published by a specific interest group that has an agenda and biases. So it's usually better to go with a newspaper that is recognized as the newspaper of record for a particular area.

Books are good for a variety of subjects and are useful for in-depth research that you can't get as regularly from newspapers or magazines. Edited books with multiple chapters by different authors can be especially good to get a variety of perspectives on a topic.



Don't assume that you can't find a book relevant to a topic that is fairly recent, since books may be published within a year of a major event.

Source: Photo courtesy of Lin Kristensen, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Books_of_the_Past.jpg.

To evaluate the credibility of a book, you'll want to know some things about the author. You can usually find this information at the front or back of the book. If an author is a credentialed and recognized expert in his or her area, the book will be more credible. But just because someone wrote a book on a subject doesn't mean he or she is the most credible source. For example, a quick search online brings up many books related to public speaking that are written by people who have no formal training in communication or speech. While they may have public speaking experience that can help them get a book deal with a certain publisher, that alone wouldn't qualify them to write a textbook, as textbook authors are expected to be credentialed experts—that is, people with experience and advanced training/degrees in their area. The publisher of a book can also be an indicator of credibility. Books published by university/academic presses (University of Chicago Press, Duke University Press) are considered more credible than books published by trade presses (Penguin, Random House), because they are often peer reviewed and they are not primarily profit driven.

Reference Tools

The transition to college-level research means turning more toward primary sources and away from general

reference materials. **Primary sources** are written by people with firsthand experiences with an event or researchers/scholars who conducted original research. Unfortunately, many college students are reluctant to give up their reliance on reference tools like dictionaries and encyclopedias. While reference tools like dictionaries and encyclopedias are excellent for providing a speaker with a background on a topic, they should not be the foundation of your research unless they are academic and/or specialized.

Dictionaries are handy tools when we aren't familiar with a particular word. However, citing a dictionary like *Webster's* as a source in your speech is often unnecessary. I tell my students that *Webster's Dictionary* is useful when you need to challenge a Scrabble word, but it isn't the best source for college-level research. You will inevitably come upon a word that you don't know while doing research. Most good authors define the terms they use within the content of their writing. In that case, it's better to use the author's definition than a dictionary definition. Also, citing a dictionary doesn't show deep research skills; it only shows an understanding of alphabetical order. So ideally you would quote or paraphrase the author's definition rather than turning to a general dictionary like Webster's. If you must turn to a dictionary, I recommend an academic dictionary like *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, which is the most comprehensive dictionary in the English language, with more than twenty volumes. You can't access the *OED* for free online, but most libraries pay for a subscription that you can access as a student or patron. While the *OED* is an academic dictionary, it is not specialized, and you may need a specialized dictionary when dealing with very specific or technical terms. *The Dictionary of Business and Economics* is an example of an academic and specialized dictionary.

Many students have relied on encyclopedias for research in high school, but most encyclopedias, like *World Book*, *Encarta*, or *Britannica*, are not primary sources. Instead, they are examples of **secondary sources** that aggregate, or compile, research done by others in a condensed summary. As I noted earlier, reference sources like encyclopedias are excellent resources to get you informed about the basics of a topic, but at the college level, primary sources are expected. Many encyclopedias are Internet based, which makes them convenient, but they are still not primary sources, and their credibility should be even more scrutinized.

Wikipedia's open format also means it doesn't generally meet the expectations for credible, scholarly research.

Source: Wikimedia Foundation.

Wikipedia revolutionized how many people retrieve information and pioneered an open-publishing format that allowed a community of people to post, edit, and debate content. While this is an important contribution to society, Wikipedia is not considered a scholarly or credible source. Like other encyclopedias, Wikipedia should not be used in college-level research, because it is not a primary source. In addition, since its content can be posted and edited by anyone, we cannot be sure of the credibility of the content. Even though there are self-appointed "experts" who monitor and edit some of the information on Wikipedia, we cannot verify their credentials or the review process that information goes through before it's posted. I'm not one of the college professors who completely dismisses Wikipedia, however. Wikipedia can be a great source for personal research, developing news stories, or trivia. Sometimes you can access primary sources through Wikipedia if you review the footnote citations included in an entry. Moving beyond Wikipedia, as with dictionaries, there are some encyclopedias that are better suited for college research. The *Encyclopedia of Black America* and the *Encyclopedia of Disaster Relief* are examples of specialized academic reference sources that will often include, in each entry, an author's name and credentials and more primary source information.

Interviews

When conducting an interview for a speech, you should access a person who has expertise in or direct experience with your speech topic. If you follow the suggestions for choosing a topic that were mentioned earlier, you may already know something about your speech topic and may have connections to people who would be good interview subjects. Previous employers, internship supervisors, teachers, community leaders, or even relatives may be appropriate interviewees, given your topic. If you do not have a connection to someone you can interview, you can often find someone via the Internet who would be willing to answer some questions. Many informative and persuasive speech topics relate to current issues, and most current issues have organizations that represent

their needs. For an informative speech on ageism or a persuasive speech on lowering the voting age, a quick Internet search for "youth rights" leads you to the webpage for the National Youth Rights Association. Like most organization web pages, you can click on the "Contact Us" link to get information for leaders in the organization. You could also connect to members of the group through Facebook and interview young people who are active in the organization.

Once you have identified a good interviewee, you will want to begin researching and preparing your questions. Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" and can provide descriptions and details that will add to your speech. Quotes and paraphrases from your interview can add a personal side to a topic or at least convey potentially complicated information in a more conversational and interpersonal way.

Closed questions can be answered with one or two words and can provide a starting point to get to more detailed information if the interviewer has prepared follow-up questions. Unless the guidelines or occasion for your speech suggest otherwise, you should balance your interview data with the other sources in your speech. Don't let your references to the interview take over your speech.

Tips for Conducting Interviews

1. Do preliminary research to answer basic questions. Many people and organizations have information available publicly. Don't waste interview time asking questions like "What year did your organization start?" when you can find that on the website.
2. Plan questions ahead of time. Even if you know the person, treat it as a formal interview so you can be efficient.
3. Ask open-ended questions that can't be answered with only a yes or no. Questions that begin with how and why are generally more open-ended than do and did questions. Make sure you have follow-up questions ready.
4. Use the interview to ask for the personal side of an issue that you may not be able to find in other resources. Personal narratives about experiences can resonate with an audience.
5. Make sure you are prepared. If interviewing in person, have paper, pens, and a recording device if you're using one. Test your recording device ahead of time. If interviewing over the phone, make sure you have good service so you don't drop the call and that you have enough battery power on your phone. When interviewing on the phone or via video chat, make sure distractions (e.g., barking dogs) are minimized.
6. Whether the interview is conducted face-to-face, over the phone, or via video (e.g., Skype), you must get permission to record. Recording can be useful, as it increases accuracy and the level of detail taken away from the interview. Most smartphones have free apps now that allow you to record face-to-face or phone conversations.
7. Whether you record or not, take written notes during the interview. Aside from writing the interviewee's responses, you can also take note of follow-up questions that come to mind or notes on the nonverbal communication of the interviewee.
8. Mention ahead of time if you think you'll have follow-up questions, so the interviewee can expect further contact.
9. Reflect and expand on your notes soon after the interview. It's impossible to transcribe everything during the interview, but you will remember much of what you didn't have time to write down and can add it in.
10. Follow up with a thank-you note. People are busy, and thanking them for their time and the information they provided will be appreciated.

Websites

We already know that utilizing library resources can help you automatically filter out content that may not be scholarly or credible, since the content in research databases is selected and restricted. However, some information may be better retrieved from websites. Even though both research databases and websites are electronic sources, there are two key differences between them that may impact their credibility. First, most of the content in research

databases is or was printed but has been converted to digital formats for easier and broader access. In contrast, most of the content on websites has not been printed. Although not always the case, an exception to this is documents in PDF form found on web pages. You may want to do additional research or consult with your instructor to determine if that can count as a printed source. Second, most of the content on research databases has gone through editorial review, which means a professional editor or a peer editor has reviewed the material to make sure it is credible and worthy of publication. Most content on websites is not subjected to the same review process, as just about anyone with Internet access can self-publish information on a personal website, blog, wiki, or social media page. So what sort of information may be better retrieved from websites, and how can we evaluate the credibility of a website?

Most well-known organizations have official websites where they publish information related to their mission. If you know there is an organization related to your topic, you may want to see if they have an official website. It is almost always better to get information from an official website, because it is then more likely to be considered primary source information. Keep in mind, though, that organizations may have a bias or a political agenda that affects the information they put out. If you do get information from an official website, make sure to include that in your verbal citation to help establish your credibility. Official reports are also often best found on websites, as they rarely appear in their full form in periodicals, books, or newspapers. Government agencies, nonprofits, and other public service organizations often compose detailed and credible reports on a wide variety of topics.

The US Census Bureau's official website is a great place to find current and credible statistics related to population numbers and demographic statistics.
Source: Photo courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau.

A key way to evaluate the credibility of a website is to determine the site's accountability. By accountability, I mean determining who is ultimately responsible for the content put out and whose interests the content meets. The more information that is included on a website, the better able you will be to determine its accountability. Ideally all or most of the following information would be included: organization/agency name, author's name and contact information, date the information was posted or published, name and contact information for person in charge of web content (i.e., web editor or webmaster), and a link to information about the organization/agency/business mission. While all this information doesn't have to be present to warrant the use of the material, the less accountability information is available, the more you should scrutinize the information. You can also begin to judge the credibility of a website by its domain name. Some common domain names are *.com, .net, .org, .edu, .mil,* and *.gov.* For each type of domain, there are questions you may ask that will help you evaluate the site's credibility. You can see a summary of these questions in Table. Note that some domain names are marked as "restricted" and others aren't. When a domain is restricted, *.mil* for example, a person or group wanting to register that domain name has to prove that their content is appropriate for the guidelines of the domain name. Essentially, this limits access to the information published on those domain names, which increases the overall credibility.

Table 9.2 Website Domain Names and Credibility

Domain Name	Purpose	Restricted?	Questions to Ask
.com, .net	Commercial	No	Is the information posted for profit? Is the information posted influenced by advertisers?
.org	Mostly noncommercial organizations	No	What is the mission of the organization? Who is responsible for the content? Is the information published to enhance public knowledge or to solicit donations?
.edu	Higher education	Yes	Who published the information? (the institution or an administrator, faculty member, staff member, or student)
.mil	US military	Yes	Most information on .mil sites will be credible, since it is not published for profit and only limited people have access to post information.
.gov	US government	Yes	Most information on .gov sites will be credible, since it is not published for profit and only limited people have access to post information.

Evaluating Sources

Public speakers have an ethical obligation to create a message based on the best quality sources. The **CRAAP Test** is a list of questions that help you determine if the sources you found are accurate and reliable. Keep in mind that the following list is not static or complete. Different criteria will be more or less important depending on your situation or need. (Source: "LibGuides: Literature Reviews: Home." *Evaluating Info – Literature Reviews – LibGuides at CSU, Chico*, Meriam Library, California State University at Chico, 8 Mar. 2018, libguides.csuchico.edu/c.php?g=414315.) **Key: ***indicates criteria is for Web sources only

Currency: The timeliness of the information.

- When was the information published or posted?
- Has the information been revised or updated?
- Is the information current or out-of date for your topic?
- Are the links functional? *****

Relevance: The importance of the information for your needs.

- Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Is the information at an appropriate level (i.e. not too elementary or advanced for your needs)?
- Have you looked at a variety of sources before determining this is one you will use?
- Would you be comfortable using this source for a research paper?

Authority: The source of the information.

- Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor?
- Are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?
- What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations given?
- What are the author's qualifications to write on the topic?
- Is there contact information, such as a publisher or e-mail address?
- Does the URL reveal anything about the author or source? examples: .com .edu .gov .org .net *****

Accuracy: The reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the informational content.

- Where does the information come from?
- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Has the information been reviewed or refereed?
- Can you verify any of the information in another source or from personal knowledge?
- Does the language or tone seem biased and free of emotion?
- Are there spelling, grammar, or other typographical errors?

Purpose: The reason the information exists.

- What is the purpose of the information? to inform? teach? sell? entertain? persuade?
- Do the authors/sponsors make their intentions or purpose clear?
- Is the information fact? opinion? propaganda?Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?
- Are there political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases?

Types of Supporting Material

There are several types of supporting material that you can pull from the sources you find during the research

process to add to your speech. They include examples, explanations, statistics, analogies, testimony, and visual aids. You will want to have a balance of information, and you will want to include the material that is most relevant to your audience and is most likely to engage them. When determining relevance, utilize some of the strategies mentioned in Section 9.1 "Selecting and Narrowing a Topic". Thinking about who your audience is and what they know and would like to know will help you tailor your information. Also try to incorporate **proxemic information**, meaning information that is geographically relevant to your audience. For example, if delivering a speech about prison reform to an audience made up of Californians, citing statistics from North Carolina prisons would not be as proxemic as citing information from California prisons. The closer you can get the information to the audience, the better. I tell my students to make the information so relevant and proxemic that it is in our backyards, in the car with us on the way to school or work, and in the bed with us while we sleep.

Examples

An **example** is a cited case that is representative of a larger whole. Examples are especially beneficial when presenting information that an audience may not be familiar with. They are also useful for repackaging or reviewing information that has already been presented. Examples can be used in many different ways, so you should let your audience, purpose and thesis, and research materials guide your use. You may pull examples directly from your research materials, making sure to cite the source. The following is an example used in a speech about the negative effects of standardized testing: "Standardized testing makes many students anxious, and even ill. On March 14, 2002, the *Sacramento Bee* reported that some standardized tests now come with instructions indicating what teachers should do with a test booklet if a student throws up on it." You may also cite examples from your personal experience, if appropriate: "I remember being sick to my stomach while waiting for my SAT to begin."

You may also use hypothetical examples, which can be useful when you need to provide an example that is extraordinary or goes beyond most people's direct experience. Capitalize on this opportunity by incorporating vivid description into the example that appeals to the audience's senses. Always make sure to indicate when you are using a hypothetical example, as it would be unethical to present an example as real when it is not. Including the word imagine or something similar in the first sentence of the example can easily do this.

Whether real or hypothetical, examples used as supporting material can be brief or extended. Brief examples are usually one or two sentences, as you can see in the following hypothetical example: "Imagine that your child, little sister, or nephew has earned good grades for the past few years of elementary school, loves art class, and also plays on the soccer team. You hear the unmistakable sounds of crying when he or she comes home from school and you find out that art and soccer have been eliminated because students did not meet the federal guidelines for performance on standardized tests." Brief examples are useful when the audience is already familiar with a concept or during a review. Extended examples, sometimes called illustrations, are several sentences long and can be effective in introductions or conclusions to get the audience's attention or leave a lasting impression. It is important to think about relevance and time limits when considering using an extended illustration. Since most speeches are given within time constraints, you want to make sure the extended illustration is relevant to your speech purpose and thesis and that it doesn't take up a disproportionate amount of the speech. If a brief example or series of brief examples would convey the same content and create the same tone as the extended example, I suggest you go with brevity.

Explanations

Explanations clarify ideas by providing information about what something is, why something is the way it is, or how something works or came to be. One of the most common types of explanation is a definition. Definitions do not have to come from the dictionary. Many times, authors will define concepts as they use them in their writing, which is a good alternative to a dictionary definition.

As you do your research, think about how much your audience likely knows about a given subject. You do not need to provide definitions when information is common knowledge. Anticipate audience confusion and define legal, medical, or other forms of jargon as well as slang and foreign words. Definitions like the following are also useful for words that we are familiar with but may not know specifics: "According to the 2011 book *Prohibition: 13 Years That Changed America*, what we now know as Prohibition started in 1920 with the passage of the Volstead Act and the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment." Keep in mind that repeating a definition verbatim from a dictionary often leads to fluency hiccups, because definitions are not written to be read aloud. It's a good

idea to put the definition into your own words (still remembering to cite the original source) to make it easier for you to deliver.

Other explanations focus on the "why" and "how" of a concept. Continuing to inform about Prohibition, a speaker could explain why the movement toward Prohibition began: "The Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution gained support because of the strong political influence of the Anti-Saloon League." The speaker could go on to explain how the Constitution is amended: "According to the same book, a proposed amendment to the Constitution needs three-fourths of all the states to approve it in order to be ratified." We use explanations as verbal clarifications to support our claims in daily conversations, perhaps without even noticing it. Consciously incorporating clear explanations into your speech can help you achieve your speech goals.

Statistics

Statistics are numerical representations of information. They are very credible in our society, as evidenced by their frequent use by news agencies, government offices, politicians, and academics. As a speaker, you can capitalize on the power of statistics if you use them appropriately. Unfortunately, statistics are often misused by speakers who intentionally or unintentionally misconstrue the numbers to support their argument without examining the context from which the statistic emerged. All statistics are contextual, so plucking a number out of a news article or a research study and including it in your speech without taking the time to understand the statistic is unethical.

Although statistics are popular as supporting evidence, they can also be boring. There will inevitably be people in your audience who are not good at processing numbers. Even people who are good with numbers have difficulty processing through a series of statistics presented orally. Remember that we have to adapt our information to listeners who don't have the luxury of pressing a pause or rewind button. For these reasons, it's a good idea to avoid using too many statistics and to use startling examples when you do use them. Startling statistics should defy our expectations. When you give the audience a large number that they would expect to be smaller, or vice versa, you will be more likely to engage them, as the following example shows: "Did you know that 1.3 billion people in the world do not have access to electricity? That's about 20 percent of the world's population according to a 2009 study on the International Energy Agency's official website."

You should also repeat key statistics at least once for emphasis. In the previous example, the first time we hear the statistic 1.3 billion, we don't have any context for the number. Translating that number into a percentage in the next sentence repeats the key statistic, which the audience now has context for, and repackages the information into a percentage, which some people may better understand. You should also round long numbers up or down to make them easier to speak. Make sure that rounding the number doesn't distort its significance. Rounding 1,298,791,943 to 1.3 billion, for example, makes the statistic more manageable and doesn't alter the basic meaning. It is also beneficial to translate numbers into something more concrete for visual or experiential learners by saying, for example, "That's equal to the population of four Unites States of Americas." While it may seem easy to throw some numbers in your speech to add to your credibility, it takes more work to make them impactful, memorable, and effective.

Tips for Using Statistics

1. Make sure you understand the context from which a statistic emerges.
2. Don't overuse statistics.
3. Use startling statistics that defy the audience's expectations.
4. Repeat key statistics at least once for emphasis.
5. Use a variety of numerical representations (whole numbers, percentages, ratios) to convey information.
6. Round long numbers to make them easier to speak.
7. Translate numbers into concrete ideas for more impact.

Analogies

Analogies involve a comparison of ideas, items, or circumstances. When you compare two things that actually exist, you are using a literal analogy—for example, "Germany and Sweden are both European countries that have had nationalized health care for decades." Another type of literal comparison is a historical analogy. In Mary

Fisher's now famous 1992 speech to the Republican National Convention, she compared the silence of many US political leaders regarding the HIV/AIDS crisis to that of many European leaders in the years before the Holocaust.

> My father has devoted much of his lifetime to guarding against another holocaust. He is part of the generation who heard Pastor Niemöller come out of the Nazi death camps to say, "They came after the Jews and I was not a Jew, so I did not protest. They came after the Trade Unionists, and I was not a Trade Unionist, so I did not protest. They came after the Roman Catholics, and I was not a Roman Catholic, so I did not protest. Then they came after me, and there was no one left to protest." The lesson history teaches is this: If you believe you are safe, you are at risk.

A figurative analogy compares things that are not normally related, often relying on metaphor, simile, or other figurative language devices. In the following example, wind and revolution are compared: "Just as the wind brings changes in the weather, so does revolution bring change to countries."

When you compare differences, you are highlighting contrast—for example, "Although the United States is often thought of as the most medically advanced country in the world, other Western countries with nationalized health care have lower infant mortality rates and higher life expectancies." To use analogies effectively and ethically, you must choose ideas, items, or circumstances to compare that are similar enough to warrant the analogy. The more similar the two things you're comparing, the stronger your support. If an entire speech on nationalized health care was based on comparing the United States and Sweden, then the analogy isn't too strong, since Sweden has approximately the same population as the state of North Carolina. Using the analogy without noting this large difference would be misrepresenting your supporting material. You could disclose the discrepancy and use other forms of supporting evidence to show that despite the population difference the two countries are similar in other areas to strengthen your speech.

Testimony

Testimony is quoted information from people with direct knowledge about a subject or situation. Expert testimony is from people who are credentialed or recognized experts in a given subject. Lay testimony is often a recounting of a person's experiences, which is more subjective. Both types of testimony are valuable as supporting material. We can see this in the testimonies of people in courtrooms and other types of hearings. Lawyers know that juries want to hear testimony from experts, eyewitnesses, and friends and family. Congressional hearings are similar.

Congressional hearings often draw on expert and lay testimony to provide a detailed understanding of an event or issue.

Source: Photo courtesy of Federal Emergency Management Agency, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:FEMA_-_21441_-_Photograph_by_Mark_Wolfe_taken_on_01-14-2006_in_Mississippi.jpg.

When Toyota cars were malfunctioning and being recalled in 2010, mechanics and engineers were called to testify about the technical specifications of the car (expert testimony), and car drivers like the soccer mom who recounted the brakes on her Prius suddenly failing while she was driving her kids to practice were also called (lay testimony). When using testimony, make sure you indicate whether it is expert or lay by sharing with the audience the context of the quote. Share the credentials of experts (education background, job title, years of experience, etc.) to add to your credibility or give some personal context for the lay testimony (eyewitness, personal knowledge, etc.).

"Getting Competent"

Choosing the Right Supporting Material

As you sift through your research materials to find supporting material to incorporate into your speech, you will want to include a variety of information types. Choosing supporting material that is relevant to your audience will help make your speech more engaging. As was noted earlier, a speaker should consider the audience throughout the speech-making process. Imagine you were asked to deliver a speech about your college or university. To get some practice adapting supporting material to various audiences, provide an example of each type of supporting material that is tailored to the following specific audiences. Include an example, an explanation, a statistic, an analogy, some testimony, and a visual aid.

- Incoming first-year students
- Parents of incoming first-year students
- Alumni of the college or university
- Community members that live close to the school

Visual Aids

Visual aids help a speaker reinforce speech content visually, which helps amplify the speaker's message. They can be used to present any of the types of supporting materials discussed previously. Speakers rely heavily on an audience's ability to learn by listening, which may not always be successful if audience members are visual or experiential learners. Even if audience members are good listeners, information overload or external or internal noise can be barriers to a speaker achieving his or her speech goals. Therefore skillfully incorporating visual aids into a speech has many potential benefits:

- Helping your audience remember information because it is presented orally and visually
- Helping your audience understand information because it is made more digestible through diagrams, charts, and so on
- Helping your audience see something in action by demonstrating with an object, showing a video, and so on
- Engaging your audience by making your delivery more dynamic through demonstration, gesturing, and so on

There are several types of visual aids, and each has its strengths in terms of the type of information it lends itself to presenting. The types of visual aids we will discuss are objects; chalkboards, whiteboards, and flip charts; posters and handouts; pictures; diagrams; charts; graphs; videos; and presentation software. It's important to remember that supporting materials presented on visual aids should be properly cited. We will discuss proper incorporation of supporting materials into a speech in Section 9.3 "Organizing". While visual aids can help bring your supporting material to life, they can also add more opportunities for things to go wrong during your speech. Therefore we'll discuss some tips for effective creation and delivery as we discuss the various types of visual aids.

Objects

Three-dimensional objects that represent an idea can be useful as a visual aid for a speech. They offer the audience a direct, concrete way to understand what you are saying. I often have my students do an introductory speech where they bring in three objects that represent their past, present, and future. Students have brought in a drawer from a chest that they were small enough to sleep in as a baby, a package of Ramen noodles to represent their life as a college student, and a stethoscope or other object to represent their career goals, among other things. Models

also fall into this category, as they are scaled versions of objects that may be too big (the International Space Station) or too small (a molecule) to actually show to your audience.

Tips for Using Objects Effectively

1. Make sure your objects are large enough for the audience to see.
2. Do not pass objects around, as it will be distracting.
3. Hold your objects up long enough for the audience to see them.
4. Do not talk to your object, wiggle or wave it around, tap on it, or obstruct the audience's view of your face with it.
5. Practice with your objects so your delivery will be fluent and there won't be any surprises.

Chalkboards, Whiteboards, and Flip Charts

Chalkboards, whiteboards, and flip charts can be useful for interactive speeches. If you are polling the audience or brainstorming you can write down audience responses easily for everyone to see and for later reference. They can also be helpful for unexpected clarification. If audience members look confused, you can take a moment to expand on a point or concept using the board or flip chart. Since many people are uncomfortable writing on these things due to handwriting or spelling issues, it's good to anticipate things that you may have to expand on and have prepared extra visual aids or slides that you can include if needed. You can also have audience members write things on boards or flip charts themselves, which helps get them engaged and takes some of the pressure off you as a speaker.

Posters and Handouts

Posters generally include text and graphics and often summarize an entire presentation or select main points. Posters are frequently used to present original research, as they can be broken down into the various steps to show how a process worked. Posters can be useful if you are going to have audience members circulating around the room before or after your presentation, so they can take the time to review the poster and ask questions. Posters are not often good visual aids during a speech, because it's difficult to make the text and graphics large enough for a room full of people to adequately see. The best posters are those created using computer software and professionally printed on large laminated paper.

These professional posters come at a price, often costing between forty and sixty dollars. If you opt to make your own poster, take care to make it look professional. Use a computer and printer to print out your text; do not handwrite on a poster. Make sure anything you cut by hand has neat, uniform edges. You can then affix the text, photos, and any accent backing to the poster board. Double-sided tape works well for this, as it doesn't leave humps like those left by rolled tape or the bubbles, smearing, or sticky mess left by glue.

Handouts can be a useful alternative to posters. Think of them as miniposters that audience members can reference and take with them. Audience members will likely appreciate a handout that is limited to one page, is neatly laid out, and includes the speaker's contact information. It can be appropriate to give handouts to an audience before a long presentation where note taking is expected, complicated information is presented, or the audience will be tested on or have to respond to the information presented. In most regular speeches less than fifteen minutes long, it would not be wise to distribute handouts ahead of time, as they will distract the audience from the speaker. It's better to distribute the handouts after your speech or at the end of the program if there are others speaking after you.

Pictures

Photographs, paintings, drawings, and sketches fall into the pictures category of visual aids. Pictures can be useful when you need to show an exact replication of what you're speaking about. Pictures can also connect to your audience on a personal level, especially if they evoke audience emotions. Think about the use of pictures in television commercials asking for donations or sponsorships. Organizations like Save the Children and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals successfully use pictures of malnourished children or abused animals to pull at the heartstrings of viewers. A series of well-chosen and themed pictures can have

a meaningful impact on an audience. Although some pictures can be effectively presented when printed out on standard 8 1/2″ x 11″ printer paper using a black and white printer, others will need to be enlarged and/or printed in color, which will cost some money. You can often avoid this by incorporating a picture into a PowerPoint presentation, as the picture will be projected large enough for people to see. We will discuss PowerPoint in more detail later.

Diagrams and Drawings

Diagrams are good for showing the inner workings of an object or pointing out the most important or relevant parts of something. Think about diagrams as blueprints that show the inside of something—for example, key bones in the human body in a speech about common skateboarding injuries. Diagrams are good alternatives to pictures when you only need to point out certain things that may be difficult to see in a photograph.

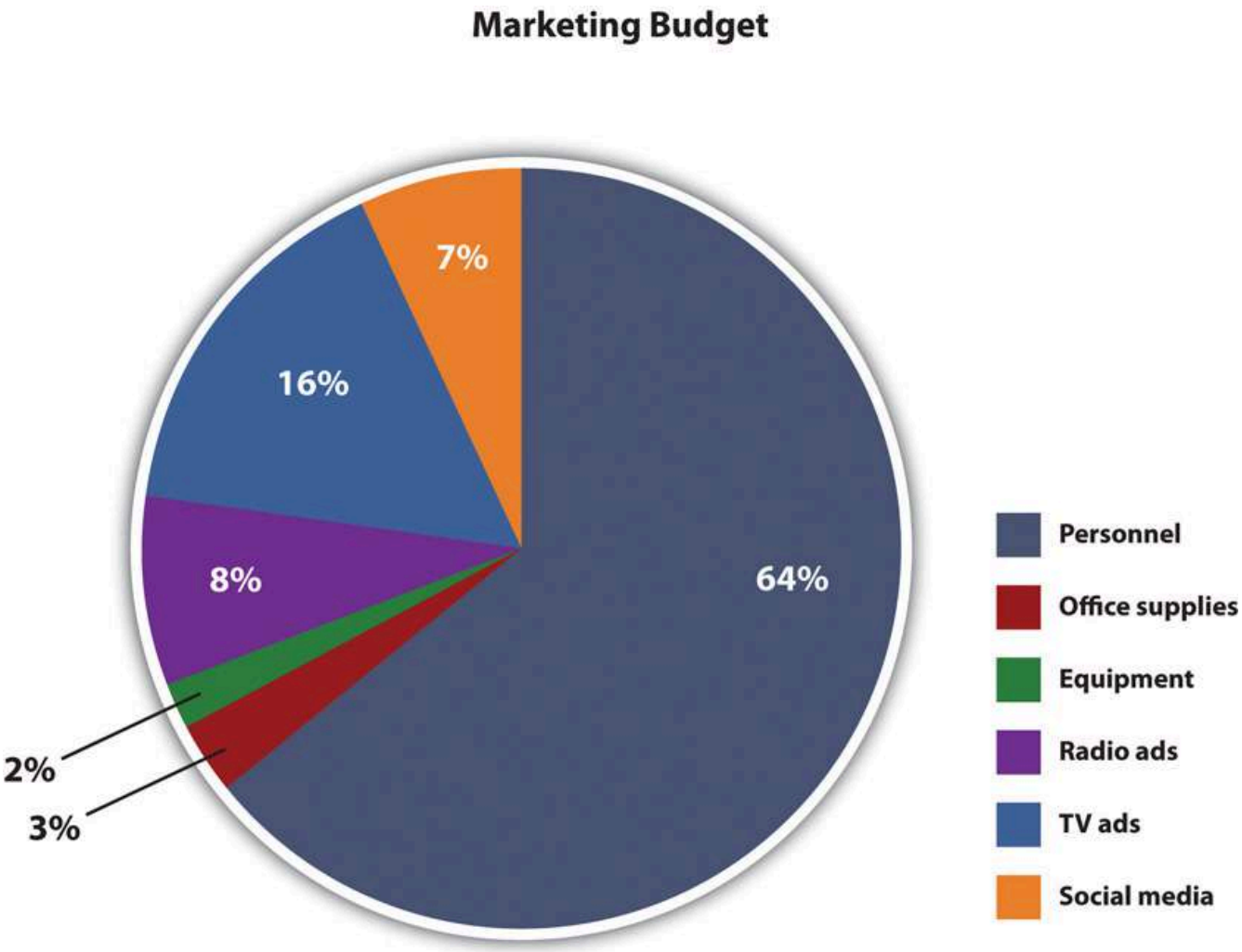
You may even be able to draw a simple diagram yourself if you find it would be useful during your speech. Although not all maps are simple enough to be created by the speaker, many maps can be hand drawn during a speech or ahead of time to indicate different locations or patterns. While I would recommend that you anticipate this ahead of time so you can incorporate a more professional version of the diagram created with computer software or more precise drawing, drawing a diagram on an overhead projector, whiteboard, or smart board can be useful.

Charts and Tables

Marketing Department Quarterly Budget

Category	Budgeted	Used	Quarter
Personnel	36,000	37,062	-1,062
Office supplies	2,000	1,890	110
Equipment/ Computers	1,500	1,338	162
Radio ad buy	5,000	4,500	500
TV ad buy	9,000	9,000	0
Social media ad buy	4,000	4,140	-140
Total	**57,500**	**57,930**	**-430**

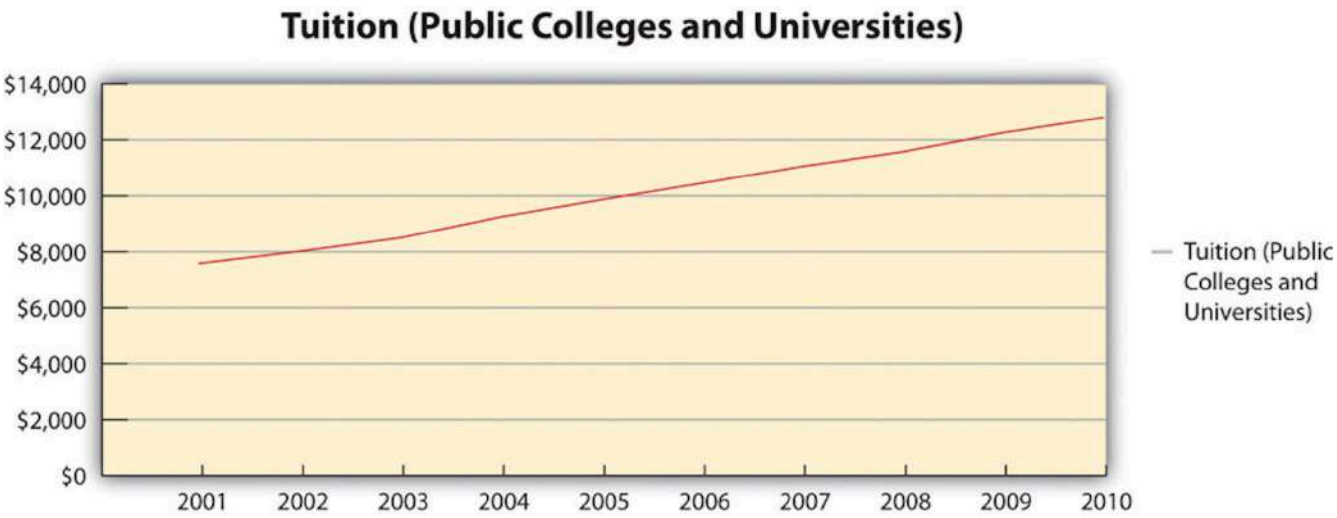
Charts and tables are useful for compiling and cross-referencing larger amounts of information. The combination of rows and columns allows you to create headers and then divide them up into units, categories, dates, and so on. Medical information is put into charts so that periods of recorded information, such as vital signs, can be updated and scanned by doctors and nurses. Charts and tables are also good for combining text and numbers, and they are easy to make with word processing software like Microsoft Word or spreadsheet software like Excel. Think of presenting your department's budget and spending at the end of a business quarter. You could have headers in the columns with the various categories and itemized deductions in the rows ending with a final total for each column.



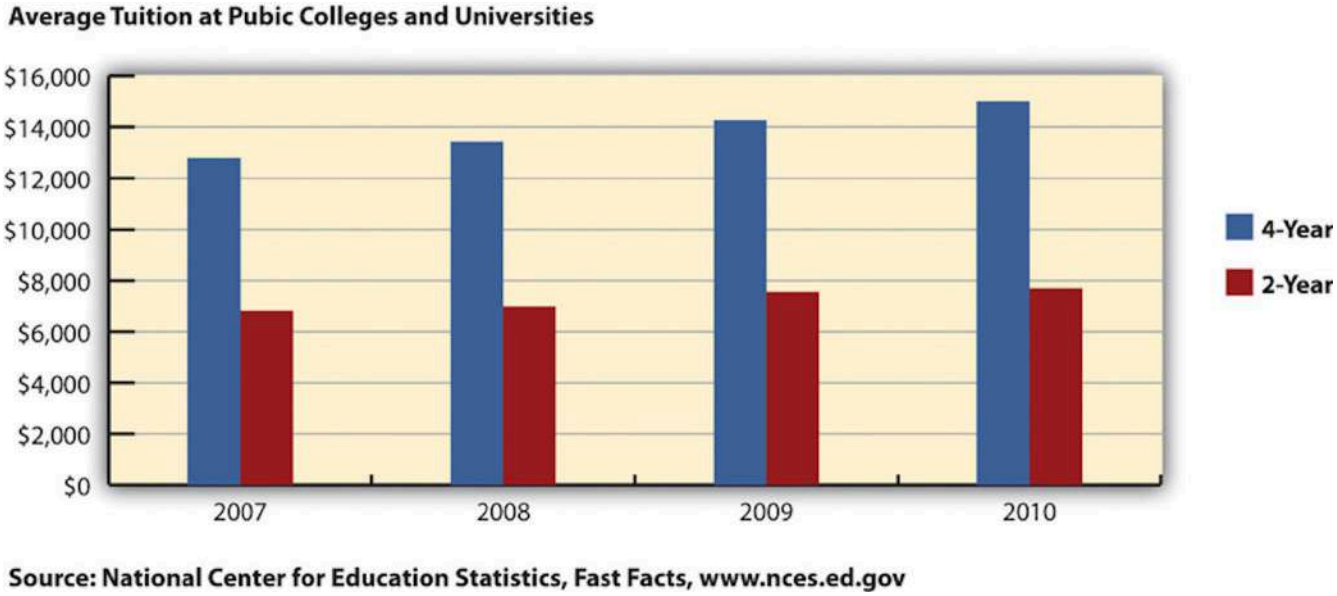
A pie chart is an alternative representation of textual and numerical data that offers audience members a visual representation of the relative proportions of a whole. In a pie chart, each piece of the pie corresponds to a percentage of the whole, and the size of the pie varies with the size of the percentage. As with other charts and tables, most office software programs now easily make pie charts.

Graphs

Graphs are representations that point out numerical relationships or trends and include line graphs and bar graphs. Line graphs are useful for showing trends over time. For example, you could track the rising cost of tuition for colleges and universities in a persuasive speech about the need for more merit-based financial aid.



Bar graphs are good for comparing amounts. In the same speech, you could compare the tuition of two-year institutions to that of four-year institutions. Graphs help make numerical data more digestible for your audience and allow you to convey an important numerical trend visually and quickly without having to go into lengthy explanations. Remember to always clearly label your x-axis and y-axis and to explain the basics of your graph to your audience before you go into the specific data. If you use a graph that was created by someone else, make sure it is large and clear enough for the audience to read and that you cite the original source.



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Facts, http://www.nces.ed.gov.

Video

Video clips as visual aids can be powerful and engaging for an audience, but they can also be troublesome for speakers. Whether embedded in a PowerPoint presentation, accessed through YouTube, or played from a laptop or DVD player, video clips are notorious for tripping up speakers. They require more than one piece of electronics when they are hooked to a projector and speaker and sometimes also require an Internet connection. The more electronic connection points, the more chances for something to go wrong. Therefore it is very important to test your technology before your speech, have a backup method of delivery if possible, and be prepared to go on without the video if all else fails. Although sometimes tempting, you should not let the video take over your speech. I recommend that my students not have more than 10 percent of their speech be filled with video, meaning there should be no more than one minute of video in a ten-minute speech. Make sure your video is relevant and that it is cued to where it needs to be. One useful strategy for incorporating video is to play a video without audio

and speak along with the video, acting as a narrator. This allows the speaker to have more control over the visual aid and to adapt it and make it more relevant to a specific topic and audience. Additionally, video editing software like Final Cut and iMovie are readily available to college students and relatively easy to use. Some simple editing to cut together various clips that are meaningful or adding an introductory title or transitions can go a long way toward making your video look professional.

Presentation Software

The prevalence of computers and projectors in most schools, offices, and other presentation facilities has made using computer-generated visual aids more convenient. PowerPoint is the most commonly used presentation software and has functionality ranging from the most simple text-based slide to complicated transitions, timing features, video/sound imbedding, and even functionality with audience response systems like Turning Point that allow data to be collected live from audience members and incorporated quickly into the slideshow. Despite the fact that most college students have viewed and created numerous PowerPoint presentations, I have still seen many poorly executed slideshows that detracted from the speaker's message. PowerPoint should be viewed as a speech amplifier. Like an amplifier for a guitar, it doesn't do much without a musician there to play the instrument. The speaker is the musician, the speech is the instrument, and PowerPoint is the amplifier. Just as the amplifier doesn't dictate what the guitar player does, neither should PowerPoint take over the speaker.

I like to distinguish between using PowerPoint as a presentation aid and as a visual aid. PowerPoint, with all its bells and whistles, is designed as a presentation aid. Presentations are generally longer than speeches, at least fifteen minutes long, and are content heavy. College lectures and many professional conference presentations fall into this category. In these cases, PowerPoint generally runs along with the speaker throughout the presentation, reviewing key points and presenting visual aids such as pictures and graphs. The constant running of the slideshow also facilitates audience note taking, which is also common during presentations.

Speeches, on the other hand, are usually fifteen minutes or less, have repetition and redundancy built in (as they are adapted to a listening audience), and carry less expectation that the audience will take detailed notes. In this case, I believe PowerPoint should be used more as a visual aid, meaning that it should be simpler and amplify particular components of the speech rather than run along with the speaker throughout the speech.

Tips for Using PowerPoint as a Visual Aid

1. Do not have more than two slides per main point.
2. Use a consistent theme with limited variation in font style and font size.
3. Incorporate text and relevant graphics into each slide.
4. Limit content to no more than six lines of text or six bullet points per slide.
5. Do not use complete sentences; be concise.
6. Avoid unnecessary animation or distracting slide transitions.
7. Only have a slide displayed when it is relevant to what you're discussing. Insert completely black slides to display when you are not explicitly referencing content in the speech so the audience doesn't get distracted.

Video Clip 9.1

James Geary, Metaphorically Speaking
(click to see video)
In this video, James Geary presents on metaphor using Prezi as his visual aid.

Key Takeaways

Research sources include periodicals, newspapers and books, reference tools, interviews, and websites. The credibility of each type of supporting material should be evaluated.

Visual aids help a speaker reinforce their content visually and have many potential benefits. Visual aids can also detract from a speech if not used properly. Visual aids include objects; chalkboards, whiteboards, and flip charts; posters and handouts; pictures; diagrams; charts; graphs; video; and presentation software.

Exercises

Getting integrated: Identify some ways that research skills are helpful in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.

Go to the library webpage for your school. What are some resources that will be helpful for your research? Identify at least two library databases and at least one reference librarian. If you need help with research, what resources are available?

What are some websites that you think are credible for doing college-level research? Why? What are some website that are not credible? Why?

Chapter 9.3 and 9.4

Organizing and Outlining a Speech

9.3 Organizing

Learning Objectives

Explain the process of organizing a speech.

Identify common organizational patterns.

Incorporate supporting materials into a speech.

Employ verbal citations for various types of supporting material.

List key organizing signposts.

Identify the objectives of a speech introduction.

Identify the objectives of a speech conclusion.

When organizing your speech, you want to start with the body. Even though most students want to start with the introduction, I explain that it's difficult to introduce and preview something that you haven't yet developed. A well-structured speech includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Think of this structure as a human body. This type of comparison dates back to Plato, who noted, "every speech ought to be put together like a living creature." James A. Winans, Public Speaking (New York: Century, 1917), 411. The introduction is the head, the body is the torso and legs, and the conclusion is the feet. The information you add to this structure from your research and personal experience is the organs and muscle. The transitions you add are the connecting tissues that hold the parts together, and a well-practiced delivery is the skin and clothing that makes everything presentable.

Organizing the Body of Your Speech

Writing the body of your speech takes the most time in the speech-writing process. Your specific purpose and thesis statements should guide the initial development of the body, which will then be more informed by your research process. You will determine main points that help achieve your purpose and match your thesis. You will then fill information into your main points by incorporating the various types of supporting material discussed previously. Before you move on to your introduction and conclusion, you will connect the main points together with transitions and other signposts.

Determining Your Main Points

Think of each main point as a miniature speech within your larger speech. Each **main point** will have a central idea, meet some part of your specific purpose, and include supporting material from your research that relates to your thesis. Reviewing the draft of your thesis and specific purpose statements can lead you to research materials. As you review your research, take notes on and/or highlight key ideas that stick out to you as useful, effective, relevant, and interesting. It is likely that these key ideas will become the central ideas of your main points, or at least subpoints. Once you've researched your speech enough to achieve your specific purpose, support your thesis, and meet the research guidelines set forth by your instructor, boss, or project guidelines, you can distill the research down to a series of central ideas. As you draft these central ideas, use parallel wording, which is similar

wording among key organizing signposts and main points that helps structure a speech. Using **parallel wording** in your central idea statement for each main point will also help you write parallel key signposts like the preview statement in the introduction, transitions between main points, and the review statement in the conclusion. The following example shows parallel wording in the central ideas of each main point in a speech about the green movement and schools:

1. The green movement in schools positively affects school buildings and facilities.
2. The green movement in schools positively affects students.
3. The green movement in schools positively affects teachers.

While writing each central idea using parallel wording is useful for organizing information at this stage in the speech-making process, you should feel free to vary the wording a little more in your actual speech delivery. You will still want some parallel key words that are woven throughout the speech, but sticking too close to parallel wording can make your content sound forced or artificial.

After distilling your research materials down, you may have several central idea statements. You will likely have two to five main points, depending on what your instructor prefers, time constraints, or the organizational pattern you choose. All the central ideas may not get converted into main points; some may end up becoming subpoints and some may be discarded. Once you get your series of central ideas drafted, you will then want to consider how you might organize them, which will help you narrow your list down to what may actually end up becoming the body of your speech.

Organizing Your Main Points

There are several ways you can organize your main points, and some patterns correspond well to a particular subject area or speech type. Determining which pattern you will use helps filter through your list of central ideas generated from your research and allows you to move on to the next step of inserting supporting material into your speech. Here are some common organizational patterns.

Topical Pattern

When you use the **topical pattern**, you are breaking a large idea or category into smaller ideas or subcategories. In short you are finding logical divisions to a whole. While you may break something down into smaller topics that will make two, three, or more main points, people tend to like groups of three. In a speech about the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, for example, you could break the main points down to (1) the musicians who performed, (2) the musicians who declined to perform, and (3) the audience. You could also break it down into three specific performances—(1) Santana, (2) The Grateful Dead, and (3) Creedence Clearwater Revival—or three genres of music—(1) folk, (2) funk, and (3) rock.

The topical pattern breaks a topic down into logical divisions but doesn't necessarily offer any guidance in ordering them. To help determine the order of topical main points, you may consider the primacy or recency effect. You prime an engine before you attempt to start it and prime a surface before you paint it. The primacy effect is similar in that you present your best information first in order to make a positive impression and engage your audience early in your speech. The recency effect is based on the idea that an audience will best remember the information they heard most recently. Therefore you would include your best information last in your speech to leave a strong final impression. Both primacy and recency can be effective. Consider your topic and your audience to help determine which would work best for your speech.

Chronological Pattern

A **chronological pattern** helps structure your speech based on time or sequence. If you order a speech based on time, you may trace the development of an idea, product, or event. A speech on Woodstock could cover the following: (1) preparing for the event, (2) what happened during the event, and (3) the aftermath of the event. Ordering a speech based on sequence is also chronological and can be useful when providing directions on how to do something or how a process works. This could work well for a speech on baking bread at home, refinishing furniture, or harvesting corn. The chronological pattern is often a good choice for speeches related to history or demonstration speeches.

Spatial Pattern

The **spatial pattern** arranges main points based on their layout or proximity to each other. A speech on Woodstock could focus on the layout of the venue, including (1) the camping area, (2) the stage area, and (3) the musician/crew area. A speech could also focus on the components of a typical theater stage or the layout of the new 9/11 memorial at the World Trade Center site.

Problem-Solution Pattern

The **problem-solution pattern** entails presenting a problem and offering a solution. This pattern can be useful for persuasive speaking—specifically, persuasive speeches focused on a current societal issue. This can also be coupled with a call to action asking an audience to take specific steps to implement a solution offered. This organizational pattern can be applied to a wide range of topics and can be easily organized into two or three main points. You can offer evidence to support your claim that a problem exists in one main point and then offer a specific solution in the second main point. To be more comprehensive, you could set up the problem, review multiple solutions that have been proposed, and then add a third main point that argues for a specific solution out of the ones reviewed in the second main point. Using this pattern, you could offer solutions to the problem of rising textbook costs or offer your audience guidance on how to solve conflicts with roommates or coworkers.

Cause-Effect Pattern

The **cause-effect pattern** sets up a relationship between ideas that shows a progression from origin to result. You could also start with the current situation and trace back to the root causes. This pattern can be used for informative or persuasive speeches. When used for informing, the speaker is explaining an established relationship and citing evidence to support the claim—for example, accessing unsecured, untrusted websites or e-mails leads to computer viruses. When used for persuading, the speaker is arguing for a link that is not as well established and/or is controversial—for example, violent video games lead to violent thoughts and actions. In a persuasive speech, a cause-effect argument is often paired with a proposed solution or call to action, such as advocating for stricter age restrictions on who can play violent video games. When organizing an informative speech using the cause-effect pattern, be careful not to advocate for a particular course of action.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Monroe's Motivated Sequence is a five-step organization pattern that attempts to persuade an audience by making a topic relevant, using positive and/or negative motivation, and including a call to action. The five steps are (1) attention, (2) need, (3) satisfaction, (4) visualization, and (5) action. Alan H. Monroe and Douglas Ehninger, Principles of Speech, 5th brief ed. (Chicago, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1964).

The attention step is accomplished in the introduction to your speech. Whether your entire speech is organized using this pattern or not, any good speaker begins by getting the attention of the audience. We will discuss several strategies in Section 9 "Getting Your Audience's Attention" for getting an audience's attention. The next two steps set up a problem and solution.

After getting the audience's attention you will want to establish that there is a need for your topic to be addressed. You will want to cite credible research that points out the seriousness or prevalence of an issue. In the attention and need steps, it is helpful to use supporting material that is relevant and proxemic to the audience.

Once you have set up the need for the problem to be addressed, you move on to the satisfaction step, where you present a solution to the problem. You may propose your own solution if it is informed by your research and reasonable. You may also propose a solution that you found in your research.

The visualization step is next and incorporates positive and/or negative motivation as a way to support the relationship you have set up between the need and your proposal to satisfy the need. You may ask your audience to visualize a world where things are better because they took your advice and addressed this problem. This capitalizes on positive motivation. You may also ask your audience to visualize a world where things are worse because they did not address the issue, which is a use of negative motivation. Now that you have hopefully persuaded your audience to believe the problem is worthy of addressing, proposed a solution, and asked them to visualize potential positive or negative consequences, you move to the action step.

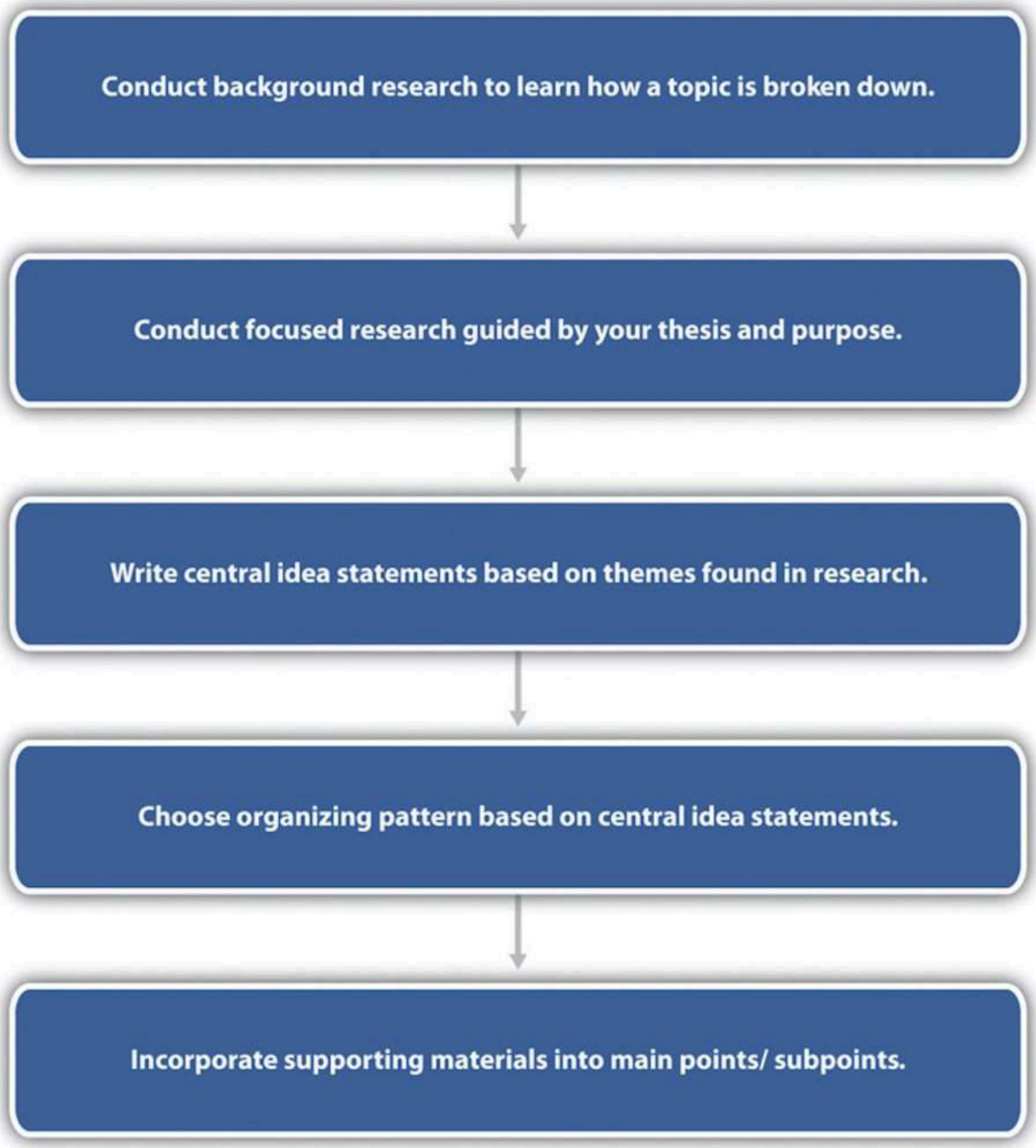
The action step includes a call to action where you as basically saying, "Now that you see the seriousness of this problem, here's what you can do about it." The call to action should include concrete and specific steps an

audience can take. Your goal should be to facilitate the call to action, making it easy for the audience to complete. Instead of asking them to contact their elected officials, you could start an online petition and make the link available to everyone. You could also bring the contact information for officials that represent that region so the audience doesn't have to look them up on their own. Although this organizing pattern is more complicated than the others, it offers a proven structure that can help you organize your supporting materials and achieve your speech goals.

Incorporating Supporting Material

So far, you have learned several key steps in the speech creation process, which are reviewed in Figure 9.4 "From Research to Main Points". Now you will begin to incorporate more specific information from your supporting materials into the body of your speech. You can place the central ideas that fit your organizational pattern at the beginning of each main point and then plug supporting material in as subpoints.

Figure 9.4 From Research to Main Points



This information will also make up the content of your formal and speaking outlines, which we will discuss more in Section 9.4 “Outlining”. Remember that you want to include a variety of supporting material (examples, analogies, statistics, explanations, etc.) within your speech. The information that you include as subpoints helps back up the central idea that started the main point. Depending on the length of your speech and the depth of your research, you may also have sub-subpoints that back up the claim you are making in the subpoint. Each piece of supporting material you include eventually links back to the specific purpose and thesis statement. This approach to supporting your speech is systematic and organized and helps ensure that your content fits together logically and that your main points are clearly supported and balanced.

One of the key elements of academic and professional public speaking is verbally citing your supporting materials so your audience can evaluate your credibility and the credibility of your sources. You should include

citation information in three places: verbally in your speech, on any paper or electronic information (outline, PowerPoint), and on a separate reference sheet. Since much of the supporting material you incorporate into your speech comes directly from your research, it's important that you include relevant citation information as you plug this information into your main points. Don't wait to include citation information once you've drafted the body of your speech. At that point it may be difficult to retrace your steps to locate the source of a specific sentence or statistic. As you paraphrase or quote your supporting material, work the citation information into the sentences; do not clump the information together at the end of a sentence, or try to cite more than one source at the end of a paragraph or main point. It's important that the audience hear the citations as you use the respective information so it's clear which supporting material matches up with which source.

Writing key bibliographic information into your speech will help ensure that you remember to verbally cite your sources and that your citations will be more natural and flowing and less likely to result in fluency hiccups. At minimum, you should include the author, date, and source in a verbal citation. Sometimes more information is necessary. When citing a magazine, newspaper, or journal article, it is more important to include the source name than the title of the article, since the source name—for example, *Newsweek*—is what the audience needs to evaluate the speaker's credibility. For a book, make sure to cite the title and indicate that the source is a book. When verbally citing information retrieved from a website, you do not want to try to recite a long and cumbersome URL in your speech. Most people don't even make it past the "www." before they mess up. It is more relevant to audiences for speakers to report the sponsor/author of the site and the title of the web page, or section of the website, where they obtained their information. When getting information from a website, it is best to use "official" organization websites or government websites. When you get information from an official site, make sure you state that in your citation to add to your credibility. For an interview, state the interviewee's name, their credentials, and when the interview took place. Advice for verbally citing sources and examples from specific types of sources follow:

Magazine article

"According to an article by Niall Ferguson in the January 23, 2012, issue of *Newsweek*, we can expect much discussion about 'class warfare' in the upcoming presidential and national election cycle. Ferguson reports that…"

"As reported by Niall Ferguson, in the January 23, 2012, issue of *Newsweek*, many candidates denounce talking points about economic inequality…"

Newspaper article

"On November 26, 2011, Eithne Farry of *The Daily Telegraph* of London reported that…"

"An article about the renewed popularity of selling products in people's own homes appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on November 26, 2011. Eithne Farry explored a few of these 'blast-from-the-past' styled parties…"

Website

"According to information I found at ready.gov, the website of the US Department of Homeland Security, US businesses and citizens…"

"According to information posted on the US Department of Homeland Security's official website,…"

"Helpful information about business continuity planning can be found on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's official website, located at ready.gov…"

Journal article

"An article written by Dr. Nakamura and Dr. Kikuchi, at Meiji University in Tokyo, found that the Fukushima disaster was complicated by Japan's high nuclear consciousness. Their 2011 article published in the journal *Public Administration Today* reported that…"

"In a 2012 article published in *Public Administration Review*, Professors Nakamura and Kikuchi reported that the Fukushima disaster was embarrassing for a country with a long nuclear history…"

"Nakamura and Kikuchi, scholars in crisis management and public policy, authored a 2011 article about the failed crisis preparation at the now infamous Fukushima nuclear plant. Their *Public Administration Review* article reports that…"

Bad example (doesn't say where the information came from). "A 2011 study by Meiji University scholars found the crisis preparations at a Japanese nuclear plant to be inadequate…"

Book

"In their 2008 book *At War with Metaphor*, Steuter and Wills describe how we use metaphor to justify military conflict. They report…"

"Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, experts in sociology and media studies, describe the connections between metaphor and warfare in their 2008 book At War with Metaphor. They both contend that…"

"In their 2008 book *At War with Metaphor*, Steuter and Wills reveal…"

Interview

"On February 20 I conducted a personal interview with Dr. Linda Scholz, a communication studies professor at Eastern Illinois University, to learn more about Latina/o Heritage Month. Dr. Scholz told me that…"

"I conducted an interview with Dr. Linda Scholz, a communication studies professor here at Eastern, and learned that there are more than a dozen events planned for Latina/o Heritage Month."

"In a telephone interview I conducted with Dr. Linda Scholz, a communication studies professor, I learned…"

"Getting Critical"

Plagiarism

During the process of locating and incorporating supporting material into your speech, it's important to practice good research skills to avoid intentional or unintentional plagiarism. Plagiarism, as we have already learned, is the uncredited use of someone else's words or ideas. It's important to note that most colleges and universities have strict and detailed policies related to academic honesty. You should be familiar with your school's policy and your instructor's policy. At many schools, there are consequences for academic dishonesty whether it is intentional or unintentional. Although many schools try to make a learning opportunity out of an initial violation, multiple violations could lead to suspension or expulsion. At the class level, plagiarism may result in an automatic "F" for the assignment or the course.

Over my years of teaching, I have encountered more than a dozen cases of plagiarism. While that is not a large percentage in relation to the large number of students I have taught, I have noticed that the instances have steadily increased over the past few years. I don't think this is because students are becoming more dishonest; I think it's become easier to locate and copy information and easier to catch those who do. I always remind my students that they do not have access to a secret version of the Internet that faculty can't access. If it takes a student five seconds to find a speech to plagiarize online, it will take me the same amount of time. Software programs like Turnitin.com also aid instructors in detecting plagiarism.

Being organized and thorough in your research can help avoid a situation where you feel backed into a corner and fake some sources or leave out some citations because you're out of time. One key to avoiding this type of situation is to keep good records as you research and write. First, as you locate sources, always record all the key bibliographic information. I know from experience how frustrating it can be to try to locate a source after you've already worked it into your speech or paper, and you have the quote or paraphrase but can't retrace your steps to find where you took it from. Printing the source, downloading the PDF, or copying and pasting the URL as soon as you locate the source can help you retrace your steps if needed.

Save drafts of your writing as you progress. Each day I work on a chapter for this book, I go to the "File" menu, choose "Save As," and amend the file name to include that day's date. That way I have a record that shows my work. The various style guides for writing also offer specific advice on how to cite sources and how to conduct research. You are probably familiar with MLA (Modern Language Association), used mostly in English and the humanities, and APA (American Psychological Association), which is used mostly in the social sciences. There's also the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS), used in history and also the style this book is in, and CBE (developed by the Council of Science Editors), which is used in biological and earth sciences. Since each manual is geared toward a different academic area, it's a good source for specific research-related questions. When in doubt about how to conduct or cite research, you can also ask your instructor for guidance.

Why do you think instances of academic dishonesty have been steadily increasing over the past few years?

What is your school's policy in academic honesty? What is your instructor's policy? What are the potential consequences for violating this policy at the school and classroom levels?

Based on what you learned here, what are some strategies you can employ to make your research process more organized?

Signposts

Signposts on highways help drivers and passengers navigate places they are not familiar with and give us reminders and warnings about what to expect down the road. **Signposts** in speeches are statements that help audience members navigate the turns of your speech. There are several key signposts in your speech. In the order you will likely use them, they are preview statement, transition between introduction and body, transitions between main points, transition from body to conclusion, and review statement (see Table 9.3 "Organizing Signposts" for a review of the key signposts with examples). While the preview and review statements are in the introduction and conclusion, respectively, the other signposts are all transitions that help move between sections of your speech.

Table 9.3 Organizing Signposts

Signpost	Example
Preview statement	"Today, I'd like to inform you about the history of Habitat for Humanity, the work they have done in our area, and my experiences as a volunteer."
Transition from introduction to body	"Let's begin with the history of Habitat for Humanity."
Transition from main point one to main point two	"Now that you know more about the history of Habitat for Humanity, let's look at the work they have done in our area."
Transition from main point two to main point three	"Habitat for Humanity has done a lot of good work in our area, and I was fortunate to be able to experience this as a volunteer."
Transition from body to conclusion	*"In closing, I hope you now have a better idea of the impact this well-known group has had."*
Review statement	"Habitat for Humanity is an organization with an inspiring history that has done much for our area while also providing an opportunity for volunteers, like myself, to learn and grow."

There are also signposts that can be useful within sections of your speech. Words and phrases like *Aside from* and *While* are good ways to transition between thoughts within a main point or subpoint. Organizing signposts like *First, Second,* and *Third* can be used within a main point to help speaker and audience move through information. The preview in the introduction and review in the conclusion need not be the only such signposts in your speech. You can also include internal previews and internal reviews in your main points to help make the content more digestible or memorable.

In terms of writing, compose transitions that are easy for you to remember and speak. Pioneer speech teacher James A. Winans wrote in 1917 that "it is at a transition, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, that the speaker who staggers or breaks down, meets his [or her] difficulty." James A. Winans, Public Speaking (New York: Century, 1917), 421. His observation still holds true today. Key signposts like the ones in Table 9.3 "Organizing Signposts" should be concise, parallel, and obviously worded. Going back to the connection between speech signposts and signposts that guide our driving, we can see many connections. Speech signposts should be one concise sentence. Stop signs, for example, just say, "STOP." They do not say, "Your vehicle is now approaching an intersection. Please bring it to a stop."

Try to remove unnecessary words from key signposts to make them more effective and easier to remember and deliver. Speech signposts should also be parallel. All stop signs are octagonal with a red background and white lettering, which makes them easily recognizable to drivers. If the wording in your preview statement matches with key wording in your main points, transitions between main points, and review statement, then your audience will be better able to follow your speech. Last, traffic signposts are obvious. They are bright colors, sometimes reflective, and may even have flashing lights on them. A "Road Closed" sign painted in camouflage isn't a good idea and could lead to disaster.

Being too vague or getting too creative with your speech signposts can also make them disappear into the background of your speech. My students have expressed concern that using parallel and obvious wording in speech signposts would make their speech boring or insult the intelligence of their audience. This is not the case. As we learned in Chapter 5 "Listening", most people struggle to be active listeners, so making a speech more listenable is usually appreciated. In addition, these are just six sentences in a much larger speech, so they are spaced out enough to not sound repetitive, and they can serve as anchor points to secure the attention of the audience.

In addition to well-written signposts, you want to have well-delivered signposts. **Nonverbal signposts** include pauses and changes in rate, pitch, or volume that help emphasize transitions within a speech. I have missed students' signposts before, even though they were well written, because they did not stand out in the delivery. Here are some ways you can use nonverbal signposting: pause before and after your preview and review statements so they stand out, pause before and after your transitions between main points so they stand out, and slow your rate and lower your pitch on the closing line of your speech to provide closure.

Introduction

We all know that first impressions matter. Research shows that students' impressions of instructors on the first day of class persist throughout the semester. Eric L. Laws, Jennifer M. Apperson, Stephanie Buchert, and Norman J. Bregman, "Student Evaluations of Instruction: When Are Enduring First Impressions Formed?" North American Journal of Psychology 12, no. 1 (2010): 81. First impressions are quickly formed, sometimes spontaneous, and involve little to no cognitive effort. Despite the fact that first impressions aren't formed with much conscious effort, they form the basis of inferences and judgments about a person's personality. Johanna Lass-Hennemann, Linn K. Kuehl, André Schulz, Melly S. Oitzl, and Hartmut Schachinger, "Stress Strengthens Memory of First Impressions of Others' Positive Personality Traits," PLoS ONE 6, no. 1 (2011): 1. For example, the student who approaches the front of the class before their speech wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt, looks around blankly, and lets out a sigh before starting hasn't made a very good first impression. Even if the student is prepared for the speech and delivers it well, the audience has likely already associated what they observed with personality traits of the student (i.e., lazy, indifferent), and those associations now have staying power in the face of contrary evidence that comes later.

Your introduction is only a fraction of your speech, but in that first minute or so, your audience decides whether or not they are interested in listening to the rest of the speech. There are four objectives that you should accomplish in your introduction. They include *getting your audience's attention*, introducing your topic, *establishing credibility* and relevance, and p*reviewing your main points*.

Getting Your Audience's Attention

There are several strategies you can use to get your audience's attention. Although each can be effective on its own, combining these strategies is also an option. A speaker can get their audience's attention negatively, so think carefully about your choice. The student who began his speech on Habitat for Humanity by banging on the table with a hammer definitely got his audience's attention during his 8:00 a.m. class, but he also lost credibility in that moment because many in the audience probably saw him as a joker rather than a serious speaker. The student who started her persuasive speech against animal testing with a little tap dance number ended up stumbling through the first half of her speech when she was thrown off by the confused looks the audience gave her when she finished her "attention getter." These cautionary tales point out the importance of choosing an attention getter that is appropriate, meaning that it's unusual enough to get people interested—but not over the top—and relevant to your speech topic.

Use Humor

In one of my favorite episodes of the television show *The Office*, titled "Dwight's Speech," the boss, Michael Scott, takes the stage at a regional sales meeting for a very nervous Dwight, who has been called up to accept an award. In typical Michael Scott style, he attempts to win the crowd over with humor and fails miserably. I begin this section on using humor to start a speech with this example because I think erring on the side of caution when it comes to humor tends to be the best option, especially for new speakers. I have had students who think that cracking a joke will help lighten the mood and reduce their anxiety. If well executed, this is a likely result and can boost the confidence of the speaker and get the audience hooked. But even successful comedians still bomb, and many recount stories of excruciating instances in which they failed to connect with an audience. So the danger lies in the poorly executed joke, which has the reverse effect, heightening the speaker's anxiety and leading the audience to question the speaker's competence and credibility. In general, when a speech is supposed to be professional or formal, as many in-class speeches are, humor is more likely to be seen as incongruous with the occasion. But there are other situations where a humorous opening might fit perfectly. For example, a farewell speech to a longtime colleague could start with an inside joke. When considering humor, it's good to get feedback on your idea from a trusted source.

Cite a Startling Fact or Statistic

As you research your topic, take note of any information that defies your expectations or surprises you. If you have a strong reaction to something you learn, your audience may, too. When using a startling fact or statistic as an attention getter, it's important to get the most bang for your buck. You can do this by sharing more than one fact or statistic that builds up the audience's interest. When using numbers, it's also good to repeat and/or repackage the statistics so they stick in the audience's mind, which you can see in the following example:

> In 1994, sixteen states reported that 15–19 percent of their population was considered obese. Every other state reported obesity rates less than that. In 2010, no states reported obesity rates in that same category of 15–19 percent, because every single state had at least a 20 percent obesity rate. In just six years, we went from no states with an obesity rate higher than 19 percent, to fifty. Currently, the national obesity rate for adults is nearly 34 percent. This dramatic rise in obesity is charted on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website, and these rates are expected to continue to rise.

The speaker could have just started by stating that nearly 34 percent of the US adult population was obese in 2011. But statistics aren't meaningful without context. So sharing how that number rose dramatically over six years helps the audience members see the trend and understand what the current number means. The fourth sentence repackages and summarizes the statistics mentioned in the first three sentences, which again sets up an interesting and informative contrast. Last, the speaker provides a verbal citation for the source of the statistic.

Use a Quotation

Some quotations are attention getting and some are boring. Some quotations are relevant and moving and some are abstract and stale. If you choose to open your speech with a quotation, choose one that is attention getting, relevant, and moving. The following example illustrates some tips for using a quote to start a speech: "'The most important question in the world is 'Why is the child crying?'' This quote from author Alice Walker is at the heart of my speech today. Too often, people see children suffering at the hands of bullies and do nothing about it until it's too late. That's why I believe that all public schools should adopt a zero-tolerance policy on bullying."

Notice that the quote is delivered first in the speech, then the source of the quote is cited. Since the quote, like a starting fact or statistic just discussed, is the attention-getting part, it's better to start with that than the citation. Next, the speaker explains why the quote is relevant to the speech. Just because a quote seems relevant to you doesn't mean the audience will also pick up on that relevance, so it's best to make that explicit right after you use and cite the quote. Also evaluate the credibility of the source on which you found the quote. Many websites that make quotations available care more about selling pop-up ads than the accuracy of their information. Students who don't double-check the accuracy of the quote may end up attributing the quote to the wrong person or citing a made-up quote.

Ask a Question

Starting a speech with a question is a common attention getter, but in reality many of the questions that I have heard start a speech are not very attention getting. It's important to note that just because you use one of these strategies, that doesn't make it automatically appealing to an audience. A question can be mundane and boring just like a statistic, quotation, or story can.

A rhetorical question is different from a direct question. When a speaker asks a direct question, they actually want a response from their audience. A **rhetorical question** is designed to elicit a mental response from the audience, not a verbal or nonverbal one. In short, a rhetorical question makes an audience think. Asking a direct question of your audience is warranted only if the speaker plans on doing something with the information they get from the audience. I can't recall a time in which a student asked a direct question to start their speech and did anything with that information. Let's say a student starts the speech with the direct question "By a show of hands, how many people have taken public transportation in the past week?" and sixteen out of twenty students raise their hands. If the speaker is arguing that more students should use public transportation and she expected fewer students to raise their hands, is she going to change her speech angle on the spot? Since most speakers move on from their direct question without addressing the response they got from the audience, they have not made their attention getter relevant to their topic. So, if you use a direct question, make sure you have a point to it and some way to incorporate the responses into the speech.

A safer bet is to ask a rhetorical question that elicits only a mental response. A good rhetorical question can get the audience primed to think about the content of the speech. When asked as a series of questions and combined with startling statistics or facts, this strategy can create suspense and hook an audience. The following is a series of rhetorical questions used in a speech against the testing of cosmetics on animals: "Was the toxicity of the shampoo you used this morning tested on the eyes of rabbits? Would you let someone put a cosmetic in your dog's eye to test its toxicity level? Have you ever thought about how many products that you use every day are tested on animals?" Make sure you pause after your rhetorical question to give the audience time to think. Don't pause for too long, though, or an audience member may get restless and think that you're waiting for an actual response and blurt out what he or she was thinking.

Tell a Story

When you tell a story, whether in the introduction to your speech or not, you should aim to paint word pictures in the minds of your audience members. You might tell a story from your own life or recount a story you found in your research. You may also use a hypothetical story, which has the advantage of allowing you to use your creativity and help place your audience in unusual situations that neither you nor they have actually experienced. When using a hypothetical story, you should let your audience know it's not real, and you should present a story that the audience can relate to. Speakers often let the audience know a story is not real by starting with the word imagine. As I noted, a hypothetical example can allow you to speak beyond the experience of you and your audience members by having them imagine themselves in unusual circumstances. These circumstances should not be so unusual that the audience can't relate to them. I once had a student start her speech by saying, "Imagine being held as a prisoner of war for seven years." While that's definitely a dramatic opener, I don't think students in our class were able to really get themselves into that imagined space in the second or two that we had before the speaker moved on. It may have been better for the speaker to say, "Think of someone you really care about. Visualize that person in your mind. Now, imagine that days and weeks go by and you haven't heard from that person. Weeks turn into months and years, and you have no idea if they are alive or dead." The speaker could go on to compare that scenario to the experiences of friends and family of prisoners of war. While we may not be able to imagine being held captive for years, we all know what it's like to experience uncertainty regarding the safety of a loved one.

Introducing the Topic

Introducing the topic of your speech is the most obvious objective of an introduction, but speakers sometimes forget to do this or do not do it clearly. As the author of your speech, you may think that what you're talking about is obvious. Sometimes a speech topic doesn't become obvious until the middle of a speech. By that time, however, it's easy to lose an audience that didn't get clearly told the topic of the speech in the introduction. Introducing the topic is done before the preview of main points and serves as an introduction to the overall topic.

The following are two ways a speaker could introduce the topic of childhood obesity: “Childhood obesity is a serious problem facing our country,” or “Today I’ll persuade you that childhood obesity is a problem that can no longer be ignored.”

Establishing Credibility and Relevance

The way you write and deliver your introduction makes an important first impression on your audience. But you can also take a moment in your introduction to explicitly set up your credibility in relation to your speech topic. If you have training, expertise, or credentials (e.g., a degree, certificate, etc.) relevant to your topic, you can share that with your audience. It may also be appropriate to mention firsthand experience, previous classes you have taken, or even a personal interest related to your topic. For example, I had a student deliver a speech persuading the audience that the penalties for texting and driving should be stricter. In his introduction, he mentioned that his brother’s girlfriend was killed when she was hit by a car driven by someone who was texting. His personal story shared in the introduction added credibility to the overall speech.

I ask my students to imagine that when they finish their speech, everyone in the audience will raise their hands and ask the question “Why should I care about what you just said?”

This would no doubt be a nerve-racking experience. However, you can address this concern by preemptively answering this question in your speech. A good speaker will strive to make his or her content relevant to the audience throughout the speech, and starting this in the introduction appeals to an audience because the speaker is already answering the “so what?” question. When you establish relevance, you want to use immediate words like *I*, *you*, *we*, *our*, or *your*. You also want to address the audience sitting directly in front of you. While many students are good at making a topic relevant to humanity in general, it takes more effort to make the content relevant to a specific audience.

Imagine that your audience members will all ask, “Why should I care about your topic?” and work to proactively address relevance throughout your speech.
U.S. Department of Agriculture – CC BY 2.0.

Previewing Your Main Points

The preview of main points is usually the last sentence of your introduction and serves as a map of what’s to come in the speech. The preview narrows your introduction of the topic down to the main ideas you will focus on in the speech. Your preview should be one sentence, should include wording that is parallel to the key wording of your main points in the body of your speech, and should preview your main points in the same order you discuss them in your speech. Make sure your wording is concise so your audience doesn’t think there will be four points when there are only three. The following example previews the main points for a speech on childhood obesity: “Today I’ll convey the seriousness of the obesity epidemic among children by reviewing some of the causes of obesity, common health problems associated with it, and steps we can take to help ensure our children maintain a healthy weight.”

Conclusion

How you conclude a speech leaves an impression on your audience. There are three important objectives to accomplish in your conclusion. They include summarizing the importance of your topic, *reviewing your main points*, *and closing your speech*.

Summarizing the Importance of Your Topic

After you *transition from the body of your speech to the conclusion*, you will summarize the importance of your

topic. This is the "take-away" message, or another place where you can answer the "so what?" question. This can often be a rewording of your thesis statement. The speech about childhood obesity could be summarized by saying, "Whether you have children or not, childhood obesity is a national problem that needs to be addressed."

Reviewing Your Main Points

Once you have summarized the overall importance of your speech, you review the main points. The review statement in the conclusion is very similar to the preview statement in your introduction. You don't have to use the exact same wording, but you still want to have recognizable parallelism that connects the key idea of each main point to the preview, review, and transitions. The review statement for the childhood obesity speech could be "In an effort to convince you of this, I cited statistics showing the rise of obesity, explained common health problems associated with obesity, and proposed steps that parents should take to ensure their children maintain a healthy weight."

Closing Your Speech

Like the attention getter, your closing statement is an opportunity for you to exercise your creativity as a speaker. Many students have difficulty wrapping up the speech with a sense of closure and completeness. In terms of closure, a well-written and well-delivered closing line signals to your audience that your speech is over, which cues their applause. You should not have to put an artificial end to your speech by saying "thank you" or "that's it" or "that's all I have." In terms of completeness, the closing line should relate to the overall speech and should provide some "take-away" message that may leave an audience thinking or propel them to action. A sample closing line could be "For your health, for our children's health, and for our country's health, we must take steps to address childhood obesity today." You can also create what I call the "ribbon and bow" for your speech by referring back to the introduction in the closing of your speech. For example, you may finish an illustration or answer a rhetorical question you started in the introduction.

Although the conclusion is likely the shortest part of the speech, I suggest that students practice it often. Even a well-written conclusion can be ineffective if the delivery is not good. Conclusions often turn out bad because they weren't practiced enough. If you only practice your speech starting from the beginning, you may not get to your conclusion very often because you stop to fix something in one of the main points, get interrupted, or run out of time. Once you've started your speech, anxiety may increase as you near the end and your brain becomes filled with thoughts of returning to your seat, so even a well-practiced conclusion can fall short. Practicing your conclusion by itself several times can help prevent this.

Key Takeaways

Determine the main points of a speech based on your research and supporting materials. The main points should support the thesis statement and help achieve the general and specific purposes.

Incorporating supporting material helps fill in the main points by creating subpoints. As supporting material is added to the speech, citation information should be included so you will have the information necessary to verbally cite your sources.

A speaker should do the following in the introduction of a speech: get the audience's attention, introduce the topic, establish credibility and relevance, and preview the main points.

A speaker should do the following in the conclusion of a speech: summarize the importance of the topic, review the main points, and provide closure.

Exercises

Identifying the main points of reference material you plan to use in your speech can help you determine your

main points/subpoints. Take one of your sources for your speech and list the main points and any subpoints from the article. Are any of them suitable main points for your speech? Why or why not?

Which organizational pattern listed do you think you will use for your speech, and why?

Write out verbal citations for some of the sources you plan to use in your speech, using the examples cited in the chapter as a guide.

Draft the opening and closing lines of your speech. Remember to tap into your creativity to try to engage the audience. Is there any way you can tie the introduction and conclusion together to create a "ribbon and bow" for your speech?

9.4 Outlining

Learning Objectives

Explain the principles of outlining.

Create a formal outline.

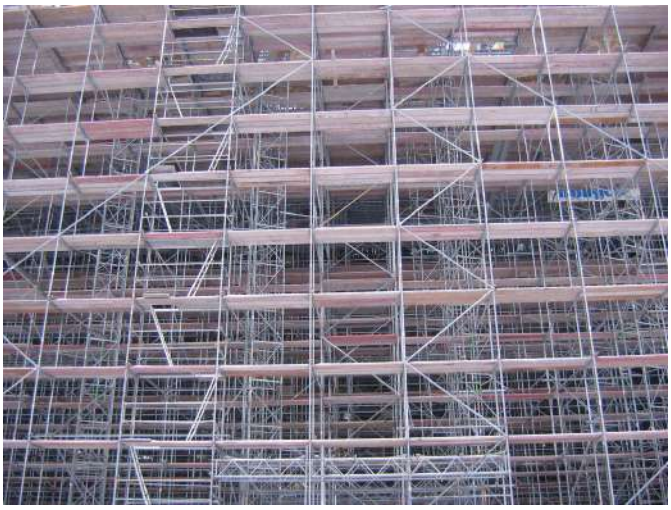
Explain the importance of writing for speaking.

Create a speaking outline.

Think of your outline as a living document that grows and takes form throughout your speech-making process. When you first draft your general purpose, specific purpose, and thesis statement, you could create a new document on your computer and plug those in, essentially starting your outline. As you review your research and distill the information down into separate central ideas that support your specific purpose and thesis, type those statements into the document. Once you've chosen your organizational pattern and are ready to incorporate supporting material, you can quote and paraphrase your supporting material along with the bibliographic information needed for your verbal citations into the document. By this point, you have a good working outline, and you can easily cut and paste information to move it around and see how it fits into the main points, subpoints, and sub-subpoints. As your outline continues to take shape, you will want to follow established principles of outlining to ensure a quality speech.

The Formal Outline

The **formal outline** is a full-sentence outline that helps you prepare for your speech. It includes the introduction and conclusion, the main content of the body, key supporting materials, citation information written into the sentences in the outline, and a references page for your speech. The formal outline also includes a title, the general purpose, specific purpose, and thesis statement. It's important to note that an outline is different from a script. While a script contains everything that will be said, an outline includes the main content. Therefore you shouldn't include every word you're going to say on your outline. This allows you more freedom as a speaker to adapt to your audience during your speech. Students sometimes complain about having to outline speeches or papers, but it is a skill that will help you in other contexts. Being able to break a topic down into logical divisions and then connect the information together will help ensure that you can prepare for complicated tasks or that you're prepared for meetings or interviews. I use outlines regularly to help me organize my thoughts and prepare for upcoming projects.



Outlining provides a scaffolding, or structure, that will help ensure your speech is logical, coherent, and organized.

Source: Photo courtesy of Tup Wanders, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scaffolding_Berlin2.jpg.

Principles of Outlining

There are principles of outlining you can follow to make your outlining process more efficient and effective. Four principles of outlining are consistency, unity, coherence, and emphasis. Warren C. DuBois, Essentials of Public Speaking (New York: Prentice Hall, 1929), 104. In terms of consistency, you should follow standard outlining format. In standard outlining format, main points are indicated by capital roman numerals, subpoints are indicated by capital letters, and sub-subpoints are indicated by Arabic numerals. Further divisions are indicated by either lowercase letters or lowercase roman numerals.

The principle of unity means that each letter or number represents one idea. One concrete way to help reduce the amount of ideas you include per item is to limit each letter or number to one complete sentence. If you find that one subpoint has more than one idea, you can divide it into two subpoints. Limiting each component of your outline to one idea makes it easier to then plug in supporting material and helps ensure that your speech is coherent. In the following example from a speech arguing that downloading music from peer-to-peer sites should be legal, two ideas are presented as part of a main point.

1. Downloading music using peer-to-peer file-sharing programs helps market new music and doesn't hurt record sales.

The main point could be broken up into two distinct ideas that can be more fully supported.

1. Downloading music using peer-to-peer file-sharing programs helps market new music.
2. Downloading music using peer-to-peer file-sharing programs doesn't hurt record sales.

Following the principle of unity should help your outline adhere to the principle of coherence, which states that there should be a logical and natural flow of ideas, with main points, subpoints, and sub-subpoints connecting to each other. James A. Winans, Public Speaking (New York: Century, 1917), 407. Shorter phrases and keywords can make up the speaking outline, but you should write complete sentences throughout your formal outline to ensure coherence. The principle of coherence can also be met by making sure that when dividing a main point or subpoint, you include at least two subdivisions. After all, it defies logic that you could divide anything into just one part. Therefore if you have an A, you must have a B, and if you have a 1, you must have a 2. If you can easily think of one subpoint but are having difficulty identifying another one, that subpoint may not be robust enough to stand on its own. Determining which ideas are coordinate with each other and which are subordinate to each other will help divide supporting information into the outline. James A. Winans, Public Speaking (New York: Century, 1917), 407–8. **Coordinate points** are on the same level of importance in relation to the thesis of the speech or the central idea of a main point. In the following example, the two main points (I, II) are coordinate with each other. The two subpoints (A, B) are also coordinate with each other. **Subordinate points** provide evidence or support for a main idea or thesis. In the following example, subpoint A and subpoint B are subordinate to main point II. You can look for specific words to help you determine any errors in distinguishing coordinate and subordinate points. Your points/subpoints are likely coordinate when you would connect the two statements using any of the following: *and, but, yet, or,* or *also*. In the example, the word also appears in B, which connects it, as a coordinate point, to A. The points/subpoints are likely subordinate if you would connect them using the following: *since, because, in order that, to explain,* or *to illustrate*. In the example, 1 and 2 are subordinate to A because they support that sentence.

Examples of Coordination and Subordination

I. Downloading music using peer-to-peer file-sharing programs helps market new music.

II. Downloading music using peer-to-peer file-sharing programs doesn't hurt record sales.

A. John Borland, writing for CNET.com in 2004, cited research conducted by professors from Harvard and the University of North Carolina that observed 1.75 million downloads from two file-sharing programs.

1. They conclude that the rapid increase in music downloading over the past few years does not significantly contribute to declining record sales.

2. Their research even suggests that the practice of downloading music may even have a "slight positive effect on the sales of the top albums."

B. A 2010 Government Accountability Office Report also states that sampling "pirated" goods could lead consumers to buy the "legitimate" goods.

The principle of emphasis states that the material included in your outline should be engaging and balanced. As you place supporting material into your outline, choose the information that will have the most impact on your audience. Choose information that is proxemic and relevant, meaning that it can be easily related to the audience's lives because it matches their interests or ties into current events or the local area. Remember primacy and recency discussed earlier and place the most engaging information first or last in a main point depending on what kind of effect you want to have. Also make sure your information is balanced. The outline serves as a useful visual representation of the proportions of your speech. You can tell by the amount of space a main point, subpoint, or sub-subpoint takes up in relation to other points of the same level whether or not your speech is balanced. If one subpoint is a half a page, but a main point is only a quarter of a page, then you may want to consider making the subpoint a main point. Each part of your speech doesn't have to be equal. The first or last point may be more substantial than a middle point if you are following primacy or recency, but overall the speech should be relatively balanced.

Sample Formal Outline

The following outline shows the standards for formatting and content and can serve as an example as you construct your own outline. Check with your instructor to see if he or she has specific requirements for speech outlines that may differ from what is shown here.

Outlining Example

Title: The USA's Neglected Sport: Soccer

General purpose: To persuade

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will believe that soccer should be more popular in the United States.

Thesis statement: Soccer isn't as popular in the United States as it is in the rest of the world because people do not know enough about the game; however, there are actions we can take to increase its popularity.

Introduction

Attention getter: GOOOOOOOOOOOOAL! GOAL! GOAL! GOOOOOOAL!

Introduction of topic: If you've ever heard this excited yell coming from your television, then you probably already know that my speech today is about soccer.

Credibility and relevance: Like many of you, I played soccer on and off as a kid, but I was never really exposed to the culture of the sport. It wasn't until recently, when I started to watch some of the World Cup games with international students in my dorm, that I realized what I'd been missing out on. Soccer is the most popular sport in the world, but I bet that, like most US Americans, it only comes on your radar every few years during the World Cup or the Olympics. If, however, you lived anywhere else in the world, soccer (or football, as it is more often called) would likely be a much larger part of your life.

Preview: In order to persuade you that soccer should be more popular in the United States, I'll explain why soccer isn't as popular in the United States and describe some of the actions we should take to change our beliefs and attitudes about the game.

Transition: Let us begin with the problem of soccer's unpopularity in America.

Body

I. Although soccer has a long history as a sport, it hasn't taken hold in the United States to the extent that it has in other countries.

A. Soccer has been around in one form or another for thousands of years.

B. The president of FIFA, which is the international governing body for soccer, was quoted in David Goldblatt's 2008 book, The Ball is Round, as saying, "Football is as old as the world…People have always played some form of football, from its very basic form of kicking a ball around to the game it is today."

C. Basil Kane, author of the book Soccer for American Spectators, reiterates this fact when he states, "Nearly every society at one time or another claimed its own form of kicking game."

II. Despite this history, the United States hasn't caught "soccer fever" for several different reasons.

A. Sports fans in the United States already have lots of options when it comes to playing and watching sports.

B. Our own "national sports" such as football, basketball, and baseball take up much of our time and attention, which may prevent people from engaging in an additional sport.

C. Statistics unmistakably show that soccer viewership is low as indicated by the much-respected Pew Research group, which reported in 2006 that only 4 percent of adult US Americans they surveyed said that soccer was their favorite sport to watch.

D. Comparatively, 34 percent of those surveyed said that football was their favorite sport to watch.

E. In fact, soccer just barely beat out ice skating, with 3 percent of the adults surveyed indicating that as their favorite sport to watch.

III. The attitudes and expectations of sports fans in the United States also prevent soccer's expansion into the national sports consciousness.

A. One reason Americans don't enjoy soccer as much as other sports is due to our shortened attention span, which has been created by the increasingly fast pace of our more revered sports like football and basketball.

1. According to the 2009 article from BleacherReport.com, "An American Tragedy: Two Reasons Why We Don't Like Soccer," the average length of a play in the NFL is six seconds, and there is a scoring chance in the NBA every twenty-four seconds.

2. This stands in stark comparison to soccer matches, which are played in two forty-five-minute periods with only periodic breaks in play.

B. Our lack of attention span isn't the only obstacle that limits our appreciation for soccer; we are also set in our expectations.

1. The Bleacher Report article also points out that unlike with football, basketball, and baseball—all sports in which the United States has most if not all the best teams in the world—we know that the best soccer teams in the world aren't based in the United States.

2. We also expect that sports will offer the same chances to compare player stats and obsess over

data that we get from other sports, but as Chad Nielsen of ESPN.com states, “There is no quantitative method to compare players from different leagues and continents.”

3. Last, as legendary sports writer Frank Deford wrote in a 2012 article on Sports Illustrated’s website, Americans don’t like ties in sports, and 30 percent of all soccer games end tied, as a draw, deadlocked, or nil-nil.

Transition: Although soccer has many problems that it would need to overcome to be more popular in the United States, I think there are actions we can take now to change our beliefs and attitudes about soccer in order to give it a better chance.

IV. Soccer is the most popular sport in the world, and there have to be some good reasons that account for this status.

A. As US Americans, we can start to enjoy soccer more if we better understand why the rest of the world loves it so much.

1. As was mentioned earlier, Chad Nielsen of ESPN.com notes that American sports fans can’t have the same stats obsession with soccer that they do with baseball or football, but fans all over the world obsess about their favorite teams and players.

2.Fans argue every day, in bars and cafés from Baghdad to Bogotá, about statistics for goals and assists, but as Nielsen points out, with the game of soccer, such stats still fail to account for varieties of style and competition.

3. So even though the statistics may be different, bonding over or arguing about a favorite team or player creates communities of fans that are just as involved and invested as even the most loyal team fans in the United States.

B. Additionally, Americans can start to realize that some of the things we might initially find off putting about the sport of soccer are actually some of its strengths.

1. The fact that soccer statistics aren’t poured over and used to make predictions makes the game more interesting.

2. The fact that the segments of play in soccer are longer and the scoring lower allows for the game to have a longer arc, meaning that anticipation can build and that a game might be won or lost by only one goal after a long and even-matched game.

C. We can also begin to enjoy soccer more if we view it as an additional form of entertainment.

1. As Americans who like to be entertained, we can seek out soccer games in many different places.

2. There is most likely a minor or even a major league soccer stadium team within driving distance of where you live.

3. You can also go to soccer games at your local high school, college, or university.

4. We can also join the rest of the world in following some of the major soccer celebrities—David Beckham is just the tip of the iceberg.

D. Getting involved in soccer can also help make our society more fit and healthy.

1. Soccer can easily be the most athletic sport available to Americans.

2. In just one game, the popular soccer player Gennaro Gattuso was calculated to have run about 6.2 miles, says Carl Bialik, a numbers expert who writes for The Wall Street Journal.

3. With the growing trend of obesity in America, getting involved in soccer promotes more running and athletic ability than baseball, for instance, could ever provide.

4. A press release on FIFA’s official website notes that one hour of soccer three times a week has been shown in research to provide significant physical benefits.

5. If that’s not convincing enough, the website ScienceDaily.com reports that the Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports published a whole special issue titled Football for Health that contained fourteen articles supporting the health benefits of soccer.

E. Last, soccer has been praised for its ability to transcend language, culture, class, and country.

1. The nongovernmental organization Soccer for Peace seeks to use the worldwide popularity of soccer as a peacemaking strategy to bridge the divides of race, religion, and socioeconomic class.

2. According to their official website, the organization just celebrated its ten-year anniversary in 2012.

3. Over those ten years the organization has focused on using soccer to bring together people of different religious faiths, particularly people who are Jewish and Muslim.

4. In 2012, three first-year college students, one Christian, one Jew, and one Muslim, dribbled soccer balls for 450 miles across the state of North Carolina to help raise money for Soccer for Peace.

5. A press release on the World Association of Nongovernmental Organizations's official website states that from the dusty refugee camps of Lebanon to the upscale new neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, "soccer turns heads, stops conversations, causes breath to catch, and stirs hearts like virtually no other activity."

Conclusion

Transition to conclusion and summary of importance: In conclusion, soccer is a sport that has a long history, can help you get healthy, and can bring people together.

Review of main points: Now that you know some of the obstacles that prevent soccer from becoming more popular in the United States and several actions we can take to change our beliefs and attitudes about soccer, I hope you agree with me that it's time for the United States to join the rest of the world in welcoming soccer into our society.

Closing statement: The article from BleacherReport.com that I cited earlier closes with the following words that I would like you to take as you leave here today: "We need to learn that just because there is no scoring chance that doesn't mean it is boring. We need to see that soccer is not for a select few, but for all. We only need two feet and a ball. We need to stand up and appreciate the beautiful game."

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Examples of APA Formatting for References

The citation style of the American Psychological Association (APA) is most often used in communication

studies when formatting research papers and references. The following examples are formatted according to the sixth edition of the APA Style Manual. Links are included to the OWL Purdue website, which is one of the most credible online sources for APA format. Of course, to get the most accurate information, it is always best to consult the style manual directly, which can be found in your college or university's library.

Books

For more information on citing books in APA style on your references page, visit http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/08.

Two Authors

Warren, J. T., & Fassett, D. L. (2011). *Communication: A critical/cultural introduction*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Chapter from Edited Book

Mumby, D. K. (2011). Power and ethics. In G. Cheney, S. May, & D. Munshi (Eds.), *The handbook of communication ethics* (pp. 84–98). New York, NY: Routledge.

Periodicals

For more information on citing articles from periodicals in APA style on your references page, visit http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/07.

Magazine

Huang, L. (2011, August 1). The death of English (LOL). *Newsweek*, 152(6), 8.

Newspaper

Kornblum, J. (2007, October 23). Privacy? That's old-school: Internet generation views openness in a different way. *USA Today*, 1D–2D.

Journal Article

Bodie, G. D. (2012). A racing heart, rattling knees, and ruminative thoughts: Defining, explaining, and treating public speaking anxiety. *Communication Education*, 59(1), 70–105.

Online Sources

For more information on citing articles from online sources in APA style on your references page, visit http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/10.

Online Newspaper Article

Perman, C. (2011, September 8). Bad economy? A good time for a steamy affair. *USA Today*. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/story/2011-09-10/economy-affairs-divorce-marriage/50340948/1

Online News Website

Fraser, C. (2011, September 22). The women defying France's full-face veil ban. *BBC News*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15023308

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Cullen, L. T. (2007, April 26). Employee diversity training doesn't work. *Time*. Retrieved from http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1615183,00.html

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The Speaking Outline

The formal outline is a full-sentence outline that helps as you prepare for your speech, and the **speaking outline** is

a keyword and phrase outline that helps you deliver your speech. While the formal outline is important to ensure that your content is coherent and your ideas are balanced and expressed clearly, the speaking outline helps you get that information out to the audience. Make sure you budget time in your speech preparation to work on the speaking outline. Skimping on the speaking outline will show in your delivery.

You may convert your formal outline into a speaking outline using a computer program. I often resave a file and then reformat the text so it's more conducive to referencing while actually speaking to an audience. You may also choose, or be asked to, create a speaking outline on note cards. Note cards are a good option when you want to have more freedom to gesture or know you won't have a lectern on which to place notes printed on full sheets of paper. In either case, this entails converting the full-sentence outline to a keyword or key-phrase outline. Speakers will need to find a balance between having too much or too little content on their speaking outlines. You want to have enough information to prevent fluency hiccups as you stop to mentally retrieve information, but you don't want to have so much information that you read your speech, which lessens your eye contact and engagement with the audience. Budgeting sufficient time to work on your speaking outline will allow you to practice your speech with different amounts of notes to find what works best for you. Since the introduction and conclusion are so important, it may be useful to include notes to ensure that you remember to accomplish all the objectives of each.

Aside from including important content on your speaking outline, you may want to include speaking cues. Speaking cues are reminders designed to help your delivery. You may write "(PAUSE)" before and after your preview statement to help you remember that important nonverbal signpost. You might also write "(MAKE EYE CONTACT)" as a reminder not to read unnecessarily from your cards. Overall, my advice is to make your speaking outline work for you. It's your last line of defense when you're in front of an audience, so you want it to help you, not hurt you.

Writing for Speaking

As you compose your outlines, write in a way that is natural for you to speak but also appropriate for the expectations of the occasion. Since we naturally speak with contractions, write them into your formal and speaking outlines. You should begin to read your speech aloud as you are writing the formal outline. As you read each section aloud, take note of places where you had difficulty saying a word or phrase or had a fluency hiccup, then go back to those places and edit them to make them easier for you to say. This will make you more comfortable with the words in front of you while you are speaking, which will improve your verbal and nonverbal delivery.

Tips for Note Cards

1. The 4 × 6 inch index cards provide more space and are easier to hold and move than 3.5 × 5 inch cards.
2. Find a balance between having so much information on your cards that you are tempted to read from them and so little information that you have fluency hiccups and verbal fillers while trying to remember what to say.
3. Use bullet points on the left-hand side rather than writing in paragraph form, so your eye can easily catch where you need to pick back up after you've made eye contact with the audience. Skipping a line between bullet points may also help.
4. Include all parts of the introduction/conclusion and signposts for backup.
5. Include key supporting material and wording for verbal citations.
6. Only write on the front of your cards.
7. Do not have a sentence that carries over from one card to the next (can lead to fluency hiccups).
8. If you have difficult-to-read handwriting, you may type your speech and tape or glue it to your cards. Use a font that's large enough for you to see and be neat with the glue or tape so your cards don't get stuck together.
9. Include cues that will help with your delivery. Highlight transitions, verbal citations, or other important information. Include reminders to pause, slow down, breathe, or make eye contact.

10. Your cards should be an extension of your body, not something to play with. Don’t wiggle, wring, flip through, or slap your note cards.

Key Takeaways

The principles of outlining include consistency, unity, coherence, and emphasis.

The speaking outline is a keyword and phrase outline that helps you deliver your speech and can include speaking cues like “pause,” “make eye contact,” and so on.

Write your speech in a manner conducive to speaking. Use contractions, familiar words, and phrases that are easy for you to articulate. Reading your speech aloud as you write it can help you identify places that may need revision to help you more effectively deliver your speech.

Exercises

What are some practical uses for outlining outside of this class? Which of the principles of outlining do you think would be most important in the workplace and why?

Identify which pieces of information you may use in your speech are coordinate with each other and subordinate.

Read aloud what you’ve written of your speech and identify places that can be reworded to make it easier for you to deliver.

Chapter 10

Delivering a Speech

Think of a speech or presentation you have seen that was poorly delivered. How did that affect your view of the speaker and his or her topic? Is a poorly delivered speech more bearable if the information is solid and organized? In most cases, bad delivery distracts us so much from a message that we don't even evaluate or absorb the information being presented. In short, a well-researched and well-prepared speech is not much without effective delivery. This chapter covers important information about managing public speaking anxiety, choosing the appropriate delivery method, practicing your speech, and employing effective vocal and physical delivery to enhance speaker credibility.

10.1 Managing Public Speaking Anxiety

Learning Objectives

Discuss common sources of public speaking anxiety.

Identify strategies for addressing public speaking anxiety.

Employ strategies for addressing public speaking anxiety.

If you feel fear, anxiety, or discomfort when confronted with the task of speaking in front of an audience, you are not alone. National polls consistently show that public speaking is among Americans' top fears. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 70. Yet, since we all have to engage in some form of public speaking, this is a fear that many people must face regularly. Effectively managing speaking anxiety has many positive effects on your speech. One major area that can improve with less anxiety is delivery. Although speaking anxiety is natural and normal, it can interfere with verbal and nonverbal delivery, which makes a speech less effective. In this chapter, we will explore causes of speaking anxiety, ways to address it, and best practices of vocal and physical delivery.

Sources of Speaking Anxiety

Aside from the self-reported data in national surveys that rank the fear of public speaking high for Americans, decades of research conducted by communication scholars shows that communication apprehension is common among college students. Jennifer S. Priem and Denise Haunani Solomon, "Comforting Apprehensive Communicators: The Effects of Reappraisal and Distraction on Cortisol Levels among Students in a Public Speaking Class," Communication Quarterly 57, no. 3 (2009): 260. **Communication apprehension** (CA) is fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to real or perceived communication with another person or persons. CA is a more general term that includes multiple forms of communication, not just public speaking. CA can be further broken down into two categories. **Trait CA** refers to a general tendency to experience anxiety related to communication, in essence incorporating it into a person's personality. **State CA** refers to anxiety related to communication that occurs in a particular situation and time. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 72. Of college students, 15 to 20 percent experience high trait CA, meaning they are generally anxious about communication. Seventy 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. Jennifer S. Priem and Denise Haunani Solomon, "Comforting Apprehensive Communicators: The Effects of Reappraisal and Distraction on Cortisol Levels among Students in a Public Speaking Class," Communication Quarterly 57, no. 3 (2009): 260–61. Whether CA is a personal trait or not, we all occasionally experience state CA. Think about the jitters you get before a first date, a job interview, or the first day of school. The novelty or uncertainty of some situations is a common trigger for communication anxiety, and public speaking is a situation that is novel and uncertain for many.

Public speaking anxiety is a type of CA that produces physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions in people when faced with a real or imagined presentation. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 71. Physiological responses to public speaking anxiety include increased heart rate, flushing of the skin or face, and sweaty palms, among other things. These reactions are the result of natural chemical processes in the human body. The fight or flight instinct helped early humans survive threatening situations. When faced with a ferocious saber-toothed tiger, for example, the body released adrenaline, cortisol, and other hormones that increased heart rate and blood pressure to get more energy to the brain, organs, and muscles in order to respond to the threat. We can be thankful for this evolutionary advantage, but our physiology hasn't caught up with our new ways of life. Our body doesn't distinguish between the causes of stressful situations, so facing down an audience releases the same hormones as facing down a wild beast.

Cognitive reactions to public speaking anxiety often include intrusive thoughts that can increase anxiety: "People are judging me," "I'm not going to do well," and "I'm going to forget what to say." These thoughts are reactions to the physiological changes in the body but also bring in the social/public aspect of public speaking in which speakers fear being negatively judged or evaluated because of their anxiety. The physiological and cognitive responses to anxiety lead to behavioral changes. All these thoughts may lead someone to stop their speech and return to their seat or leave the classroom. Anticipating these reactions can also lead to avoidance behavior where people intentionally avoid situations where they will have to speak in public.

Addressing Public Speaking Anxiety

While we can't stop the innate physiological reactions related to anxiety from occurring, we do have some control over how we cognitively process them and the behaviors that result. Research on public speaking anxiety has focused on three key ways to address this common issue: systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 70–105. In addition, it is important to address the physical manifestations of speaking anxiety.

Systematic Desensitization

Although **systematic desensitization** may sound like something that would be done to you while strapped down in the basement of a scary hospital, it actually refers to the fact that we become less anxious about something when we are exposed to it more often. Graham D. Bodie, "A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety," Communication Education 59, no. 1 (2010): 87. As was mentioned earlier, the novelty and uncertainty of public speaking is a source for many people's anxiety. So becoming more familiar with public speaking by doing it more often can logically reduce the novelty and uncertainty of it.

Systematic desensitization can result from imagined or real exposure to anxiety-inducing scenarios. In some cases, an instructor leads a person through a series of relaxation techniques. Once relaxed, the person is asked to imagine a series of scenarios including speech preparation and speech delivery. This is something you could also try to do on your own before giving a speech. Imagine yourself going through the process of preparing and practicing a speech, then delivering the speech, then returning to your seat, which concludes the scenario. Aside from this imagined exposure to speaking situations, taking a communication course like this one is a great way to directly engage in systematic desensitization. Almost all my students report that they have less speaking anxiety at the end of a semester than when they started, which is at least partially due to the fact they were forced to engage with speaking more than they would have done if they weren't taking the class.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring entails changing the way we think about something. A first step in restructuring how we deal with public speaking anxiety is to cognitively process through our fears to realize that many of the thoughts associated with public speaking anxiety are irrational. Mike Allen, John E. Hunter, and William A. Donohue, "Meta-analysis of Self-Report Data on the Effectiveness of Public Speaking Anxiety Treatment Techniques," Communication Education 38, no. 1 (2009): 54–76. For example, people report a fear of public speaking over a fear of snakes, heights, financial ruin, or even death. It's irrational to think that the consequences of giving a speech in public are more dire than getting bit by a rattlesnake, falling off a building, or dying. People also fear being embarrassed because they mess up or are evaluated negatively. Well, you can't literally die from embarrassment, and in reality, audiences are very forgiving and overlook or don't even notice many errors that we, as speakers, may dwell on. Once we realize that the potential negative consequences of giving a speech are not as dire as we think they are, we can move on to other cognitive restructuring strategies.

Communication-orientation modification therapy (COM therapy) is a type of cognitive restructuring that encourages people to think of public speaking as a conversation rather than a performance. Michael T. Motley, "COM Therapy," in Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension, eds. John A. Daly, James C. McCroskey, Joe Ayres, Tim Hopf, and Debbie M. Ayers Sonandre (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2009), 379–400. Many people have a performance-based view of public speaking. This can easily be seen in the language that some students use to discuss public speaking. They say that they "rehearse" their speech, deal with "stage fright," then "perform" their speech on a "stage." I like to remind my students that there is no stage at the front of our classroom; it is a normal floor. To get away from a performance orientation, we can reword the previous statements to say that they "practice" their speech, deal with "public speaking anxiety," then "deliver" their speech from the front of the room. Viewing public speaking as a conversation also helps with confidence. After all, you obviously have some conversation skills, or you wouldn't have made it to college. We engage in conversations every day. We don't have to write everything we're going to say out on a note card, we don't usually get nervous or anxious in regular conversations, and we're usually successful when we try. Even though we don't engage in public speaking as much, we speak to others in public all the time. Thinking of public speaking as a type of conversation helps you realize that you already have accumulated experiences and skills that you can draw from, so you aren't starting from scratch.

Last, **positive visualization** is another way to engage in cognitive restructuring. Speaking anxiety often leads people to view public speaking negatively. They are more likely to judge a speech they gave negatively, even if it was good. They're also likely to set up negative self-fulfilling prophecies that will hinder their performance in future speeches. To effectively use positive visualization, it's best to engage first in some relaxation exercises such as deep breathing or stretching, which we will discuss more later, and then play through vivid images in your mind of giving a successful speech. This should be done a few times before giving the actual speech. Students sometimes question the power of positive visualization, thinking that it sounds corny. Ask an Olympic diver what his or her coach says to do before jumping off the diving board and the answer will probably be "Coach says to image completing a perfect 10 dive." Likewise a Marine sharpshooter would likely say his commanding officer says to imagine hitting the target before pulling the trigger. In both instances, positive visualization is being used in high-stakes situations. If it's good enough for Olympic athletes and snipers, it's good enough for public speakers.

Skills Training

Skills training is a strategy for managing public speaking anxiety that focuses on learning skills that will improve specific speaking behaviors. These skills may relate to any part of the speech-making process, including topic selection, research and organization, delivery, and self-evaluation. Skills training, like systematic desensitization, makes the public speaking process more familiar for a speaker, which lessens uncertainty. In addition, targeting specific areas and then improving on them builds more confidence, which can in turn lead to more improvement. Feedback is important to initiate and maintain this positive cycle of improvement. You can use the constructive criticism that you get from your instructor and peers in this class to target specific areas of improvement. Self-evaluation is also an important part of skills training. Make sure to evaluate yourself within the context of your assignment or job and the expectations for the speech. Don't get sidetracked by a small delivery error if the expectations for content far outweigh the expectations for delivery. Combine your self-evaluation with the feedback from your instructor, boss, and/or peers to set specific and measurable goals and then assess whether or

not you meet them in subsequent speeches. Once you achieve a goal, mark it off your list and use it as a confidence booster. If you don't achieve a goal, figure out why and adjust your strategies to try to meet it in the future.

Physical Relaxation Exercises

Suggestions for managing speaking anxiety typically address its cognitive and behavioral components, while the physical components are left unattended. As we learned earlier, we can't block these natural and instinctual responses. We can, however, engage in **physical relaxation exercises** to counteract the general physical signs of anxiety caused by cortisol and adrenaline release, which include increased heart rate, trembling, flushing, high blood pressure, and speech disfluency.

I liken confronting the physical aspects of public speaking anxiety to chemical warfare. Some breathing and stretching exercises release endorphins, which are your body's natural antidote to stress hormones. Deep breathing is a proven way to release endorphins. It also provides a general sense of relaxation and can be done discretely, even while waiting to speak. In order to get the benefits of deep breathing, you must breathe into your diaphragm. The diaphragm is the muscle below your lungs that helps you breathe and stand up straight, which makes it a good muscle for a speaker to exercise. To start, breathe in slowly through your nose, filling the bottom parts of your lungs up with air. While doing this, your belly should pooch out. Hold the breath for three to five full seconds and then let it out slowly through your mouth. After doing this only a few times, many students report that they can actually feel a flooding of endorphins, which creates a brief "light-headed" feeling. I lead my class in breathing exercises before the first few days of speeches. Once you have practiced and are comfortable with the technique, you can do this before you start your speech, and no one sitting around you will even notice. You might also want to try this technique during other stressful situations. Deep breathing before dealing with an angry customer or loved one, or before taking a test, can help you relax and focus.

Stretching is another way to quickly and effectively release endorphins. Very old exercise traditions like yoga, tai chi, and Pilates teach the idea that stretching is a key component of having a healthy mind and spirit. Exercise in general is a good stress reliever, but many of us don't have the time or willpower to do it. We can, however, all take time to do some stretching. Obviously, it would be distracting for the surrounding audience if a speaker broke into some planking or Pilates just before his or her speech. Simple and discrete stretches can help get the body's energy moving around, which can make a speaker feel more balanced and relaxed. Our blood and our energy/stress have a tendency to pool in our legs, especially when we're sitting. The following stretch can help manage the physical manifestations of anxiety while waiting to speak. Start with both feet flat on the floor. Raise your back heels off the floor and flex and release your calf muscles. You can flex and release your calves once before putting your heels back down and repeating, or you can flex a few times on each repetition. Doing this three to five times should sufficiently get your blood and energy moving around. Stretching your wrists can also help move energy around in your upper body, since our huge amounts of typing and using other electronic controllers put a lot of stress on this intersection of muscles, tendons, and bones. Point one hand up at the wrist joint, like you're waving at someone. Then use your other hand to pull, gently, the hand that's pointing up back toward your elbow. Stop pulling once you feel some tension. Hold the hand there for a few seconds and release. Then point the hand down at the wrist joint like you're pointing at something on the floor, and use the other hand to push the hand back toward your elbow. Again, stop pushing when you feel the tension, hold the stretch for a few seconds, and release. You can often do this stretch discretely as well while waiting to speak.

Vocal Warm-Up Exercises

Vocal warm-up exercises are a good way to warm up your face and mouth muscles, which can help prevent some of the fluency issues that occur when speaking. Newscasters, singers, and other professional speakers use vocal warm-ups. I lead my students in vocal exercises before speeches, which also helps lighten the mood. We all stand in a circle and look at each other while we go through our warm-up list. For the first warm-up, we all make a motorboat sound, which makes everybody laugh. The full list of warm-ups follows and contains specific words and exercises designed to warm up different muscles and different aspects of your voice. After going through just a few, you should be able to feel the blood circulating in your face muscles more. It's a surprisingly good workout!

Sample Vocal Warm-Ups

- Purse your lips together and make a motorboat sound. Hold it for ten seconds and repeat. "BBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBBB."

- Clench your teeth and say, “N, N, N, N,” to stretch your cheek muscles.
- Say “Mum” five times, and open your mouth and eyes wide each time you say it.
- Say “Puh” five times, making sure to use your diaphragm to enunciate the h.
- Say “Red Rover” ten times, overenunciating each r.
- Say “Wilbur” ten times, overenunciating the w and r.
- Say “Bumblebee” ten times, enunciating each b.
- Say “Red letter, yellow letter” five times, making sure to distinctly pronounce each word.
- Say “Selfish shellfish” five times, making sure to distinctly pronounce each word.
- Say “Unique New York” five times, enunciating the q and k.

Top Ten Ways to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

As you can see in this section, there are many factors that contribute to speaking anxiety, and there are many ways to address it. The following is a list of the top ten ways to reduce speaking anxiety that I developed with my colleagues, which helps review what we’ve learned.

1. Remember, you are not alone. Public speaking anxiety is common, so don’t ignore it—confront it.
2. Remember, you can’t literally “die of embarrassment.” Audiences are forgiving and understanding.
3. Remember, 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.

“Getting Critical”

How Much Emphasis Should We Place on Delivery?

Before you read the rest of the chapter, take some time to think about the balance between the value of content and delivery in a speech. We know it’s important to have solid content and to have an engaging and smooth delivery to convey that content, but how should each category be weighted and evaluated? Most people who have made it to college can put the time and effort into following assignment guidelines to put together a well-researched and well-organized speech. But some people are naturally better at delivering speeches than others. Some people are more extroverted, experience less public speaking anxiety, and are naturally more charismatic than others. Sometimes a person’s delivery and charisma might distract an audience away from critically evaluating the content of their speech. Charismatic and well-liked celebrities and athletes, for example, are used to endorse products and sell things to the public. We may follow their advice because we like them, instead of basing our choice on their facts or content. Aristotle, Cicero, and other notable orators instructed that delivery should be good enough to present the material effectively but not so good or so bad that it draws attention to itself. But in today’s celebrity culture, the bling or packaging is sometimes more valued than the contents. This

leads us to some questions that might help us unpack the sometimes tricky relationship between content and delivery.

Do you think worries about content or delivery contribute more to speaking anxiety? Explain your choice.

How should someone be evaluated who works hard to research, organize, and write a speech, but doesn't take the time to practice so they have a good delivery? What if they practice, but still don't deliver the speech well on speech day?

How should we evaluate a speaker who delivers an engaging speech that gets the audience laughing and earns a big round of applause but doesn't verbally cite sources or present well-organized ideas?

Is it ethical for someone to use their natural charisma or speaking abilities to win over an audience rather than relying on the merit and strength of their speech content? In what speaking situations would this be more acceptable? Less acceptable?

Key Takeaways

Getting integrated: Public speaking anxiety is a form of communication apprehension (CA) that is commonly experienced by many people and can be effectively managed using a variety of strategies. While we most often think of public speaking anxiety as an issue in the classroom and workplace, it can affect communication in personal and civic contexts as well.

Systematic desensitization helps lessen public speaking anxiety through repeated exposure to real or imagined public speaking scenarios.

Cognitive restructuring addresses public speaking by replacing negative thoughts with more positive thoughts, and COM therapy can help you view public speaking as a conversation rather than a performance.

Skills training allows you to focus on improving specific skills related to public speaking, which can increase confidence and lead to further skill development.

Physical relaxation exercises like deep breathing and stretching allow us to voluntarily use our bodies to address involuntary bodily reactions to anxiety.

Exercises

Of the strategies for managing public speaking anxiety listed in the chapter (systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, skills training, physical relaxation exercises), which do you think would be most useful for you and why?

When you take a communication course like this one, you are automatically engaging in some skills training. What are some public speaking skills that you are already good at? What are some skills that you should work on? Write out three goals you would like to accomplish for your next speech that focus on improving your public speaking skills.

10.2 Delivery Methods and Practice Sessions

Learning Objectives

Identify the four methods of speech delivery.

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each delivery method.

Discuss strategies for making speech practice sessions more effective.

There are many decisions that must be made during the speech-making process. Making informed decisions about delivery can help boost your confidence and manage speaking anxiety. In this section, we will learn some strengths and weaknesses of various delivery methods and how to make the most of your practice sessions.

Delivery Methods

Different speaking occasions call for different delivery methods. While it may be acceptable to speak from memory in some situations, lengthy notes may be required in others. The four most common delivery methods are impromptu, manuscript, memorized, and extemporaneous.

Impromptu Delivery

When using **impromptu delivery**, a speaker has little to no time to prepare for a speech. This means there is little time for research, audience analysis, organizing, and practice. For this reason, impromptu speaking often evokes higher degrees of speaking anxiety than other delivery types. Although impromptu speaking arouses anxiety, it is also a good way to build public speaking skills. Using some of the exercises for managing speaking anxiety that were discussed earlier in this chapter can help a speaker better manage the challenges of impromptu speaking. Only skilled public speakers with much experience are usually able to "pull off" an impromptu delivery without looking unprepared. Otherwise, a speaker who is very familiar with the subject matter can sometimes be a competent impromptu speaker, because their expertise can compensate for the lack of research and organizing time.

When Mark Twain famously said, "It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech," he was jokingly pointing out the difficulties of giving a good impromptu speech, essentially saying that there is no such thing as a good impromptu speech, as good speeches take time to prepare. We don't always have the luxury of preparation, though. So when speaking impromptu, be brief, stick to what you know, and avoid rambling. Quickly organize your thoughts into an introduction, body, and conclusion. Try to determine three key ideas that will serve as the basis of your main points.

In what situations would impromptu speaking be used? Since we've already started thinking of the similarities between public speaking and conversations, we can clearly see that most of our day-to-day interactions involve impromptu speaking. When your roommate asks you what your plans for the weekend are, you don't pull a few note cards out of your back pocket to prompt your response. This type of conversational impromptu speaking isn't anxiety inducing because we're talking about our lives, experiences, or something we're familiar with. This is also usually the case when we are asked to speak publicly with little to no advance warning. For example, if you are at a meeting for work and you are representing the public relations department, a colleague may ask you to say a few words about a recent news story involving a public relations misstep of a competing company. In this case, you are being asked to speak on the spot because of your expertise. A competent communicator should anticipate instances like this when they might be called on to speak, so they won't be so surprised. Of course, being caught completely off guard or being asked to comment on something unfamiliar to you creates more anxiety. In such cases, do not pretend to know something you don't, as that may come back to hurt you later. You can usually mention that you do not have the necessary background information at that time but will follow up later with your comments.

Salespeople on home-shopping television shows are masters of impromptu speaking. They obviously have sales training and have built up a repertoire of adjectives and sayings that entice an audience to buy. But they are often

speaking impromptu when interacting with a guest on the show or the customers who call in. Their ability to remain animated and fluent in their delivery with little time to prepare comes from much experience. Politicians, lawyers, teachers, journalists, and spokespeople engage in impromptu speaking regularly.

Strengths of Impromptu Delivery

- Content and delivery are spontaneous, which can make the speech more engaging (if a speaker's anxiety is under control).
- It enhances public speaking skills because speakers have to "think on their feet."

Weaknesses of Impromptu Delivery

- It is typically the most anxiety-inducing delivery method, since speakers do not have time to prepare or practice the speech.
- Speakers may get off topic or ramble if they did not set up some structure to guide them.
- Speakers may be tempted to overstate or mislead an audience about the extent of their knowledge or expertise if asked to speak about something they aren't familiar with.

Manuscript Delivery

Speaking from a written or printed document that contains the entirety of a speech is known as **manuscript delivery**. Manuscript delivery can be the best choice when a speech has complicated information and/or the contents of the speech are going to be quoted or published. Despite the fact that most novice speakers are not going to find themselves in that situation, many are drawn to this delivery method because of the security they feel with having everything they're going to say in front of them. Unfortunately, the security of having every word you want to say at your disposal translates to a poorly delivered and unengaging speech. Even with every word written out, speakers can still have fluency hiccups and verbal fillers as they lose their place in the manuscript or get tripped up over their words. The alternative, of course, is that a speaker reads the manuscript the whole time, effectively cutting himself or herself off from the audience. One way to make a manuscript delivery more engaging is through the use of a teleprompter. Almost all politicians who give televised addresses use teleprompters. In Figure 10.1 "President Obama's Teleprompter System", you can see President Obama's teleprompter system.

Figure 10.1 President Obama's Teleprompter System

Newscasters and politicians frequently use teleprompters so they can use manuscript delivery but still engage with the audience.

Source: Photo courtesy of Chad Davis, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:20080603_Obama_Speaks_on_Nomination_Victory_Night.jpg.

You may not even notice them, as the technology has improved to give the illusion that a speaker is engaged with the audience and delivering a speech from memory. The Plexiglas sheets on poles that surround the president during the inauguration and State of the Union addresses are cleverly hidden teleprompters. Even these useful devices can fail. A quick search for "teleprompter fail" on YouTube will yield many examples of politicians and newscasters who probably wish they had a paper backup of their speech. Since most of us will likely not have opportunities to speak using a teleprompter, great care should be taken to ensure that the delivery is effective.

To make the delivery seem more natural, print the speech out in a larger-than-typical font, triple-space between lines so you can easily find your place, use heavier-than-normal paper so it's easy to pick up and turn the pages as needed, and use a portfolio so you can carry the manuscript securely.

Strengths of Manuscript Delivery

- The speaker can include precise or complex information such as statistics or quotes.
- The entire content of the speech is available for reference during the delivery.
- The speech will be consistent in terms of content and time length, which is beneficial if a speech will be delivered multiple times.

Weaknesses of Manuscript Delivery

- Engagement with the audience is challenging, because the speaker must constantly reference the manuscript (unless a teleprompter is used).
- Speakers are unable to adapt information to audience reactions, since they are confined to the content of the manuscript.
- Speakers may be tempted to read the entire speech because they didn't practice enough or because they get nervous.
- Speakers who are able to make eye contact with the audience may still sound like they are reading the speech unless they employ proper vocal variety, pacing, and pauses.

Memorized Delivery

Completely memorizing a speech and delivering it without notes is known as **memorized delivery**. Some students attempt to memorize their speech because they think it will make them feel more confident to not have to look at their notes; however, when their anxiety level spikes at the beginning of their speech and their mind goes blank for a minute, many admit they should have chosen a different delivery method. When using any of the other delivery methods, speakers still need to rely on their memory. An impromptu speaker must recall facts or experiences related to their topic, and speakers using a manuscript want to have some of their content memorized so they do not read their entire speech to their audience. The problem with memorized delivery overall is that it puts too much responsibility on our memory, which we all know from experience is fallible.

When memorizing, most people use rote memorization techniques, which entail reading and then reciting something over and over until it is committed to memory. One major downfall of this technique is its effect on speaking rate. When we memorize this way, we end up going over the early parts of a speech many more times than the later parts. As you memorize one sentence, you add on another, and so on. By the time you're adding on later parts of your speech, you are likely speed talking through the earlier parts because you know them by heart at that point. As we'll discuss more later, to prevent bad habits from practice from hurting our speech delivery, speakers should practice a speech the exact way they want to deliver it to their audience. Fast-paced speaking during practice will likely make its way into the actual delivery of the speech. Delivery also suffers when speaking from memory if the speaker sounds like he or she is reciting the speech. Rote memorization tasks that many of us had to do in school have left their mark on our memorized delivery. Being made to recite the pledge of allegiance, the preamble to the Constitution, and so on didn't enhance our speaking abilities. I've observed many students whose speeches remind me of the sound of school children flatly going through the motions of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. It's the "going through the motions" impression that speakers should want to avoid.

Memorized delivery is a good option for people like tour guides, who need to move while speaking and be interactive with an audience.

Source: Photo courtesy of John Lambert Pearson, http://www.flickr.com/photos/orphanjones/896596938.

Even with much practice, our memories can fail. If you do opt to use memorized delivery, make sure you have several "entry points" determined, so you can pick up at spots other than the very beginning of a speech if you lose your place and have to start again. Memorized delivery is very useful for speakers who are going to be moving around during a speech when carrying notes would be burdensome. Think of the tour guide who showed you around your college campus. As someone who used to give college tours, I can attest to the fact that we all had speeches memorized, which was a good thing. It's already difficult enough to walk backward while facing a group of people and lead them across roads and up stairs. Think about how dangerous it would be if the tour guide were trying to hold onto and reference a stack of note cards at the same time! In summary, I only recommend memorized delivery in cases where the speech is short (only one to two minutes), the speech is personal (like a brief toast), or the speech will be repeated numerous times (like a tour guide's spiel), and even in these cases, it may be perfectly fine to have notes. Many students think that their anxiety and/or delivery challenges will be fixed if they just memorize their speech only to find that they are more anxious and have more problems.

Strengths of Memorized Delivery

- Speakers can include precise or complex information such as statistics or quotes (if they have put the time into memorization).
- Speakers can directly engage with the audience without worrying about referencing notes.
- The speech will be consistent in terms of content and time-length, which is beneficial if a speech will be delivered multiple times.

Weaknesses of Memorized Delivery

- It is the most time-consuming delivery method.
- Speakers are unable to adapt information to audience reactions, since they are confined to the content they memorized.
- If speakers lose their place in the speech, they will likely have to start over.
- Since everything is preplanned, it is difficult to make the speech content and delivery seem genuine (i.e., humor may seem "canned" or corny).
- The speech can sound like a recitation if the proper vocal variety and pacing are not used.

Extemporaneous Delivery

Extemporaneous delivery entails memorizing the overall structure and main points of a speech and then speaking from keyword/key-phrase notes. This delivery mode brings together many of the strengths of the previous three methods. Since you only internalize and memorize the main structure of a speech, you don't have to worry as much about the content and delivery seeming stale. Extemporaneous delivery brings in some of the spontaneity of impromptu delivery but still allows a speaker to carefully plan the overall structure of a speech and incorporate supporting materials that include key facts, quotations, and paraphrased information. You can also more freely adapt your speech to fit various audiences and occasions, since every word and sentence isn't predetermined. This can be especially beneficial when a speech will be delivered multiple times. The minilectures

I give in my classes, for example, are good examples of extemporaneous delivery. Even though I've presented the basic content of this chapter dozens of times over the years, each presentation has been different, because I can vary the examples and amount of elaboration that I add to the core content that I've memorized. For example, I may spend more time discussing speaking anxiety with a class that has expressed more apprehension about public speaking. I also change the example videos I show to connect to ever-changing current events or popular culture.

When preparing a speech that you will deliver extemporaneously, you will want to start practicing your speech early and then continue to practice as you revise your content. Investing quality time and effort into the speech-outlining process helps with extemporaneous delivery. As you put together your outline, you are already doing the work of internalizing the key structure of your speech. Read parts of your outline aloud as you draft them to help ensure they are written in a way that makes sense and is easy for you to deliver. By the time you complete the formal, full-sentence outline, you should have already internalized much of the key information in your speech. Now, you can begin practicing with the full outline. As you become more comfortable with the content of your full outline, start to convert it into your speaking outline. Take out information that you know well and replace it with a keyword or key phrase that prompts your memory. You'll probably want to leave key quotes, facts, and other paraphrased information, including your verbal source citation information, on your delivery outline so you make sure to include it in your speech. Once you've converted your full outline into your speaking outline, practice it a few more times, making sure to take some time between each practice session so you don't inadvertently start to memorize the speech word for word. The final product should be a confident delivery of a well-organized and structured speech that is conversational and adaptable to various audiences and occasions.

Strengths of Extemporaneous Delivery

- Speech content and delivery appear more spontaneous and natural, making it more conversational, since the speaker is using a keyword/key-phrase outline.
- Speakers can include quotes or complex information on their speaking outline for easy reference.
- Speakers can adapt information and delivery to specific audiences, occasions, and audience reactions, since they are not confined to the content of a manuscript or what they memorized.

Weaknesses of Extemporaneous Delivery

- Since the speech is so adaptable, it can be difficult to ensure the speech will be the exact same length each time.
- It is perhaps not the best option when exact wording is expected.
- Speakers must find a balance between having too much content on their speaking outline, which may cause them to read, and too little content, which may lead to fluency hiccups.

Practicing Your Speech

Practicing a speech is essential, and practice sessions can be more or less useful depending on how you approach them. There are three primary phases to the practice process. In the first phase, you practice as you're working through your ideas and drafting your outline. In the second, you practice for someone and get feedback. In the third, you put the finishing touches on the speech.

Start practicing your speech early, as you are working through your ideas, by reading sections aloud as you draft them into your working outline. This will help ensure your speech is fluent and sounds good for the audience. Start to envision the audience while you practice and continue to think about them throughout the practicing process. This will help minimize anxiety when you actually have them sitting in front of you. Once you have completed your research and finished a draft of your outline, you will have already practiced your speech several times as you were putting it together. Now, you can get feedback on the speech as a whole.

You begin to solicit feedback from a trusted source in the second phase of practicing your speech. This is the most important phase of practicing, and the one that most speakers do not complete. Beginning speakers may be nervous to practice in front of someone, which is to be expected. But review the strategies for managing anxiety discussed earlier in this chapter and try to face that anxiety. After all, you will have to face a full audience when you deliver the speech, so getting used to speaking in front of someone can only help you at this point. Choose someone who will give you constructive feedback on your speech, not just unconditional praise or criticism.

Before you practice for them, explain the assignment or purpose of the speech. When practicing for a classroom speech, you may even want to give the person the assignment guidelines or a feedback sheet that has some key things for them to look for. Ask them for feedback on content and delivery. Almost anyone is good at evaluating delivery, but it's more difficult to evaluate content. And, in most cases, the content of your speech will be account for more of your grade or what you will be evaluated on for work than the delivery. Also begin to time your speech at this point, so you can determine if it meets any time limits that you have.

In addition to practicing for a trusted source for feedback, you may want to audio or video record your speech. This can be useful because it provides an objective record that you can then compare with the feedback you got from your friend and to your own evaluation of your speech. The most important part of this phase is incorporating the feedback you receive into your speech. If you practice for someone, get feedback, and then don't do anything with the feedback, then you have wasted your time and their time. Use the feedback to assess whether or not you met your speaking goals. Was your thesis supported? Was your specific purpose met? Did your speech conform to any time limits that were set? Based on your answers to these questions, you may need to make some changes to your content or delivery, so do not put this part of practicing off to the last minute. Once the content has been revised as needed, draft your speaking outline and move on to the next phase of practice.

During the third and final phase of practice, you are putting the finishing touches on your speech. You should be familiar with the content based on your early practice sessions. You have also gotten feedback and incorporated that feedback into the speech. Your practice sessions at this point should precreate, as much as possible, the conditions in which you will be giving your speech. You should have your speaking outline completed so you can practice with it. It's important to be familiar with the content on your note cards or speaking outline so you will not need to rely on it so much during the actual delivery. You may also want to practice in the type of clothing you will be wearing on speech day. This can be useful if you are wearing something you don't typically wear—a suit for example—so you can see how it might affect your posture, gestures, and overall comfort level. If possible, at least one practice session in the place you will be giving the speech can be very helpful, especially if it's a room you are not familiar with. Make sure you're practicing with any visual aids or technology you will use so you can be familiar with it and it doesn't affect your speech fluency. Continue to time each practice round. If you are too short or too long, you will need to go back and adjust your content some more. Always adjust your content to fit the time limit; do not try to adjust your delivery. Trying to speed talk or stretch things out to make a speech faster or longer is a mistake that will ultimately hurt your delivery, which will hurt your credibility. The overall purpose of this phase of practicing is to minimize surprises that might throw you off on speech day.

Some "Dos" and "Don'ts" for Effective Speech Practice Sessions

- Do start practicing sections of your speech early, as you draft your outline.
- Do practice for someone for feedback.
- Do time yourself once a draft of the speech is completed and adjust the speech as needed to conform to time limits.
- Do deliver the speech the way you want it to be when you deliver it for your audience (use the rate, volume, vocal variety, pauses, and emphasis you plan to use on speech day).
- Don't only practice in front of a mirror (practicing once in front of a mirror can help you gauge your facial expressions and other aspects of delivery, but that shouldn't be the only way you practice).
- Don't only practice in your head (we have a tendency to go too fast when we practice in our head, and you need to get practice saying the words of your speech to help lessen fluency hiccups).
- Don't practice too much. It's best to practice a few times in the days leading up to the speech, making sure to leave several hours between practice sessions. Practicing too much can lead you to become bored with your content, which could lead to delivery that sounds like a recitation.

Key Takeaways

The four methods of delivering a speech are impromptu, manuscript, memorized, and extemporaneous delivery.

Impromptu delivery evokes higher levels of speaking anxiety because a speaker has little to no time to prepare the speech; however, this method can increase public speaking skills for people who enjoy thinking on their feet.

Manuscript delivery entails speaking from a manuscript that contains a word-for-word transcript of your speech. This delivery method can be good for speeches that contain complex information that will be published or quoted but can be challenging because speakers may read their speech, which lessens engagement with the audience.

Memorized delivery entails speaking from memory. Speakers with a reliable memory will be able to include specific information and engage the audience freely. This method is the most time-consuming delivery option and may come across as a recitation instead of an engaging speech.

Extemporaneous delivery entails memorizing the general structure of a speech, not every word, and then delivering the speech from a keyword outline. Having the keyword outline allows a speaker to include specific information and references while remaining adaptable to the occasion and audience since every word isn't planned out.

Practicing your speech should occur in three phases. First, practice as you are drafting the outline to help you process through your speech ideas. Second, practice for someone and get feedback and record your speech for self-evaluation. Use this feedback to make appropriate changes to your speech. Third, put the finishing touches on the speech: make needed adjustments to the content to meet time limits, become familiar with your speaking outline, and precreate the conditions of speech day for your final few practice sessions.

Exercises

Which delivery methods have you used before? Which did you like the best and why? Which delivery method would you most prefer a speaker to use if you were an audience member and why?

Have you ever had any "surprises" come up during a speech that you could have prevented with more effective practice sessions? If so, explain. If not, list some surprises that good practice sessions could help prevent.

Using the suggestions in the chapter, make a timeline for practicing your next speech. Include specific dates and make a list of things you plan to do during each of the three phases of practice.

10.3 Vocal Delivery

Learning Objectives

Identify elements of vocal delivery that make a speech more engaging.

Identify elements of vocal delivery that make a speech clearer.

Discuss the relationship between vocal delivery and speaker credibility.

Vocal delivery includes components of speech delivery that relate to your voice. These include rate, volume, pitch, articulation, pronunciation, and fluency. Our voice is important to consider when delivering our speech for two main reasons. First, vocal delivery can help us engage and interest the audience. Second, vocal delivery helps ensure that our ideas are communicated clearly.

Speaking for Engagement

We have all had the displeasure of listening to an unengaging speaker. Even though the person may care about his or her topic, an unengaging delivery that doesn't communicate enthusiasm will translate into a lack of interest

for most audience members. Although a speaker can be visually engaging by incorporating movement and gestures, which we will discuss more later, a flat or monotone vocal delivery can be sedating or even annoying. Incorporating vocal variety in terms of rate, volume, and pitch is key to being a successful speaker.

Rate

Rate of speaking refers to how fast or slow you speak. If you speak too fast, your audience will not be able to absorb the information you present. If you speak too slowly, the audience may lose interest. The key is to vary your rate of speaking in a middle range, staying away from either extreme, in order to keep your audience engaged. In general, a higher rate of speaking signals that a speaker is enthusiastic about his or her topic. Speaking slowly may lead the audience to infer that the speaker is uninterested, uninformed, or unprepared to present his or her own topic. These negative assumptions, whether they are true or not, are likely to hurt the credibility of the speaker. Having evaluated thousands of speeches, I can say that, in terms of rate, the issue speakers face is speaking too fast. The goal is to speak at a rate that will interest the audience and will effectively convey your information. Speaking at a slow rate throughout a speech would likely bore an audience, but that is not a common occurrence.

Some people naturally speak faster than others, which is fine, but we can all alter our rate of speaking with practice. If you find that you are a naturally fast speaker, make sure that you do not “speed talk” through your speech when practicing it. Even if you try to hold back when actually delivering your speech, you may fall back into your practice routine and speak too fast. You can also include reminders to “slow down” on your speaking outline.

Volume

Volume refers to how loud or soft your voice is. As with speaking rate, you want to avoid the extremes of being too loud or too soft, but still vary your volume within an acceptable middle range. When speaking in a typically sized classroom or office setting that seats about twenty-five people, using a volume a few steps above a typical conversational volume is usually sufficient. When speaking in larger rooms, you will need to project your voice. You may want to look for nonverbal cues from people in the back rows or corners, like leaning forward or straining to hear, to see if you need to adjust your volume more. Obviously, in some settings, a microphone will be necessary to be heard by the entire audience. Like rate, audiences use volume to make a variety of judgments about a speaker. Softer speakers are sometimes judged as meek, which may lead to lowered expectations for the speech or less perceived credibility. Loud speakers may be seen as overbearing or annoying, which can lead audience members to disengage from the speaker and message. Be aware of the volume of your voice and, when in doubt, increase your volume a notch, since beginning speakers are more likely to have an issue of speaking too softly rather than too loudly.

Pitch

Pitch refers to how high or low a speaker’s voice is. As with other vocal qualities, there are natural variations among people’s vocal pitch. Unlike rate and volume, there are more physiological limitations on the control we have over pitch. For example, males generally have lower pitched voices than females. Despite these limitations, each person still has the capability to intentionally change their pitch across a range large enough to engage an audience. Changing pitch is a good way to communicate enthusiasm and indicate emphasis or closure. In general, our pitch goes up when we are discussing something exciting. Our pitch goes down slightly when we emphasize a serious or important point. Lowering pitch is also an effective way to signal transitions between sections of your speech or the end of your speech, which cues your audience to applaud and avoids an awkward ending.

Of the vocal components of delivery discussed so far, pitch seems to give beginning speakers the most difficulty. There is a stark difference between the way I hear students speak before and after class and the way they speak when they get in front of the class. It’s like giving a speech temporarily numbs their ability to vary their pitch. Record yourself practicing your speech to help determine if the amount of pitch variety and enthusiasm you think you convey while speaking actually comes through. Speakers often assume that their pitch is more varied and their delivery more enthusiastic than the audience actually perceives it to be. Many of my students note this on the self-evaluations they write after viewing their recorded speech.

Vocal Variety

Overall, the lesson to take away from this section on vocal delivery is that variety is key. **Vocal variety** includes changes in your rate, volume, and pitch that can make you look more prepared, seem more credible, and be able to engage your audience better. Employing vocal variety is not something that takes natural ability or advanced skills training. It is something that beginning speakers can start working on immediately and everyone can accomplish. The key is to become aware of how you use your voice when you speak, and the best way to do this is to record yourself. We all use vocal variety naturally without thinking about it during our regular conversations, and many of us think that this tendency will translate over to our speaking voices. This is definitely not the case for most beginning speakers. Unlike in your regular conversations, it will take some awareness and practice to use vocal variety in speeches. I encourage students to make this a delivery priority early on. Since it's something anyone can do, improving in this area will add to your speaking confidence, which usually translates into better speeches and better grades further on.

Speaking for Clarity

In order to be an effective speaker, your audience should be able to understand your message and digest the information you present. Audience members will make assumptions about our competence and credibility based on how we speak. As with other aspects of speech delivery, many people are not aware that they have habits of speech that interfere with their message clarity. Since most of our conversations are informal and take place with people we know, many people don't make a concerted effort to articulate every word clearly and pronounce every word correctly, and most of the people we talk to either don't notice our errors or don't correct us if they do notice. Since public speaking is generally more formal than our conversations, we should be more concerned with the clarity of our speech.

Articulation

Articulation refers to the clarity of sounds and words we produce. If someone is articulate, they speak words clearly, and speakers should strive to speak clearly. Poor articulation results when speakers do not speak clearly. For example, a person may say dinnt instead of didn't, gonna instead of going to, wanna instead of want to, or hunnerd instead of hundred. Unawareness and laziness are two common challenges to articulation. As with other aspects of our voice, many people are unaware that they regularly have errors in articulation. Recording yourself speak and then becoming a higher self-monitor are effective ways to improve your articulation. Laziness, on the other hand, requires a little more motivation to address. Some people just get in the habit of not articulating their words well. I'm sure we all know someone who mumbles when they speak or slurs their words together. From my experience, this is a problem that I've noticed more among men than women. Both mumbling and slurring are examples of poor articulation. In more informal settings, this type of speaking may be acceptable, but in formal settings, it will be negatively evaluated, which will hurt a speaker's credibility. Perhaps the promise of being judged more favorably, which may help a person become more successful, is enough to motivate a mumbler to speak more clearly.

When combined with a low volume, poor articulation becomes an even greater problem. Doing vocal warm-ups like the ones listed in Section 10.1 "Managing Public Speaking Anxiety" or tongue twisters can help prime your mouth, lips, and tongue to articulate words more clearly. When you notice that you have trouble articulating a particular word, you can either choose a different word to include in your speech or you can repeat it a few times in a row in the days leading up to your speech to get used to saying it.

Pronunciation

Unlike articulation, which focuses on the clarity of words, **pronunciation** refers to speaking words correctly, including the proper sounds of the letters and the proper emphasis. Mispronouncing words can damage a speaker's credibility, especially when the correct pronunciation of a word is commonly known. I have actually heard someone, presenting on the topic of pronunciation, mispronounce the word pronunciation, saying "pro-NOUN-ciation" instead of "pro-NUN-ciation." In such a case, it would not be unwarranted for the audience to question the speaker's expertise on the subject.

We all commonly run into words that we are unfamiliar with and therefore may not know how to pronounce. I offer my students three suggestions when faced with this problem. The first is to look the word up in an online dictionary. Many dictionaries have a speaker icon with their definitions, and when you click on it, you can hear the correct pronunciation of a word. Some words have more than one pronunciation—for example, Caribbean—so choosing either of the accepted pronunciations is fine. Just remember to consistently use that pronunciation to avoid confusing your audience. If a word doesn't include an audio pronunciation, you can usually find the phonetic spelling of a word, which is the word spelled out the way it sounds. There will occasionally be words that you can't locate in a dictionary. These are typically proper nouns or foreign words. In this case, I suggest the "phone-a-friend" strategy. Call up the people you know who have large vocabularies or are generally smart when it comes to words, and ask them if they know how to pronounce it. If they do, and you find them credible, you're probably safe to take their suggestion. The third option is to "fake it 'til you make it" and should only be used as a last resort. If you can't find the word in a dictionary and your smart friends don't know how to pronounce it, it's likely that your audience will also be unfamiliar with the word. In that case, using your knowledge of how things are typically pronounced, decide on a pronunciation that makes sense and confidently use it during your speech. Most people will not question it. In the event that someone does correct you on your pronunciation, thank him or her for correcting you and adjust your pronunciation.

Fluency

Fluency refers to the flow of your speaking. To speak with fluency means that your speech flows well and that there are not many interruptions to that flow. There are two main disfluencies, or problems that affect the flow of a speech. **Fluency hiccups** are unintended pauses in a speech that usually result from forgetting what you were saying, being distracted, or losing your place in your speaking notes. Fluency hiccups are not the same as intended pauses, which are useful for adding emphasis or transitioning between parts of a speech. While speakers should try to minimize fluency hiccups, even experienced speakers need to take an unintended pause sometimes to get their bearings or to recover from an unexpected distraction. Fluency hiccups become a problem when they happen regularly enough to detract from the speaker's message.

Verbal fillers are words that speakers use to fill in a gap between what they were saying and what they're saying next. Common verbal fillers include um, uh, ah, er, you know, and like. The best way to minimize verbal fillers is to become a higher self-monitor and realize that you use them. Many students are surprised when they watch the video of their first speech and realize they said "um" thirty times in three minutes. Gaining that awareness is the first step in eliminating verbal fillers, and students make noticeable progress with this between their first and second speeches. If you do lose your train of thought, having a brief fluency hiccup is better than injecting a verbal filler, because the audience may not even notice the pause or may think it was intentional.

Common Causes of Fluency Hiccups

- **Lack of preparation.** Effective practice sessions are the best way to prevent fluency hiccups.
- **Not writing for speaking.** If you write your speech the way you've been taught to write papers, you will have fluency hiccups. You must translate the written words into something easier for you to present orally. To do this, read your speech aloud and edit as you write to make sure your speech is easy for you to speak.
- **A poorly prepared speaking outline.** Whether it is on paper or note cards, sloppy writing, unorganized bullet points, or incomplete/insufficient information on a speaking outline leads to fluency hiccups.
- **Distractions.** Audience members and the external environment are unpredictable. Hopefully audience members will be polite and will silence their phones, avoid talking while the speaker is presenting, and avoid moving excessively. There could also be external noise that comes through a door or window. A speaker can also be distracted by internal noise such as thinking about other things.

"Getting Plugged In"

Delivering Presentations Online

As many people and organizations are trying to do more with smaller budgets, and new software becomes available, online presentations are becoming more common. Whether using a Webinar format, a WebEx, Skype, FaceTime, Elluminate Live, or some other program, the live, face-to-face audience is now mediated through a computer screen. Despite this change in format, many of the same basic principles of public speaking apply when speaking to people virtually. Yet many business professionals seem to forget the best practices of public speaking when presenting online or don't get that they apply in both settings. The website TheVirtualPresenter.com offers many tips for presenting online that we've covered in this book, including be audience focused, have engaging delivery, and use visual aids effectively. Roger Courville, "Delivery," TheVirtualPresenter.com, accessed November 5, 2012, http://thevirtualpresenter.com/category/delivery. Yet speakers need to think about some of these things differently when presenting online. We have natural ways to engage an audience when presenting face-to-face, but since many online presentations are only one-way in terms of video, speakers have to rely on technology like audience polls, live chat, or options for audience members to virtually raise their hand when they have a question to get feedback while speaking. Also, in some formats, the audience can only see the presenter's computer desktop or slide show, which pulls attention away from physical delivery and makes vocal delivery and visual aids more important. Extemporaneous delivery and vocal variety are still key when presenting online. Reading from your slides or having a monotone voice will likely not make a favorable impression on your audience. The lesson to take away is that presenting online requires the same skills as presenting in person, so don't let the change in format lead you to make mistakes that will make you a less effective speaker.

Have you ever presented online or been an audience member for an online presentation? If so, describe your experience and compare it to face-to-face speaking.

What are some of the key differences between presenting online and presenting in person that a speaker should consider?

How might online presentations play into your future career goals? What types of presentations do you think you would give? What could you do to ensure the presentations are effective?

Key Takeaways

Speakers should use vocal variety, which is changes in rate, volume, and pitch, to make a speech more engaging.

Speakers should use proper articulation and pronunciation to make their message clear.

Interruptions to the fluency of a speech, including fluency hiccups and verbal fillers, detract from the speaker's message and can lessen a speaker's credibility.

Exercises

Record yourself practicing your speech. How does your speech sound in terms of vocal variety? Cite specific examples.

Listen to your recorded speech again. How would you evaluate your articulation and pronunciation? Cite specific examples.

Over the course of a day, take note of verbal fillers that you tend to use. List them here so you can be a higher self-monitor and begin to notice and lessen your use of them.

10.4 Physical Delivery

Learning Objectives

Explain the role of facial expressions and eye contact in speech delivery.

Explain the role of posture, gestures, and movement in speech delivery.

Explain the connection between personal appearance and credibility in speech delivery.

Explain the connection between visual aids and speech delivery.

Many speakers are more nervous about physical delivery than vocal delivery. Putting our bodies on the line in front of an audience often makes us feel more vulnerable than putting our voice out there. Yet most audiences are not as fixated on our physical delivery as we think they are. Knowing this can help relieve some anxiety, but it doesn't give us a free pass when it comes to physical delivery. We should still practice for physical delivery that enhances our verbal message. Physical delivery of a speech involves nonverbal communication through the face and eyes, gestures, and body movements.

Physical Delivery and the Face

We tend to look at a person's face when we are listening to them. Again, this often makes people feel uncomfortable and contributes to their overall speaking anxiety. Many speakers don't like the feeling of having "all eyes" on them, even though having a room full of people avoiding making eye contact with you would be much more awkward. Remember, it's a good thing for audience members to look at you, because it means they're paying attention and interested. Audiences look toward the face of the speaker for cues about the tone and content of the speech.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions can help bring a speech to life when used by a speaker to communicate emotions and demonstrate enthusiasm for the speech. As with vocal variety, we tend to use facial expressions naturally and without conscious effort when engaging in day-to-day conversations. Yet I see many speakers' expressive faces turn "deadpan" when they stand in front of an audience. Some people naturally have more expressive faces than others—think about the actor Jim Carey's ability to contort his face as an example. But we can also consciously control and improve on our facial expressions to be more effective speakers. As with other components of speech delivery, becoming a higher self-monitor and increasing your awareness of your typical delivery habits can help you understand, control, and improve your delivery. Although you shouldn't only practice your speech in front of a mirror, doing so can help you get an idea of how expressive or unexpressive your face is while delivering your speech. There is some more specific advice about assessing and improving your use of facial expressions in the "Getting Competent" box in this chapter.

Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech, and it is important that your facial expressions stay consistent with your message. In order to set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile. A smile is a simple but powerful facial expression that can communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and are also associated with various moods or personality traits. For example, combinations of facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored, among other things. 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. Also make sure your facial expressions match with the content of your speech. When delivering something lighthearted 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 conflicting messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is an important element of nonverbal communication in all communication settings. Chapter 4 explains the power of eye contact to make people feel welcome/unwelcome, comfortable/uncomfortable, listened to / ignored, and so on. As a speaker, **eye contact** can also be used to establish credibility and hold your audience's attention. We often interpret a lack of eye contact to mean that someone is not credible or not competent, and as a public speaker, you don't want your audience thinking either of those things. Eye contact holds attention because an audience member who knows the speaker is making regular eye contact will want to reciprocate that eye contact to show that they are paying attention. This will also help your audience remember the content of your speech better, because acting like we're paying attention actually leads us to pay attention and better retain information.

Eye contact is an aspect of delivery that beginning speakers can attend to and make noticeable progress on early in their speech training. By the final speech in my classes, I suggest that my students make eye contact with their audience for at least 75 percent of their speech. Most speakers cannot do this when they first begin practicing with extemporaneous delivery, but continued practice and effort make this an achievable goal for most.

As was mentioned in Chapter 4 "Nonverbal Communication", norms for eye contact vary among cultures. Therefore it may be difficult for speakers from countries that have higher power distances or are more collectivistic to get used to the idea of making direct and sustained eye contact during a speech. In these cases, it is important for the speaker to challenge himself or herself to integrate some of the host culture's expectations and for the audience to be accommodating and understanding of the cultural differences.

Tips for Having Effective Eye Contact

1. Once in front of the audience, establish eye contact before you speak.
2. Make slow and deliberate eye contact, sweeping through the whole audience from left to right.
3. Despite what high school speech teachers or others might have told you, do not look over the audience's heads, at the back wall, or the clock. Unless you are in a huge auditorium, it will just look to the audience like you are looking over their heads.
4. Do not just make eye contact with one or a few people that you know or that look friendly. Also, do not just make eye contact with your instructor or boss. Even if it's comforting for you as the speaker, it is usually awkward for the audience member.
5. Try to memorize your opening and closing lines so you can make full eye contact with the audience. This will strengthen the opening and closing of your speech and help you make a connection with the audience.

Physical Delivery and the Body

Have you ever gotten dizzy as an audience member because the speaker paced back and forth? I know I have. Anxiety can lead us to do some strange things with our bodies, like pacing, that we don't normally do, so it's important to consider the important role that your body plays during your speech. Extra movements caused by anxiety are called **nonverbal adaptors**, and most of them manifest as distracting movements or gestures. These nonverbal adaptors, like tapping a foot, wringing hands, playing with a paper clip, twirling hair, jingling change in a pocket, scratching, and many more, can definitely detract from a speaker's message and credibility. Conversely, a confident posture and purposeful gestures and movement can enhance both.

Posture

Posture is the position we assume with our bodies, either intentionally or out of habit. Although people, especially young women, used to be trained in posture, often by having them walk around with books stacked on their heads, you should use a posture that is appropriate for the occasion while still positioning yourself in a way that feels natural. In a formal speaking situation, it's important to have an erect posture that communicates professionalism and credibility. However, a military posture of standing at attention may feel and look unnatural in a typical school or business speech. In informal settings, it may be appropriate to lean on a table or lectern, or even sit among your audience members. Head position is also part of posture. In most speaking situations, it is best to keep your head up, facing your audience. A droopy head doesn't communicate confidence. Consider the occasion important, as an inappropriate posture can hurt your credibility.

Government and military leaders use an erect posture to communicate confidence and professionalism during public appearances.

Source: Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Defense, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defense.gov_News_Photo_100406-N-0696M-096.jpg.

Gestures

Gestures include arm and hand movements. We all go through a process of internalizing our native culture from childhood. An obvious part of this process is becoming fluent in a language. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that we also become fluent in nonverbal communication, gestures in particular. We all use hand gestures while we speak, but we didn't ever take a class in matching verbal communication with the appropriate gestures; we just internalized these norms over time based on observation and put them into practice. By this point in your life, you have a whole vocabulary of hand movements and gestures that spontaneously come out while you're speaking. Some of these gestures are emphatic and some are descriptive. Arthur Koch, Speaking with a Purpose, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2007), 105.

Emphatic gestures are the most common hand gestures we use, and they function to emphasize our verbal communication and often relate to the emotions we verbally communicate. Pointing with one finger or all the fingers straight out is an emphatic gesture. We can even bounce that gesture up and down to provide more emphasis. Moving the hand in a circular motion in front of our chest with the fingers spread apart is a common emphatic gesture that shows excitement and often accompanies an increased rate of verbal speaking. We make this gesture more emphatic by using both hands. Descriptive gestures function to illustrate or refer to objects rather than emotions. We use descriptive gestures to indicate the number of something by counting with our fingers or the size, shape, or speed of something. Our hands and arms are often the most reliable and easy-to-use visual aids a speaker can have.

While it can be beneficial to plan a key gesture or two in advance, it is generally best to gesture spontaneously in a speech, just as you would during a regular conversation. For some reason, students are insecure about or uncomfortable with gesturing during a speech. Even after watching their speech videos, many students say they think they "gestured too much" or nit-pick over a particular gesture. Out of thousands of speeches I've seen, I can't recall a student who gestured too much to the point that it was distracting. Don't try to overdo your gestures though. You don't want to look like one of those crazy-arm inflatable dancing men that companies set up on the side of the road to attract customers. But more important, don't try to hold back. Even holding back a little usually ends up nearly eliminating gestures. While the best beginning strategy is to gesture naturally, you also want to remain a high self-monitor and take note of your typical patterns of gesturing. If you notice that you naturally

gravitate toward one particular gesture, make an effort to vary your gestures more. You also want your gestures to be purposeful, not limp or lifeless. I caution my students against having what I call "spaghetti noodle arms," where they raise their hand to gesture and then let it flop back down to their side.

Movement

Sometimes movement of the whole body, instead of just gesturing with hands, is appropriate in a speech. I recommend that beginning speakers hold off trying to incorporate body movement from the waist down until they've gotten at least one speech done. This allows you to concentrate on managing anxiety and focus on more important aspects of delivery like vocal variety, avoiding fluency hiccups and verbal fillers, and improving eye contact. When students are given the freedom to move around, it often ends up becoming floating or pacing, which are both movements that comfort a speaker by expending nervous energy but only serve to distract the audience. Floating refers to speakers who wander aimlessly around, and pacing refers to speakers who walk back and forth in the same path. To prevent floating or pacing, make sure that your movements are purposeful. Many speakers employ the triangle method of body movement where they start in the middle, take a couple steps forward and to the right, then take a couple steps to the left, then return back to the center. Obviously you don't need to do this multiple times in a five- to ten-minute speech, as doing so, just like floating or pacing, tends to make an audience dizzy. To make your movements appear more natural, time them to coincide with a key point you want to emphasize or a transition between key points. Minimize other movements from the waist down when you are not purposefully moving for emphasis. Speakers sometimes tap or shuffle their feet, rock, or shift their weight back and forth from one leg to the other. Keeping both feet flat on the floor, and still, will help avoid these distracting movements.

Credibility and Physical Delivery

Audience members primarily take in information through visual and auditory channels. Just as the information you present verbally in your speech can add to or subtract from your credibility, nonverbal communication that accompanies your verbal messages affects your credibility.

Personal Appearance

Looking like a credible and prepared public speaker will make you feel more like one and will make your audience more likely to perceive you as such. This applies to all speaking contexts: academic, professional, and personal. Although the standards for appropriate personal appearance vary between contexts, meeting them is key. You may have experienced a time when your vocal and physical delivery suffered because you were not "dressed the part." The first time I ever presented at a conference, I had a terrible cold and in my hazy packing forgot to bring a belt. While presenting later that day, all I could think about was how everyone was probably noticing that, despite my nice dress shirt tucked into my slacks, I didn't have a belt on. Dressing the part makes you feel more confident, which will come through in your delivery. Ideally, you should also be comfortable in the clothes you're wearing. If the clothes are dressy, professional, and nice but ill fitting, then the effect isn't the same. Avoid clothes that are too tight or too loose. Looking the part is just as important as dressing the part, so make sure you are cleaned and groomed in a way that's appropriate for the occasion.

Visual Aids and Delivery

Visual aids play an important role in conveying supporting material to your audience. They also tie to delivery, since using visual aids during a speech usually requires some physical movements. It is important not to let your use of visual aids detract from your credibility. I've seen many good speeches derailed by posters that fall over, videos with no sound, and uncooperative PowerPoint presentations.

The following tips can help you ensure that your visual aids enhance, rather than detract, from your message and credibility:

1. Only have your visual aid displayed when it is relevant to what you are saying: insert black slides in PowerPoint, hide a model or object in a box, flip a poster board around, and so on.

2. Make sure to practice with your visual aids so there aren't any surprises on speech day.
3. Don't read from your visual aids. Put key information from your PowerPoint or Prezi on your speaking outline and only briefly glance at the screen to make sure you are on the right slide. You can also write information on the back of a poster or picture that you're going to display so you can reference it while holding the visual aid up, since it's difficult to hold a poster or picture and note cards at the same time.
4. Triple check your technology to make sure it's working: electricity, Internet connection, wireless clicker, sound, and so on.
5. Proofread all your visual aids to find spelling/grammar errors and typos.
6. Bring all the materials you may need to make your visual aid work: tape/tacks for posters and pictures, computer cables/adaptors, and so on. Don't assume these materials will be provided.
7. Have a backup plan in case your visual aid doesn't work properly.

Key Takeaways

Facial expressions help communicate emotions and enthusiasm while speaking. Make sure that facial expressions are consistent with the content being presented. Record yourself practicing your speech in order to evaluate your use of facial expressions.

Eye contact helps establish credibility and keep your audience's attention while you're speaking.

Posture should be comfortable and appropriate for the speaking occasion.

Emphatic and descriptive gestures enhance the verbal content of our speech. Gestures should appear spontaneous but be purposeful.

Movements from the waist down should be purposefully used to emphasize a point or as a transition during a speech.

Audience members will make assumptions about your competence and credibility based on dress and personal appearance. Make sure your outer presentation of self is appropriate for the occasion and for the impression you are trying to project.

Visual aids can add to your speech but can also interfere with your delivery and negatively affect your credibility if not used effectively.

Exercises

Identify three goals related to delivery that you would like to accomplish in this course. What strategies/tips can you use to help achieve these goals?

What nonverbal adaptors have you noticed that others use while speaking? Are you aware of any nonverbal adaptors that you have used? If so, what are they?

Getting integrated: Identify some steps that speakers can take to ensure that their dress and physical appearance enhance their credibility. How might expectations for dress and physical appearance vary from context to context (academic, professional, personal, and civic)?

Chapter 11

Informative and Persuasive Speaking

Communicative messages surround us. Most try to teach us something and/or influence our thoughts or behaviors. As with any type of communication, some messages are more engaging and effective than others. I'm sure you have experienced the displeasure of sitting through a boring class lecture that didn't seem to relate to your interests or a lecture so packed with information that your brain felt overloaded. Likewise, you have probably been persuaded by a message only to find out later that the argument that persuaded you was faulty or the speaker misleading. As senders and receivers of messages, it's important that we be able to distinguish between informative and persuasive messages and know how to create and deliver them.

11.1 Informative Speeches

Learning Objectives

Identify common topic categories for informative speeches.

Identify strategies for researching and supporting informative speeches.

Explain the different methods of informing.

Employ strategies for effective informative speaking, including avoiding persuasion, avoiding information overload, and engaging the audience.

Many people would rather go see an impassioned political speech or a comedic monologue than a lecture. Although informative speaking may not be the most exciting form of public speaking, it is the most common. Reports, lectures, training seminars, and demonstrations are all examples of informative speaking. That means you are more likely to give and listen to informative speeches in a variety of contexts. Some organizations, like consulting firms, and career fields, like training and development, are solely aimed at conveying information. College alumni have reported that out of many different speech skills, informative speaking is most important. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 3. Since your exposure to informative speaking is inevitable, why not learn how to be a better producer and consumer of informative messages?

Creating an Informative Speech

As you'll recall from Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", speaking to inform is one of the three possible general purposes for public speaking. The goal of **informative speaking** is to teach an audience something using objective factual information. Interestingly, informative speaking is a newcomer in the world of public speaking theorizing and instruction, which began thousands of years ago with the ancient Greeks. Thomas H. Olbricht, Informative Speaking (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1968), 1–12. Ancient philosophers and statesmen like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian conceived of public speaking as rhetoric, which is inherently persuasive. During that time, and until the 1800s, almost all speaking was argumentative. Teaching and instruction were performed as debates, and even fields like science and medicine relied on argumentative reasoning instead of factual claims.

While most instruction is now verbal, for most of modern history, people learned by doing rather than listening, as apprenticeships were much more common than classroom-based instruction. So what facilitated the change

from argumentative and demonstrative teaching to verbal and informative teaching? One reason for this change was the democratization of information. Technical information used to be jealously protected by individuals, families, or guilds. Now society generally believes that information should be shared and made available to all. The increasing complexity of fields of knowledge and professions also increased the need for informative speaking. Now one must learn a history or backstory before actually engaging with a subject or trade. Finally, much of the information that has built up over time has become commonly accepted; therefore much of the history or background information isn't disputed and can now be shared in an informative rather than argumentative way.

Choosing an Informative Speech Topic

Being a successful informative speaker starts with choosing a topic that can engage and educate the audience. Your topic choices may be influenced by the level at which you are speaking. Informative speaking usually happens at one of three levels: formal, vocational, and impromptu. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 3–4. Formal informative speeches occur when an audience has assembled specifically to hear what you have to say. Being invited to speak to a group during a professional meeting, a civic gathering, or a celebration gala brings with it high expectations. Only people who have accomplished or achieved much are asked to serve as keynote speakers, and they usually speak about these experiences. Many more people deliver informative speeches at the vocational level, as part of their careers. Teachers like me spend many hours lecturing, which is a common form of informative speaking. In addition, human resources professionals give presentations about changes in policy and provide training for new employees, technicians in factories convey machine specifications and safety procedures, and servers describe how a dish is prepared in their restaurant. Last, we all convey information daily in our regular interactions. When we give a freshman directions to a campus building, summarize the latest episode of American Idol for our friend who missed it, or explain a local custom to an international student, we are engaging in impromptu informative speaking.

Whether at the formal, vocational, or impromptu level, informative speeches can emerge from a range of categories, which include objects, people, events, processes, concepts, and issues. An extended speech at the formal level may include subject matter from several of these categories, while a speech at the vocational level may convey detailed information about a process, concept, or issue relevant to a specific career.

Since we don't have time to research or organize content for impromptu informative speaking, these speeches may provide a less detailed summary of a topic within one of these categories. A broad informative speech topic could be tailored to fit any of these categories. As you draft your specific purpose and thesis statements, think about which category or categories will help you achieve your speech goals, and then use it or them to guide your research. Table 10.1 "Sample Informative Speech Topics by Category" includes an example of how a broad informative subject area like renewable energy can be adapted to each category as well as additional sample topics.

Table 11.1 Sample Informative Speech Topics by Category

Category	Renewable Energy Example	Other Examples
Objects	Biomass gasifier	Tarot cards, star-nosed moles, Enterprise 1701-D
People	Al Gore	Jennifer Lopez, Bayard Rustin, the Amish
Concepts	Sustainability	Machismo, intuition, Wa (social harmony)
Events	Earth Day	Pi Day, Take Back the Night, 2012 presidential election
Processes	Converting wind to energy	Scrapbooking, animal hybridization, Academy Awards voting
Issues	Nuclear safety	Cruise ship safety, identity theft, social networking and privacy

Speeches about objects convey information about any nonhuman material things. Mechanical objects, animals, plants, and fictional objects are all suitable topics of investigation. Given that this is such a broad category, strive

to pick an object that your audience may not be familiar with or highlight novel relevant and interesting facts about a familiar object.

Speeches about people focus on real or fictional individuals who are living or dead. These speeches require in-depth biographical research; an encyclopedia entry is not sufficient. Introduce a new person to the audience or share little-known or surprising information about a person we already know. Although we may already be familiar with the accomplishments of historical figures and leaders, audiences often enjoy learning the "personal side" of their lives.

Speeches about concepts are less concrete than speeches about objects or people, as they focus on ideas or notions that may be abstract or multifaceted. A concept can be familiar to us, like equality, or could literally be a foreign concept like *qi* (or *chi*), which is the Chinese conception of the energy that flows through our bodies. Use the strategies discussed in this book for making content relevant and proxemic to your audience to help make abstract concepts more concrete.

Speeches about events focus on past occasions or ongoing occurrences. A particular day in history, an annual observation, or a seldom occurring event can each serve as interesting informative topics. As with speeches about people, it's important to provide a backstory for the event, but avoid rehashing commonly known information.

Informative speeches about processes provide a step-by-step account of a procedure or natural occurrence. Speakers may walk an audience through, or demonstrate, a series of actions that take place to complete a procedure, such as making homemade cheese. Speakers can also present information about naturally occurring processes like cell division or fermentation.

Last, informative speeches about issues provide objective and balanced information about a disputed subject or a matter of concern for society. It is important that speakers view themselves as objective reporters rather than commentators to avoid tipping the balance of the speech from informative to persuasive. Rather than advocating for a particular position, the speaker should seek to teach or raise the awareness of the audience.

Researching an Informative Speech Topic

Having sharp research skills is a fundamental part of being a good informative speaker. Since informative speaking is supposed to convey factual information, speakers should take care to find sources that are objective, balanced, and credible. Periodicals, books, newspapers, and credible websites can all be useful sources for informative speeches, and you can use the guidelines for evaluating supporting materials discussed in Chapter 9 to determine the best information to include in your speech. Aside from finding credible and objective sources, informative speakers also need to take time to find engaging information. This is where sharp research skills are needed to cut through all the typical information that comes up in the research process to find novel information. Novel information is atypical or unexpected, but it takes more skill and effort to locate. Even seemingly boring informative speech topics like the history of coupons can be brought to life with information that defies the audience's expectations. A student recently delivered an engaging speech about coupons by informing us that coupons have been around for 125 years, are most frequently used by wealthier and more educated households, and that a coupon fraud committed by an Italian American businessman named Charles Ponzi was the basis for the term *Ponzi scheme*, which is still commonly used today.

As a teacher, I can attest to the challenges of keeping an audience engaged during an informative presentation. While it's frustrating to look out at my audience of students and see glazed-over eyes peering back at me, I also know that it is my responsibility to choose interesting information and convey it in a way that's engaging. Even though the core content of what I teach hasn't change dramatically over the years, I constantly challenge myself to bring that core information to life through application and example. As we learned earlier, finding proxemic and relevant information and examples is typically a good way to be engaging. The basic information may not change quickly, but the way people use it and the way it relates to our lives changes. Finding current, relevant examples and finding novel information are both difficult, since you, as the researcher, probably don't know this information exists.

Here is where good research skills become necessary to be a good informative speaker. Using advice from Chapter 9 should help you begin to navigate through the seas of information to find hidden treasure that excites you and will in turn excite your audience.

As was mentioned earlier, the goal for informative speaking is to teach your audience. An audience is much more likely to remain engaged when they are actively learning. This is like a balancing act. You want your audience to be challenged enough by the information you are presenting to be interested, but not so challenged that they become overwhelmed and shut down. You should take care to consider how much information your

audience already knows about a topic. Be aware that speakers who are very familiar with their speech topic tend to overestimate their audience's knowledge about the topic. It's better to engage your topic at a level slightly below your audience's knowledge level than above. Most people won't be bored by a brief review, but many people become lost and give up listening if they can't connect to the information right away or feel it's over their heads.

A good informative speech leaves the audience thinking long after the speech is done. Try to include some practical "takeaways" in your speech. I've learned many interesting and useful things from the informative speeches my students have done. Some of the takeaways are more like trivia information that is interesting to share—for example, how prohibition led to the creation of NASCAR. Other takeaways are more practical and useful—for example, how to get wine stains out of clothing and carpet or explanations of various types of student financial aid.

Organizing and Supporting an Informative Speech

You can already see that informing isn't as easy as we may initially think. To effectively teach, a speaker must present quality information in an organized and accessible way. Once you have chosen an informative speech topic and put your research skills to the test in order to locate novel and engaging information, it's time to organize and support your speech.

Organizational Patterns

Three organizational patterns that are particularly useful for informative speaking are topical, chronological, and spatial. As you'll recall, to organize a speech topically, you break a larger topic down into logical subdivisions. An informative speech about labor unions could focus on unions in three different areas of employment, three historically significant strikes, or three significant legal/legislative decisions. Speeches organized chronologically trace the development of a topic or overview the steps in a process. An informative speech could trace the rise of the economic crisis in Greece or explain the steps in creating a home compost pile. Speeches organized spatially convey the layout or physical characteristics of a location or concept. An informative speech about the layout of a fire station or an astrology wheel would follow a spatial organization pattern.

Methods of Informing

Types of and strategies for incorporating supporting material into speeches are discussed in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", but there are some specific ways to go about developing ideas within informative speeches. Speakers often inform an audience using definitions, descriptions, demonstrations, and explanations. It is likely that a speaker will combine these methods of informing within one speech, but a speech can also be primarily organized using one of these methods.

Informing through Definition

Informing through definition entails defining concepts clearly and concisely and is an important skill for informative speaking. There are several ways a speaker can inform through definition: synonyms and antonyms, use or function, example, and etymology. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 53–55. Defining a concept using a synonym or an antonym is a short and effective way to convey meaning. Synonyms are words that have the same or similar meanings, and antonyms are words that have opposite meanings. In a speech about how to effectively inform an audience, I would claim that using concrete words helps keep an audience engaged. I could enhance your understanding of what concrete means by defining it with synonyms like tangible and relatable. Or I could define concrete using antonyms like abstract and theoretical.

Identifying the use or function of an object, item, or idea is also a short way of defining. We may think we already know the use and function of most of the things we interact with regularly. This is true in obvious cases like cars, elevators, and smartphones. But there are many objects and ideas that we may rely on and interact with but not know the use or function. For example, QR codes (or quick response codes) are popping up in magazines, at airports, and even on t-shirts. Andy Vuong, "Wanna Read That QR Code? Get the Smartphone App," The Denver Post, April 18, 2011, accessed March 6, 2012, http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_17868932. Many

people may notice them but not know what they do. As a speaker, you could define QR codes by their function by informing the audience that QR codes allow businesses, organizations, and individuals to get information to consumers/receivers through a barcode-like format that can be easily scanned by most smartphones.

A speaker can also define a topic using examples, which are cited cases that are representative of a larger concept. In an informative speech about anachronisms in movies and literature, a speaker might provide the following examples: the film *Titanic* shows people on lifeboats using flashlights to look for survivors from the sunken ship (such flashlights weren't invented until two years later);The Past in Pictures, "Teaching Using Movies: Anachronisms!" accessed March 6, 2012,http://www.thepastinthepictures.wildelearning.co.uk/Introductoryunit!.htm. Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* includes a reference to a clock, even though no mechanical clocks existed during Caesar's time. Scholasticus K, "Anachronism Examples in Literature," February 2, 2012, accessed March 6, 2012, http://www.buzzle.com/articles/anachronism-examples-in-literature.html. Examples are a good way to repackage information that's already been presented to help an audience retain and understand the content of a speech. Later we'll learn more about how repackaging information enhances informative speaking.

Etymology refers to the history of a word. Defining by etymology entails providing an overview of how a word came to its current meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is the best source for finding etymology and often contains interesting facts that can be presented as novel information to better engage your audience. For example, the word *assassin*, which refers to a person who intentionally murders another, literally means "hashish-eater" and comes from the Arabic word *hashshashin*. The current meaning emerged during the Crusades as a result of the practices of a sect of Muslims who would get high on hashish before killing Christian leaders—in essence, assassinating them. Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed March 6, 2012, http://www.oed.com.

Informing through Description

As the saying goes, "Pictures are worth a thousand words." **Informing through description** entails creating verbal pictures for your audience. Description is also an important part of informative speeches that use a spatial organizational pattern, since you need to convey the layout of a space or concept. Good descriptions are based on good observations, as they convey what is taken in through the senses and answer these type of questions: What did that look like? Smell like? Sound like? Feel like? Taste like? If descriptions are vivid and well written, they can actually invoke a sensory reaction in your audience. Just as your mouth probably begins to salivate when I suggest that you imagine biting into a fresh, bright yellow, freshly cut, juicy lemon wedge, so can your audience be transported to a setting or situation through your descriptions. I once had a student set up his speech about the history of streaking by using the following description: "Imagine that you are walking across campus to your evening class. You look up to see a parade of hundreds upon hundreds of your naked peers jogging by wearing little more than shoes."

Informing through Demonstration

When **informing through demonstration**, a speaker gives verbal directions about how to do something while also physically demonstrating the steps. Early morning infomercials are good examples of demonstrative speaking, even though they are also trying to persuade us to buy their "miracle product." Whether straightforward or complex, it's crucial that a speaker be familiar with the content of their speech and the physical steps necessary for the demonstration. Speaking while completing a task requires advanced psycho-motor skills that most people can't wing and therefore need to practice. Tasks suddenly become much more difficult than we expect when we have an audience. Have you ever had to type while people are reading along with you? Even though we type all the time, even one extra set of eyes seems to make our fingers more clumsy than usual.

Television chefs are excellent examples of speakers who frequently inform through demonstration. While many of them make the process of speaking while cooking look effortless, it took much practice over many years to make viewers think it is effortless.

Part of this practice also involves meeting time limits. Since television segments are limited and chefs may be demonstrating and speaking live, they have to be able to adapt as needed. Demonstration speeches are notorious for going over time, especially if speakers haven't practiced with their visual aids / props. Be prepared to condense or edit as needed to meet your time limit. The reality competition show The Next Food Network Star captures these difficulties, as many experienced cooks who have the content knowledge and know how to physically

complete their tasks fall apart when faced with a camera challenge because they just assumed they could speak and cook at the same time.

Tips for Demonstration Speeches

1. Include personal stories and connections to the topic, in addition to the "how-to" information, to help engage your audience.
2. Ask for audience volunteers (if appropriate) to make the demonstration more interactive.
3. Include a question-and-answer period at the end (if possible) so audience members can ask questions and seek clarification.
4. Follow an orderly progression. Do not skip around or backtrack when reviewing the steps.
5. Use clear signposts like first, second, and third.
6. Use orienting material like internal previews and reviews, and transitions.
7. Group steps together in categories, if needed, to help make the information more digestible.
8. Assess the nonverbal feedback of your audience. Review or slow down if audience members look lost or confused.
9. Practice with your visual aids / props many times. Things suddenly become more difficult and complicated than you expect when an audience is present.
10. Practice for time and have contingency plans if you need to edit some information out to avoid going over your time limit.

Informing through Explanation

Informing through explanation entails sharing how something works, how something came to be, or why something happened. This method of informing may be useful when a topic is too complex or abstract to demonstrate. When presenting complex information make sure to break the topic up into manageable units, avoid information overload, and include examples that make the content relevant to the audience. Informing through explanation works well with speeches about processes, events, and issues. For example, a speaker could explain the context surrounding the Lincoln-Douglas debates or the process that takes place during presidential primaries.

"Getting Plugged In"

TED Talks as a Model of Effective Informative Speaking

Over the past few years, I have heard more and more public speaking teachers mention their use of TED speeches in their classes. What started in 1984 as a conference to gather people involved in Technology, Entertainment, and Design has now turned into a worldwide phenomenon that is known for its excellent speeches and presentations, many of which are informative in nature. "About TED," accessed October 23, 2012, http://www.ted.com/pages/about. The motto of TED is "Ideas worth spreading," which is in keeping with the role that we should occupy as informative speakers. We should choose topics that are worth speaking about and then work to present them in such a way that audience members leave with "take-away" information that is informative and useful. TED fits in with the purpose of the "Getting Plugged In" feature in this book because it has been technology focused from the start. For example, Andrew Blum's speech focuses on the infrastructure of the Internet, and Pranav Mistry's speech focuses on a new technology he developed that allows for more interaction between the physical world and the world of data. Even speakers who don't focus on technology still skillfully use technology in their presentations, as is the case with David Gallo's speech about exotic underwater life. Here are links to all these speeches:

Andrew Blum's speech: What Is the Internet, Really?http://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_blum_what_is_the_internet_really.html

Pranav Mistry's speech: The Thrilling Potential of Sixth Sense Technology.http://www.ted.com/talks/pranav_mistry_the_thrilling_potential_of_sixthsense_technology.html

David Gallo's speech: Underwater Astonishments.http://www.ted.com/talks/david_gallo_shows_underwater_astonishments.html

What can you learn from the TED model and/or TED speakers that will help you be a better informative speaker?

In what innovative and/or informative ways do the speakers reference or incorporate technology in their speeches?

Effective Informative Speaking

There are several challenges to overcome to be an effective informative speaker. They include avoiding persuasion, avoiding information overload, and engaging your audience.

Avoiding Persuasion

We should avoid thinking of informing and persuading as dichotomous, meaning that it's either one or the other. It's more accurate to think of informing and persuading as two poles on a continuum, as in Figure 11.1. Thomas H. Olbricht, Informative Speaking (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1968), 14. Most persuasive speeches rely on some degree of informing to substantiate the reasoning. And informative speeches, although meant to secure the understanding of an audience, may influence audience members' beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors.

Figure 11.1 Continuum of Informing and Persuading

Speakers can look to three areas to help determine if their speech is more informative or persuasive: speaker purpose, function of information, and audience perception. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 5–6. First, for informative speaking, a speaker's purpose should be to create understanding by sharing objective, factual information. Specific purpose and thesis statements help establish a speaker's goal and purpose and can serve as useful reference points to keep a speech on track. When reviewing your specific purpose and thesis statement, look for words like *should/shouldn't*, *good/bad*, and *right/wrong*, as these often indicate a persuasive slant in the speech.

Second, information should function to clarify and explain in an informative speech. Supporting materials shouldn't function to prove a thesis or to provide reasons for an audience to accept the thesis, as they do in persuasive speeches. Although informative messages can end up influencing the thoughts or behaviors of audience members, that shouldn't be the goal.

Third, an audience's perception of the information and the speaker helps determine whether a speech is classified as informative or persuasive. The audience must perceive that the information being presented is not controversial or disputed, which will lead audience members to view the information as factual. The audience must also accept the speaker as a credible source of information. Being prepared, citing credible sources, and engaging the audience help establish a speaker's credibility. Last, an audience must perceive the speaker to be trustworthy and not have a hidden agenda. Avoiding persuasion is a common challenge for informative speakers, but it is something to consider, as violating the speaking occasion may be perceived as unethical by the audience. Be aware of the overall tone of your speech by reviewing your specific purpose and thesis to make sure your speech isn't tipping from informative to persuasive.

Words like should/shouldn't, good/bad, *and* right/wrong *in a specific purpose and/or thesis statement often indicate that the speaker's purpose is tipping from informative to persuasive.*

Avoiding Information Overload

Many informative speakers have a tendency to pack a ten-minute speech with as much information as possible. This can result in **information overload**, which is a barrier to effective listening that occurs when a speech contains more information than an audience can process. Editing can be a difficult task, but it's an important skill to hone, because you will be editing more than you think. Whether it's reading through an e-mail before you send it, condensing a report down to an executive summary, or figuring out how to fit a client's message on the front page of a brochure, you will have to learn how to discern what information is best to keep and what can be thrown out. In speaking, being a discerning editor is useful because it helps avoid information overload. While a receiver may not be attracted to a brochure that's covered in text, they could take the time to read it, and reread it, if necessary. Audience members cannot conduct their own review while listening to a speaker live. Unlike readers, audience members can't review words over and over. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 10. Therefore competent speakers, especially informative speakers who are trying to teach their audience something, should adapt their message to a listening audience. To help avoid information overload, adapt your message to make it more listenable.

Although the results vary, research shows that people only remember a portion of a message days or even hours after receiving it. Laura Janusik, "Listening Facts," accessed March 6, 2012, http://d1025403.site.myhosting.com/files.listen.org/Facts.htm. If you spend 100 percent of your speech introducing new information, you have wasted approximately 30 percent of your time and your audience's time. Information overload is a barrier to effective listening, and as good speakers, we should be aware of the limitations of listening and compensate for that in our speech preparation and presentation. I recommend that my students follow a guideline that suggests spending no more than 30 percent of your speech introducing new material and 70 percent of your speech repackaging that information. I specifically use the word *repackaging* and not *repeating*. Simply repeating the same information would also be a barrier to effective listening, since people would just get bored. Repackaging will help ensure that your audience retains most of the key information in the speech. Even if they don't remember every example, they will remember the main underlying point.

Avoiding information overload requires a speaker to be a good translator of information. To be a good translator, you can compare an unfamiliar concept with something familiar, give examples from real life, connect your information to current events or popular culture, or supplement supporting material like statistics with related translations of that information. These are just some of the strategies a good speaker can use. While translating information is important for any oral presentation, it is especially important when conveying technical information. Being able to translate complex or technical information for a lay audience leads to more effective informing, because the audience feels like they are being addressed on their level and don't feel lost or "talked down to." The History Channel show *The Universe* provides excellent examples of informative speakers who act as good translators. The scientists and experts featured on the show are masters of translating technical information, like physics, into concrete examples that most people can relate to based on their everyday experiences.

Following the guidelines established in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech" for organizing a speech can also help a speaker avoid information overload. Good speakers build in repetition and redundancy to make their content more memorable and their speech more consumable. Preview statements, section transitions, and review statements are some examples of orienting material that helps focus an audience's attention and facilitates the process of informing. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 12.

Engaging Your Audience

As a speaker, you are competing for the attention of your audience against other internal and external stimuli. Getting an audience engaged and then keeping their attention is a challenge for any speaker, but it can be especially difficult when speaking to inform. As was discussed earlier, once you are in the professional world, you will most likely be speaking informatively about topics related to your experience and expertise. Some speakers fall into the trap of thinking that their content knowledge is enough to sustain them through an informative speech or that their position in an organization means that an audience will listen to them and appreciate their information despite their delivery. Content expertise is not enough to be an effective speaker. A person must also have speaking expertise. Rudolph Verderber, Essentials of Informative Speaking: Theory and Contexts (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 4. Effective speakers, even renowned experts, must still translate their wealth of content knowledge into information that is suited for oral transmission, audience centered, and well organized. I'm sure we're all familiar with the stereotype of the absentminded professor or the genius who thinks elegantly in his or her head but can't convey that same elegance verbally. Having well-researched and organized supporting material is an important part of effective informative speaking, but having good content is not enough.

Audience members are more likely to stay engaged with a speaker they view as credible. So complementing good supporting material with a practiced and fluent delivery increases credibility and audience engagement. In addition, as we discussed earlier, good informative speakers act as translators of information. Repackaging information into concrete familiar examples is also a strategy for making your speech more engaging. Understanding relies on being able to apply incoming information to life experiences.

Repackaging information is also a good way to appeal to different learning styles, as you can present the same content in various ways, which helps reiterate a point. While this strategy is useful with any speech, since the goal of informing is teaching, it makes sense to include a focus on learning within your audience adaptation. There are three main **learning styles** that help determine how people most effectively receive and process information: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Neil Fleming, "The VARK Helpsheets," accessed March 6, 2012, http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=helpsheets. Visual learners respond well to information presented via visual aids, so repackage information using text, graphics, charts and other media. Public speaking is a good way to present information for auditory learners who process information well when they hear it. Kinesthetic learners are tactile; they like to learn through movement and "doing." Asking for volunteers to help with a demonstration, if appropriate, is a way to involve kinesthetic learners in your speech. You can also have an interactive review activity at the end of a speech, much like many teachers incorporate an activity after a lesson to reinforce the material.

Sample Informative Speech

Title: Going Green in the World of Education

General purpose: To inform

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will be able to describe some ways in which schools are going green.

Thesis statement: The green movement has transformed school buildings, how teachers teach, and the environment in which students learn.

Introduction

Attention getter: Did you know that attending or working at a green school can lead students and teachers to have less health problems? Did you know that allowing more daylight into school buildings increases academic performance and can lessen attention and concentration challenges? Well, the research I will cite in my speech supports both of these claims, and these are just two of the many reasons why more schools, both grade schools and colleges, are going green.

Introduction of topic: Today, I'm going to inform you about the green movement that is affecting many schools.

Credibility and relevance: Because of my own desire to go into the field of education, I decided to research how schools are going green in the United States. But it's not just current and/or future teachers that will be affected by this trend. As students at Eastern Illinois University, you are already asked to make "greener" choices. Whether it's the little signs in the dorm rooms that ask you to turn off your lights when you leave the room, the reusable water bottles that

were given out on move-in day, or even our new Renewable Energy Center, the list goes on and on. Additionally, younger people in our lives, whether they be future children or younger siblings or relatives, will likely be affected by this continuing trend.

Preview statement: In order to better understand what makes a "green school," we need to learn about how K–12 schools are going green, how college campuses are going green, and how these changes affect students and teachers.

Transition: I'll begin with how K–12 schools are going green.

Body

I. According to the "About Us" section on their official website, the US Green Building Council was established in 1993 with the mission to promote sustainability in the building and construction industry, and it is this organization that is responsible for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, which is a well-respected green building certification system. While homes, neighborhoods, and businesses can also pursue LEED certification, I'll focus today on K–12 schools and college campuses.

A. It's important to note that principles of "going green" can be applied to the planning of a building from its first inception or be retroactively applied to existing buildings.

1. A 2011 article by Ash in Education Week notes that the pathway to creating a greener school is flexible based on the community and its needs.

a. In order to garner support for green initiatives, the article recommends that local leaders like superintendents, mayors, and college administrators become involved in the green movement.

b. Once local leaders are involved, the community, students, parents, faculty, and staff can be involved by serving on a task force, hosting a summit or conference, and implementing lessons about sustainability into everyday conversations and school curriculum.

2. The US Green Building Council's website also includes a tool kit with a lot of information about how to "green" existing schools.

B. Much of the efforts to green schools have focused on K–12 schools and districts, but what makes a school green?

1. According to the US Green Building Council's Center for Green Schools, green school buildings conserve energy and natural resources.

a. For example, Fossil Ridge High School in Fort Collins, Colorado, was built in 2006 and received LEED certification because it has automatic light sensors to conserve electricity and uses wind energy to offset nonrenewable energy use.

b. To conserve water, the school uses a pond for irrigation, has artificial turf on athletic fields, and installed low-flow toilets and faucets.

c. According to the 2006 report by certified energy manager Gregory Kats titled "Greening America's Schools," a LEED certified school uses 30–50 percent less energy, 30 percent less water, and reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent compared to a conventional school.

2. The Center for Green Schools also presents case studies that show how green school buildings also create healthier learning environments.

a. Many new building materials, carpeting, and furniture contain chemicals that are released into the air, which reduces indoor air quality.

b. So green schools purposefully purchase materials that are low in these chemicals.

c. Natural light and fresh air have also been shown to promote a healthier learning environment, so green buildings allow more daylight in and include functioning windows.

Transition: As you can see, K–12 schools are becoming greener; college campuses are also starting to go green.

II. Examples from the University of Denver and Eastern Illinois University show some of the potential for greener campuses around the country.

A. The University of Denver is home to the nation's first "green" law school.

1. According to the Sturm College of Law's website, the building was designed to use 40 percent less energy than a conventional building through the use of movement-sensor lighting; high-performance insulation in the walls, floors, and roof; and infrared sensors on water faucets and toilets.

2. Electric car recharging stations were also included in the parking garage, and the building has extra bike racks and even showers that students and faculty can use to freshen up if they bike or walk to school or work.

B. Eastern Illinois University has also made strides toward a more green campus.

1. Some of the dining halls on campus have gone "trayless," which according to a 2009 article by Calder in the journal Independent School has the potential to dramatically reduce the amount of water and chemical use, since there are no longer trays to wash, and also helps reduce food waste since people take less food without a tray.

2. The biggest change on campus has been the opening of the Renewable Energy Center in 2011, which according to EIU's website is one of the largest biomass renewable energy projects in the country.

a. The Renewable Energy Center uses slow-burn technology to use wood chips that are a byproduct of the lumber industry that would normally be discarded.

b. This helps reduce our dependency on our old coal-fired power plant, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

c. The project was the first known power plant to be registered with the US Green Building Council and is on track to receive LEED certification.

Transition: All these efforts to go green in K–12 schools and on college campuses will obviously affect students and teachers at the schools.

III. The green movement affects students and teachers in a variety of ways.

A. Research shows that going green positively affects a student's health.

1. Many schools are literally going green by including more green spaces such as recreation areas, gardens, and greenhouses, which according to a 2010 article in the Journal of Environmental Education by University of Colorado professor Susan Strife has been shown to benefit a child's cognitive skills, especially in the areas of increased concentration and attention capacity.

2. Additionally, the report I cited earlier, "Greening America's Schools," states that the improved air quality in green schools can lead to a 38 percent reduction in asthma incidents and that students in "green schools" had 51 percent less chance of catching a cold or the flu compared to children in conventional schools.

B. Standard steps taken to green schools can also help students academically.

1. The report "Greening America's Schools" notes that a recent synthesis of fifty-three studies found that more daylight in the school building leads to higher academic achievement.

2. The report also provides data that show how the healthier environment in green schools leads to better attendance and that in Washington, DC, and Chicago, schools improved their performance on standardized tests by 3–4 percent.

C. Going green can influence teachers' lesson plans as well their job satisfaction and physical health.

1. There are several options for teachers who want to "green" their curriculum.

a. According to the article in Education Week that I cited earlier, the Sustainability Education Clearinghouse is a free online tool that provides K–12 educators with the ability to share sustainability-oriented lesson ideas.

b. The Center for Green Schools also provides resources for all levels of teachers, from kindergarten to college, that can be used in the classroom.

2. The report "Greening America's Schools" claims that the overall improved working environment that a green school provides leads to higher teacher retention and less teacher turnover.

3. Just as students see health benefits from green schools, so do teachers, as the same report shows that teachers in these schools get sick less, resulting in a decrease of sick days by 7 percent.

Conclusion

Transition to conclusion and summary of importance: In summary, the going-green era has impacted every aspect of education in our school systems.

Review of main points: From K–12 schools to college campuses like ours, to the students and teachers in the schools, the green movement is changing the way we think about education and our environment.

Closing statement: As Glenn Cook, the editor in chief of the American School Board Journal, states on the Center for Green Schools's website, "The green schools movement is the biggest thing to happen to education since the introduction of technology to the classroom."

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Key Takeaways

Getting integrated: Informative speaking is likely the type of public speaking we will most often deliver and be audience to in our lives. Informative speaking is an important part of academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

Informative speeches teach an audience through objective factual information and can emerge from one or more of the following categories: objects, people, concepts, events, processes, and issues.Effective informative speaking requires good research skills, as speakers must include novel information, relevant and proxemic examples, and "take-away" information that audience members will find engaging and useful.

The four primary methods of informing are through definition, description, demonstration, or explanation.

Informing through definition entails defining concepts clearly and concisely using synonyms and antonyms, use or function, example, or etymology.

Informing through description entails creating detailed verbal pictures for your audience.

Informing through demonstration entails sharing verbal directions about how to do something while also physically demonstrating the steps.

Informing through explanation entails sharing how something works, how something came to be, or why something happened.

An effective informative speaker should avoid persuasion by reviewing the language used in the specific purpose and thesis statements, using objective supporting material, and appearing trustworthy to the audience.

An effective informative speaker should avoid information overload by repackaging information and building in repetition and orienting material like reviews and previews.

An effective informative speaker engages the audience by translating information into relevant and concrete examples that appeal to different learning styles.

Exercises

Getting integrated: How might you use informative speaking in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic?

Brainstorm potential topics for your informative speech and identify which topic category each idea falls into. Are there any risks of persuading for the topics you listed? If so, how can you avoid persuasion if you choose that topic?

Of the four methods of informing (through definition, description, demonstration, or explanation), which do you think is most effective for you? Why?

11.2 Persuasive Speaking

Learning Objectives

Explain how claims, evidence, and warrants function to create an argument.

Identify strategies for choosing a persuasive speech topic.

Identify strategies for adapting a persuasive speech based on an audience's orientation to the proposition.

Distinguish among propositions of fact, value, and policy.

Choose an organizational pattern that is fitting for a persuasive speech topic.

We produce and receive persuasive messages daily, but we don't often stop to think about how we make the arguments we do or the quality of the arguments that we receive. In this section, we'll learn the components of an argument, how to choose a good persuasive speech topic, and how to adapt and organize a persuasive message.

Foundation of Persuasion

Persuasive speaking seeks to influence the beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors of audience members. In order to persuade, a speaker has to construct arguments that appeal to audience members. Arguments form around three

components: claim, evidence, and warrant. The **claim** is the statement that will be supported by evidence. Your thesis statement is the overarching claim for your speech, but you will make other claims within the speech to support the larger thesis. **Evidence**, also called grounds, supports the claim. The main points of your persuasive speech and the supporting material you include serve as evidence. For example, a speaker may make the following claim: "There should be a national law against texting while driving." The speaker could then support the claim by providing the following evidence: "Research from the US Department of Transportation has found that texting while driving creates a crash risk that is twenty-three times worse than driving while not distracted." The **warrant** is the underlying justification that connects the claim and the evidence. One warrant for the claim and evidence cited in this example is that the US Department of Transportation is an institution that funds research conducted by credible experts. An additional and more implicit warrant is that people shouldn't do things they know are unsafe.

Figure 11.2 Components of an Argument [Note: This graphic is incorrect. The lower left box should read "Evidence", not "Claim".]

The quality of your evidence often impacts the strength of your warrant, and some warrants are stronger than others. A speaker could also provide evidence to support their claim advocating for a national ban on texting and driving by saying, "I have personally seen people almost wreck while trying to text." While this type of evidence can also be persuasive, it provides a different type and strength of warrant since it is based on personal experience. In general, the anecdotal evidence from personal experience would be given a weaker warrant than the evidence from the national research report. The same process works in our legal system when a judge evaluates the connection between a claim and evidence. If someone steals my car, I could say to the police, "I'm pretty sure Mario did it because when I said hi to him on campus the other day, he didn't say hi back, which proves he's mad at me." A judge faced with that evidence is unlikely to issue a warrant for Mario's arrest. Fingerprint evidence from the steering wheel that has been matched with a suspect is much more likely to warrant arrest.

As you put together a persuasive argument, you act as the judge. You can evaluate arguments that you come across in your research by analyzing the connection (the warrant) between the claim and the evidence. If the warrant is strong, you may want to highlight that argument in your speech. You may also be able to point out a weak warrant in an argument that goes against your position, which you could then include in your speech. Every argument starts by putting together a claim and evidence, but arguments grow to include many interrelated units.

Choosing a Persuasive Speech Topic

As with any speech, topic selection is important and is influenced by many factors. Good persuasive speech topics are current, controversial, and have important implications for society. If your topic is currently being discussed on television, in newspapers, in the lounges in your dorm, or around your family's dinner table, then it's a current topic. A persuasive speech aimed at getting audience members to wear seat belts in cars wouldn't have much current relevance, given that statistics consistently show that most people wear seat belts. Giving the same speech would have been much more timely in the 1970s when there was a huge movement to increase seat-belt use.

Many topics that are current are also controversial, which is what gets them attention by the media and citizens. Current and controversial topics will be more engaging for your audience. A persuasive speech to encourage audience members to donate blood or recycle wouldn't be very controversial, since the benefits of both practices are widely agreed on. However, arguing that the restrictions on blood donation by men who have had sexual relations with men be lifted would be controversial. I must caution here that controversial is not the same as inflammatory. An inflammatory topic is one that evokes strong reactions from an audience for the sake of provoking a reaction. Being provocative for no good reason or choosing a topic that is extremist will damage your credibility and prevent you from achieving your speech goals.

You should also choose a topic that is important to you and to society as a whole. As we have already discussed in this book, our voices are powerful, as it is through communication that we participate and make change in

society. Therefore we should take seriously opportunities to use our voices to speak publicly. Choosing a speech topic that has implications for society is probably a better application of your public speaking skills than choosing to persuade the audience that Lebron James is the best basketball player in the world or that Superman is a better hero than Spiderman. Although those topics may be very important to you, they don't carry the same social weight as many other topics you could choose to discuss. Remember that speakers have ethical obligations to the audience and should take the opportunity to speak seriously.

You will also want to choose a topic that connects to your own interests and passions. If you are an education major, it might make more sense to do a persuasive speech about funding for public education than the death penalty. If there are hot-button issues for you that make you get fired up and veins bulge out in your neck, then it may be a good idea to avoid those when speaking in an academic or professional context.

Choosing such topics may interfere with your ability to deliver a speech in a competent and ethical manner. You want to care about your topic, but you also want to be able to approach it in a way that's going to make people want to listen to you. Most people tune out speakers they perceive to be too ideologically entrenched and write them off as extremists or zealots.

You also want to ensure that your topic is actually persuasive. Draft your thesis statement as an "I believe" statement so your stance on an issue is clear. Also, think of your main points as reasons to support your thesis. Students end up with speeches that aren't very persuasive in nature if they don't think of their main points as reasons. Identifying arguments that counter your thesis is also a good exercise to help ensure your topic is persuasive. If you can clearly and easily identify a competing thesis statement and supporting reasons, then your topic and approach are arguable.

Review of Tips for Choosing a Persuasive Speech Topic

Choose a topic that is **current**.

Not current. People should use seat belts.

Current. People should not text while driving.

Choose a topic that is **controversial**.

Not controversial. People should recycle.

Controversial. Recycling should be mandatory by law.

Choose a topic that meaningfully impacts society.

Not as impactful. Superman is the best superhero.

Impactful. Colleges and universities should adopt zero-tolerance bullying policies.

Write a thesis statement that is clearly **argumentative and states your stance**.

Unclear thesis. Homeschooling is common in the United States.

Clear, argumentative thesis with stance. Homeschooling does not provide the same benefits of traditional education and should be strictly monitored and limited.

Adapting Persuasive Messages

Competent speakers should consider their audience throughout the speech-making process. Given that persuasive messages seek to directly influence the audience in some way, audience adaptation becomes even more important. If possible, poll your audience to find out their orientation toward your thesis. I read my students' thesis statements aloud and have the class indicate whether they agree with, disagree with, or are neutral in regards to the proposition. It is unlikely that you will have a homogenous audience, meaning that there will probably be some who agree, some who disagree, and some who are neutral. So you may employ all of the following strategies, in varying degrees, in your persuasive speech.

When you have audience members who already agree with your proposition, you should focus on intensifying their agreement. You can also assume that they have foundational background knowledge of the topic, which means you can take the time to inform them about lesser-known aspects of a topic or cause to further reinforce their agreement. Rather than move these audience members from disagreement to agreement, you can focus on moving them from agreement to action. Remember, calls to action should be as specific as possible to help you capitalize on audience members' motivation in the moment so they are more likely to follow through on the action.

There are two main reasons audience members may be neutral in regards to your topic: (1) they are uninformed about the topic or (2) they do not think the topic affects them. In this case, you should focus on instilling a concern for the topic. Uninformed audiences may need background information before they can decide if they agree or disagree with your proposition. If the issue is familiar but audience members are neutral because they don't see how the topic affects them, focus on getting the audience's attention and demonstrating relevance. Remember

that concrete and proxemic supporting materials will help an audience find relevance in a topic. Students who pick narrow or unfamiliar topics will have to work harder to persuade their audience, but neutral audiences often provide the most chance of achieving your speech goal since even a small change may move them into agreement.

When audience members disagree with your proposition, you should focus on changing their minds. To effectively persuade, you must be seen as a credible speaker. When an audience is hostile to your proposition, establishing credibility is even more important, as audience members may be quick to discount or discredit someone who doesn't appear prepared or doesn't present well-researched and supported information. Don't give an audience a chance to write you off before you even get to share your best evidence. When facing a disagreeable audience, the goal should also be small change. You may not be able to switch someone's position completely, but influencing him or her is still a success. Aside from establishing your credibility, you should also establish common ground with an audience.

Acknowledging areas of disagreement and logically refuting counterarguments in your speech is also a way to approach persuading an audience in disagreement, as it shows that you are open-minded enough to engage with other perspectives.

Determining Your Proposition

The proposition of your speech is the overall direction of the content and how that relates to the speech goal. A persuasive speech will fall primarily into one of three categories: propositions of fact, value, or policy. A speech may have elements of any of the three propositions, but you can usually determine the overall proposition of a speech from the specific purpose and thesis statements.

Propositions of fact focus on beliefs and try to establish that something "is or isn't." **Propositions of value** focus on persuading audience members that something is "good or bad," "right or wrong," or "desirable or undesirable." **Propositions of policy** advocate that something "should or shouldn't" be done. Since most persuasive speech topics can be approached as propositions of fact, value, or policy, it is a good idea to start thinking about what kind of proposition you want to make, as it will influence how you go about your research and writing. As you can see in the following example using the topic of global warming, the type of proposition changes the types of supporting materials you would need:

- **Proposition of fact.** Global warming is caused by increased greenhouse gases related to human activity.
- **Proposition of value.** America's disproportionately large amount of pollution relative to other countries is wrong.
- **Proposition of policy.** There should be stricter emission restrictions on individual cars.

To support propositions of fact, you would want to present a logical argument based on objective facts that can then be used to build persuasive arguments. Propositions of value may require you to appeal more to your audience's emotions and cite expert and lay testimony. Persuasive speeches about policy usually require you to research existing and previous laws or procedures and determine if any relevant legislation or propositions are currently being considered.

"Getting Critical"

Persuasion and Masculinity

The traditional view of rhetoric that started in ancient Greece and still informs much of our views on persuasion today has been critiqued for containing Western and masculine biases. Traditional persuasion has been linked to Western and masculine values of domination, competition, and change, which have been critiqued as coercive and violent. Sally M. Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric," Women's Studies International Quarterly 2 (1979): 195–201.

Communication scholars proposed an alternative to traditional persuasive rhetoric in the form of invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric differs from a traditional view of persuasive rhetoric that "attempts to win over an opponent, or to advocate the correctness of a single position in a very complex issue." Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T. M. Linda Scholz, "Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric: Invitational Rhetoric and a Move toward Civility," Western Journal of Communication 72 (2008): 436. Instead, invitational rhetoric proposes a model of reaching consensus through dialogue. The goal is to create a climate in which growth and change can occur but isn't required for one person to "win" an argument over another. Each person in a communication situation is acknowledged to have a standpoint that is valid but can still be influenced through the offering of alternative perspectives and the invitation to engage with and discuss these standpoints. Kathleen J. Ryan and Elizabeth J. Natalle, "Fusing Horizons: Standpoint Hermeneutics and Invitational Rhetoric," Rhetoric Society Quarterly 31 (2001): 69–90. Safety, value, and freedom are three important parts of invitational rhetoric. Safety involves a feeling of security in which audience members and speakers feel like their ideas and contributions will not be denigrated. Value refers to the notion that each person in a communication encounter is worthy of recognition and that people are willing to step outside their own perspectives to better understand others. Last, freedom is present in communication when communicators do not limit the thinking or decisions of others, allowing all participants to speak up. Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T. M. Linda Scholz, "Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric: Invitational Rhetoric and a Move toward Civility," Western Journal of Communication 72 (2008): 436–37.

Invitational rhetoric doesn't claim that all persuasive rhetoric is violent. Instead, it acknowledges that some persuasion is violent and that the connection between persuasion and violence is worth exploring. Invitational rhetoric has the potential to contribute to the civility of communication in our society. When we are civil, we are capable of engaging with and appreciating different perspectives while still understanding our own. People aren't attacked or reviled because their views diverge from ours. Rather than reducing the world to "us against them, black or white, and right or wrong," invitational rhetoric encourages us to acknowledge human perspectives in all their complexity. Jennifer Emerling Bone, Cindy L. Griffin, and T. M. Linda Scholz, "Beyond Traditional Conceptualizations of Rhetoric: Invitational Rhetoric and a Move toward Civility," Western Journal of Communication 72 (2008): 457.

What is your reaction to the claim that persuasion includes Western and masculine biases?

What are some strengths and weaknesses of the proposed alternatives to traditional persuasion?

In what situations might an invitational approach to persuasion be useful? In what situations might you want to rely on traditional models of persuasion?

Organizing a Persuasive Speech

We have already discussed several patterns for organizing your speech, but some organization strategies are specific to persuasive speaking. Some persuasive speech topics lend themselves to a topical organization pattern, which breaks the larger topic up into logical divisions. Earlier, in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", we discussed recency and primacy, and in this chapter we discussed adapting a persuasive speech based on the audience's orientation toward the proposition. These concepts can be connected when organizing a persuasive speech topically. Primacy means putting your strongest information first and is based on the idea that audience members put more weight on what they hear first. This strategy can be especially useful when addressing an audience that disagrees with your proposition, as you can try to win them over early. Recency means putting your strongest information last to leave a powerful impression. This can be useful when you are building to a climax in your speech, specifically if you include a call to action.

The problem-solution pattern is an organizational pattern that advocates for a particular approach to solve a problem. You would provide evidence to show that a problem exists and then propose a solution with additional evidence or reasoning to justify the course of action. One main point addressing the problem and one main point addressing the solution may be sufficient, but you are not limited to two. You could add a main point between the

problem and solution that outlines other solutions that have failed. You can also combine the problem-solution pattern with the cause-effect pattern or expand the speech to fit with Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

As was mentioned in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", the cause-effect pattern can be used for informative speaking when the relationship between the cause and effect is not contested. The pattern is more fitting for persuasive speeches when the relationship between the cause and effect is controversial or unclear. There are several ways to use causes and effects to structure a speech. You could have a two-point speech that argues from cause to effect or from effect to cause. You could also have more than one cause that lead to the same effect or a single cause that leads to multiple effects. The following are some examples of thesis statements that correspond to various organizational patterns. As you can see, the same general topic area, prison overcrowding, is used for each example. This illustrates the importance of considering your organizational options early in the speech-making process, since the pattern you choose will influence your researching and writing.

Persuasive Speech Thesis Statements by Organizational Pattern

- **Problem-solution.** Prison overcrowding is a serious problem that we can solve by finding alternative rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.
- **Problem–failed solution–proposed solution.** Prison overcrowding is a serious problem that shouldn't be solved by building more prisons; instead, we should support alternative rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.
- **Cause-effect.** Prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to lesser sentences for violent criminals.
- **Cause-cause-effect.** State budgets are being slashed and prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to lesser sentences for violent criminals.
- **Cause-effect-effect.** Prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to increased behavioral problems among inmates and lesser sentences for violent criminals.
- **Cause-effect-solution.** Prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to lesser sentences for violent criminals; therefore we need to find alternative rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence is an organizational pattern designed for persuasive speaking that appeals to audience members' needs and motivates them to action. If your persuasive speaking goals include a call to action, you may want to consider this organizational pattern. We already learned about the five steps of Monroe's Motivated Sequence in Chapter 9 "Preparing a Speech", but we will review them here with an example:

Step 1: Attention

- Hook the audience by making the topic relevant to them.
- Imagine living a full life, retiring, and slipping into your golden years. As you get older you become more dependent on others and move into an assisted-living facility. Although you think life will be easier, things get worse as you experience abuse and mistreatment from the staff. You report the abuse to a nurse and wait, but nothing happens and the abuse continues. Elder abuse is a common occurrence, and unlike child abuse, there are no laws in our state that mandate complaints of elder abuse be reported or investigated.

Step 2: Need

- Cite evidence to support the fact that the issue needs to be addressed.
- According to the American Psychological Association, one to two million elderly US Americans have been abused by their caretakers. In our state, those in the medical, psychiatric, and social work field are required to report suspicion of child abuse but are not mandated to report suspicions of elder abuse.

Step 3: Satisfaction

- Offer a solution and persuade the audience that it is feasible and well thought out.

- There should be a federal law mandating that suspicion of elder abuse be reported and that all claims of elder abuse be investigated.

Step 4: Visualization

- Take the audience beyond your solution and help them visualize the positive results of implementing it or the negative consequences of not.
- Elderly people should not have to live in fear during their golden years. A mandatory reporting law for elderly abuse will help ensure that the voices of our elderly loved ones will be heard.

Step 5: Action

- Call your audience to action by giving them concrete steps to follow to engage in a particular action or to change a thought or behavior.
- I urge you to take action in two ways. First, raise awareness about this issue by talking to your own friends and family. Second, contact your representatives at the state and national level to let them know that elder abuse should be taken seriously and given the same level of importance as other forms of abuse. I brought cards with the contact information for our state and national representatives for this area. Please take one at the end of my speech. A short e-mail or phone call can help end the silence surrounding elder abuse.

Key Takeaways

Good persuasive speech topics are current, controversial (but not inflammatory), and important to the speaker and society.

When audience members agree with the proposal, focus on intensifying their agreement and moving them to action.

When audience members disagree with the proposal, focus on establishing your credibility, build common ground with the audience, and incorporate counterarguments and refute them.

Propositions of fact focus on establishing that something "is or isn't" or is "true or false."

Propositions of policy advocate that something "should or shouldn't" be done.

Persuasive speeches can be organized using the following patterns: problem-solution, cause-effect, cause-effect-solution, or Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

Exercises

Getting integrated: Give an example of persuasive messages that you might need to create in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic. Then do the same thing for persuasive messages you may receive.

To help ensure that your persuasive speech topic is persuasive and not informative, identify the claims, evidence, and warrants you may use in your argument. In addition, write a thesis statement that refutes your topic idea and identify evidence and warrants that could support that counterargument.

Determine if your speech is primarily a proposition of fact, value, or policy. How can you tell? Identify an organizational pattern that you think will work well for your speech topic, draft one sentence for each of your main points, and arrange them according to the pattern you chose.

11.3 Persuasive Reasoning and Fallacies

Learning Objectives

Define inductive, deductive, and causal reasoning.

Evaluate the quality of inductive, deductive, and causal reasoning.

Identify common fallacies of reasoning.

Persuasive speakers should be concerned with what strengthens and weakens an argument. Earlier we discussed the process of building an argument with claims and evidence and how warrants are the underlying justifications that connect the two. We also discussed the importance of evaluating the strength of a warrant, because strong warrants are usually more persuasive. Knowing different types of reasoning can help you put claims and evidence together in persuasive ways and help you evaluate the quality of arguments that you encounter. Further, being able to identify common fallacies of reasoning can help you be a more critical consumer of persuasive messages.

Reasoning

Reasoning refers to the process of making sense of things around us. In order to understand our experiences, draw conclusions from information, and present new ideas, we must use reasoning. We often reason without being aware of it, but becoming more aware of how we think can empower us to be better producers and consumers of communicative messages. The three types of reasoning we will explore are inductive, deductive, and causal.

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning reaches conclusions through the citation of examples and is the most frequently used form of logical reasoning. Otis M. Walter, Speaking to Inform and Persuade (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 58. While introductory speakers are initially attracted to inductive reasoning because it seems easy, it can be difficult to employ well. Inductive reasoning, unlike deductive reasoning, doesn't result in true or false conclusions. Instead, since conclusions are generalized based on observations or examples, conclusions are "more likely" or "less likely." Despite the fact that this type of reasoning isn't definitive, it can still be valid and persuasive.

Some arguments based on inductive reasoning will be more cogent, or convincing and relevant, than others. For example, inductive reasoning can be weak when claims are made too generally. An argument that fraternities should be abolished from campus because they contribute to underage drinking and do not uphold high academic standards could be countered by providing examples of fraternities that sponsor alcohol education programming for the campus and have members that have excelled academically. Otis M. Walter, Speaking to Inform and Persuade (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 58. In this case, one overly general claim is countered by another general claim, and both of them have some merit. It would be more effective to present a series of facts and reasons and then share the conclusion or generalization that you have reached from them.

You can see inductive reasoning used in the following speech excerpt from President George W. Bush's address to the nation on the evening of September 11, 2001. Notice how he lists a series of events from the day, which builds to his conclusion that the terrorist attacks failed in their attempt to shake the foundation of America.

> Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge—huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong.
>
> A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America.

If a speaker is able to provide examples that are concrete, proxemic, and relevant to the audience, as Bush did in this example, audience members are prompted to think of additional examples that connect to their own lives. Inductive reasoning can be useful when an audience disagrees with your proposition. As you present logically connected examples as evidence that build to a conclusion, the audience may be persuaded by your evidence before they realize that the coming conclusion will counter what they previously thought.

Reasoning by analogy is a type of inductive reasoning that argues that what is true in one set of circumstances will be true in another. Otis M. Walter, Speaking to Inform and Persuade (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 64. Reasoning by analogy has been criticized and questioned by logicians, since two sets of circumstances are never exactly the same. While this is true, our goal when using reasoning by analogy in persuasive speaking is not to create absolutely certain conclusions but to cite cases and supporting evidence that can influence an audience. For example, let's say you are trying to persuade a university to adopt an alcohol education program by citing the program's success at other institutions. Since two universities are never exactly the same, the argument can't be airtight. To better support this argument, you could first show that the program was actually successful using various types of supporting material such as statistics from campus offices and testimony from students and staff. Second, you could show how the cases relate by highlighting similarities in the campus setting, culture, demographics, and previous mission. Since you can't argue that the schools are similar in all ways, choose to highlight significant similarities. Also, it's better to acknowledge significant limitations of the analogy and provide additional supporting material to address them than it is to ignore or hide such limitations.

So how do we evaluate inductive reasoning? When inductive reasoning is used to test scientific arguments, there is rigorous testing and high standards that must be met for a conclusion to be considered valid. Inductive reasoning in persuasive speaking is employed differently. A speaker cannot cite every example that exists to build to a conclusion, so to evaluate inductive reasoning you must examine the examples that are cited in ways other than quantity. First, the examples should be sufficient, meaning that enough are cited to support the conclusion. If not, you risk committing the hasty generalization fallacy. A speaker can expect that the audience will be able to think of some examples as well, so there is no set number on how many examples is sufficient. If the audience is familiar with the topic, then fewer examples are probably sufficient, while more may be needed for unfamiliar topics. A speaker can make his or her use of reasoning by example more powerful by showing that the examples correspond to the average case, which may require additional supporting evidence in the form of statistics. Arguing that teacher salaries should be increased by providing an example of a teacher who works side jobs and pays for his or her own school supplies could be effectively supported by showing that this teacher's salary corresponds to the national average. Otis M. Walter, Speaking to Inform and Persuade (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 59–60.

Second, the examples should be typical, meaning they weren't cherry-picked to match the point being argued. A speaker who argues to defund the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) because the organization supports art that is "pornographic and offensive" may cite five examples of grants given for projects that caused such controversy. Failing to mention that these examples were pulled from the more than 128,000 grants issued by the NEA would be an inappropriate use of inductive reasoning since the examples aren't sufficient or typical enough to warrant the argument. Another way to support inductive arguments is to show that the examples are a fair sample, meaning they are representative of the larger whole. Arguing that college athletes shouldn't receive scholarships because they do not have the scholastic merit of other students and have less academic achievement could be supported by sharing several examples. But if those examples were not representative, then they are biased, and the reasoning faulty. A speaker would need to show that the athletes used in the example are representative, in terms of their race, gender, sport, and background, of the population of athletes at the university.

Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning derives specifics from what is already known. It was the preferred form of reasoning used by ancient rhetoricians like Aristotle to make logical arguments. Martha D. Cooper and William L. Nothstine, Power Persuasion: Moving an Ancient Art into the Media Age (Greenwood, IN: Educational Video Group, 1996), 27. A **syllogism** is an example of deductive reasoning that is commonly used when teaching logic. A syllogism is an example of deductive reasoning in which a conclusion is supported by major and minor premises. The conclusion of a valid argument can be deduced from the major and minor premises. A commonly used example of a syllogism is "All humans are mortal. Socrates is a human. Socrates is mortal." In this case, the conclusion, "Socrates is mortal," is derived from the major premise, "All humans are mortal," and the minor premise, "Socrates is a human." In some cases, the major and minor premises of a syllogism may be taken for

granted as true. In the previous example, the major premise is presumed true because we have no knowledge of an immortal person to disprove the statement. The minor premise is presumed true because Socrates looks and acts like other individuals we know to be human. Detectives or scientists using such logic would want to test their conclusion. We could test our conclusion by stabbing Socrates to see if he dies, but since the logic of the syllogism is sound, it may be better to cut Socrates a break and deem the argument valid. Since most arguments are more sophisticated than the previous example, speakers need to support their premises with research and evidence to establish their validity before deducing their conclusion.

A syllogism can lead to incorrect conclusions if one of the premises isn't true, as in the following example:

- All presidents have lived in the White House. (Major premise)
- George Washington was president. (Minor premise)
- George Washington lived in the White House. (Conclusion)

In the previous example, the major premise was untrue, since John Adams, our second president, was the first president to live in the White House. This causes the conclusion to be false. A syllogism can also exhibit faulty logic even if the premises are both true but are unrelated, as in the following example:

- Penguins are black and white. (Major premise)
- Some old television shows are black and white. (Minor premise)
- Some penguins are old television shows. (Conclusion)

Causal Reasoning

Causal reasoning argues to establish a relationship between a cause and an effect. When speakers attempt to argue for a particular course of action based on potential positive or negative consequences that may result, they are using causal reasoning. Such reasoning is evident in the following example: Eating more local foods will boost the local economy and make you healthier. The "if/then" relationship that is set up in causal reasoning can be persuasive, but the reasoning isn't always sound. Rather than establishing a true cause-effect relationship, speakers more often set up a correlation, which means there is a relationship between two things but there are other contextual influences.

To use causal reasoning effectively and ethically, speakers should avoid claiming a direct relationship between a cause and an effect when such a connection cannot be proven. Instead of arguing that "x caused y," it is more accurate for a speaker to say "x influenced y." Causal thinking is often used when looking to blame something or someone, as can be seen in the following example: It's the president's fault that the economy hasn't recovered more. While such a statement may garner a speaker some political capital, it is not based on solid reasoning. Economic and political processes are too complex to distill to such a simple cause-effect relationship. A speaker would need to use more solid reasoning, perhaps inductive reasoning through examples, to build up enough evidence to support that a correlation exists and a causal relationship is likely. When using causal reasoning, present evidence that shows the following: (1) the cause occurred before the effect, (2) the cause led to the effect, and (3) it is unlikely that other causes produced the effect.

Review of Types of Reasoning

- **Inductive.** Arguing from examples to support a conclusion; includes reasoning by analogy. Examples should be sufficient, typical, and representative to warrant a strong argument.
- **Deductive.** Deriving specifics from what is already known; includes syllogisms. Premises that lead to a conclusion must be true, relevant, and related for the argument to be valid.
- **Causal.** Argues to establish a relationship between a cause and an effect. Usually involves a correlation rather than a true causal relationship.

Fallacies of Reasoning

Fallacies are flaws within the logic or reasoning of an argument. Although we will discuss 10 common fallacies,

more than 125 have been identified and named. It's important to note that the presence of a fallacy in an argument doesn't mean that it can't be persuasive. In fact, many people are persuaded by fallacious arguments because they do not identify the fallacy within the argument. Fallacies are often the last effort of uninformed or ill-prepared speakers who find that they have nothing better to say. Being aware of the forms of reasoning and fallacies makes us more critical consumers of persuasive messages, which is a substantial benefit of studying persuasive speaking that affects personal, political, and professional aspects of our lives.

Hasty Generalization

The hasty generalization fallacy relates to inductive reasoning and is the result of too few examples being cited to warrant the generalization. Jumping to conclusions is tempting, especially when pressed for time, but making well-researched and supported arguments is key to being an effective and ethical speaker. Making a claim that train travel is not safe and citing two recent derailments that resulted in injury doesn't produce a strong warrant when viewed in relation to the number of train passengers who travel safely every day.

False Analogy

The false analogy fallacy also relates to inductive reasoning and results when the situations or circumstances being compared are not similar enough. A common false analogy that people make is comparing something to putting a person on the moon: "If we can put a person on the moon, why can't we figure out a way to make the tax code easier to understand?" This question doesn't acknowledge the different skill sets and motivations involved in the two examples being compared.

False Cause

The false cause fallacy relates to causal reasoning and occurs when a speaker argues, with insufficient evidence, that one thing caused or causes another. When I was in high school, teachers used to say that wearing baseball caps would make us go bald when we got older. In an attempt to persuade us to not wear hats in the classroom, they were arguing, fallaciously, that wearing baseball caps is what causes baldness. When a false cause argument is made after the "effect," it is referred to in Latin as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, which means "after this, therefore because of this." Blaming bad fortune on superstitions is a good example of faulty reasoning that tries to argue for a connection between an "effect" that has already occurred and its preceding "cause." My bad luck is more likely attributable to poor decisions I have made or random interference than the mirror I broke while moving two years ago.

False Authority

The false authority fallacy results when the person making an argument doesn't actually have the qualifications to be credible but is perceived as credible because they are respected or admired. Despite the fact that this form of argument is fallacious, it is obviously quite effective. Advertisers spend millions of dollars to get celebrities and athletes to sell us their products because of the persuasive potential these stars carry in their persona, not in their ability to argue a point. Voters might be persuaded to support a candidate because of a famous musician's endorsement without questioning the political beliefs of either the musician or the politician to see if they match up with their own.

Bandwagon

Parents and other sources of guidance in our lives have tried to keep us from falling for the bandwagon fallacy. When your mom responds to your argument that you should get to go to the party because everyone else is by asking, "If everyone else jumped off a bridge, would you?" she is rightfully pointing out the fallacy in your argument. In a public-speaking-related example, I have had students try to persuade their audience to buy and eat more organic foods based on their increasing popularity. In short, popular appeal and frequency of use are not strong warrants to support an argument. Just because something is popular, doesn't mean it's good.

False Dilemma

The false dilemma fallacy occurs when a speaker rhetorically backs his or her audience into a corner, presenting them with only two options and arguing that they must choose either one or the other. This is also known as the "either/or" fallacy. Critical thinkers know that the world can't be simplified to black and white, good and bad, or right and wrong. Yet many people rely on such oversimplifications when making arguments. A speaker who argues that immigrants to the United States should learn English or go back to their own country doesn't acknowledge that there are many successful immigrants who have successful lives and contribute to society without speaking English fluently. The speaker also ignores the fact that many immigrants do not have access to English language instruction or the time to take such classes because they are busy with their own jobs and families. Granted, such a rhetorical strategy does make it easier to discuss complex issues and try to force people into a decision, but it also removes gray area in the form of context that can be really important for making a decision. Be critical of speakers and messages that claim there are only two options from which to choose.

Ad Hominem

Ad hominem means "to the person" in Latin and refers to a common fallacy of attacking a person rather than an argument. Elementary school playgrounds and middle school hallways are often sites of ad hominem attacks. When one person runs out of good reasons to support their argument and retorts to the other, "Well you're ugly!" they have resorted to a fallacious ad hominem argument. You probably aren't surprised to know that politicians frequently rely on personal attacks, especially when they are sponsored by political action committees (PACs). The proliferation of these organizations resulted in an increase in "attack ads" during the 2012 presidential race. While all fallacious arguments detract from the quality of public communication, ad hominem arguments in particular diminish the civility of our society.

Slippery Slope

The slippery slope fallacy occurs when a person argues that one action will inevitably lead to a series of other actions. If we take one step down an icy hill it becomes difficult to get back up and you slide all the way down even though you only wanted to take one step. A slippery slope fallacy in a speech about US foreign policy might take the form of the following argument: If the United States goes to help this country in need, then we will be expected to intervene any time there's a conflict in the world.

Red Herring

The red herring fallacy is my favorite because it has an interesting origin—and it was used in *Scooby Doo*! The origin of the name of this fallacy comes from old foxhunting practices in England. When the hunters were training their dogs to stay on the trail of a fox, they would mark a trail with fox scent so the dog could practice following the scent. As a further test, they would take the smell of fish (like a red herring) and create a second trail leading in another direction. If a dog left the scent of the fox trail to follow the stronger and more noticeable scent trail left by the red herring, then the dog failed the test. The smartest and best-trained dogs weren't distracted by the fishy trail and stayed on the path. Basically every episode of Scooby Doo involves a red herring trick—for example, when the ghost at the amusement park turns out to be a distraction created by the owner to cover up his financial problems and shady business practices. A speaker who uses the red herring fallacy makes an argument that distracts from the discussion at hand. Bringing up socialism during an argument about nationalized health care is an example of a red herring fallacy.

Appeal to Tradition

The appeal to tradition fallacy argues that something should continue because "it's the way things have been done before." Someone may use this type of argument when they feel threatened by a potential change. People who oppose marriage rights for gay and lesbian people often argue that the definition of marriage shouldn't change because of its traditional meaning of a "union between one man and one woman." Such appeals often overstate the history and prevalence of the "tradition." Within the United States, many departures from traditional views of marriage have led to changes that we accept as normal today. Within the past one hundred years we have seen law

changes that took away men's rights to beat their wives and make decisions for them. And it wasn't until 1993 that every state made marital rape a crime, which changed the millennia-old "tradition" that women were obligated to have sex with their husbands. Stephanie Coontz, "Traditional Marriage Has Changed a Lot," Seattle Post Intelligencer, February 23, 2006, accessed March 6, 2012, http://www.seattlepi.com/default/article/Traditional-marriage-has-changed-a-lot-1196563.php. Many people are resistant to or anxious about change, which is understandable, but this doesn't form the basis of a good argument.

Review of Fallacies

- **Hasty generalization.** Inductive reasoning fallacy that occurs when too few examples are cited to warrant a conclusion.
- **False analogy.** Inductive reasoning fallacy that occurs when situations or circumstances being compared are not similar enough.
- **False cause.** Causal reasoning fallacy that occurs when a speaker argues with insufficient evidence that one thing caused/causes another.
- **False authority.** Fallacy that occurs when a person making an argument doesn't have the knowledge or qualifications to be credible but is perceived as credible because they are respected or admired.
- **Bandwagon.** Fallacy that relies on arguing for a course of action or belief because it is commonly done or held.
- **False dilemma.** Fallacy that occurs when a speaker presents an audience only two options and argues they must choose one or the other.
- **Ad hominem.** Fallacy that occurs when a speaker attacks another person rather than his or her argument.
- **Slippery slope.** Fallacy that occurs when a person argues that one action will inevitably lead to a series of other actions.
- **Red herring.** Fallacy that occurs when a speaker poses an argument that is meant to distract from the argument at hand.
- **Appeal to tradition.** Fallacy that results when a speaker argues that something should continue because "it's the way things have been done before."

Key Takeaways

Inductive reasoning refers to arguments that persuade by citing examples that build to a conclusion. Examples should be sufficient, typical, and representative to warrant a strong argument. Reasoning by analogy argues that what is true in one set of circumstances will be true in another, and is an example of inductive reasoning.

Causal reasoning refers to arguments that establish a relationship between a cause and an effect and usually involves a correlation rather than a true causal relationship.

Fallacies refer to flaws within the logic or reasoning of an argument. Ten fallacies of reasoning discussed in this chapter are hasty generalization, false analogy, false cause, false authority, false dilemma, ad hominem, slippery slope, red herring, and appeal to tradition.

Exercises

Identify examples of inductive, deductive, and causal reasoning in the sample persuasive speech on education in prisons included in the following section on persuasive strategies.

People often use fallacies in arguments, usually without knowing it. Being able to identify fallacies is an

important critical thinking skill. Find a letter to the editor in a paper or online and see if you can identify any of the ten fallacies discussed in this chapter.

Of the ten fallacies discussed in the chapter, which do you think is the most unethical and why?

11.4 Persuasive Strategies

Learning Objectives

Identify common persuasive strategies.

Explain how speakers develop ethos.

Explain how speakers appeal to logos and pathos.

Do you think you are easily persuaded? If you are like most people, you aren't swayed easily to change your mind about something. Persuasion is difficult because changing views often makes people feel like they were either not informed or ill informed, which also means they have to admit they were wrong about something. We will learn about three persuasive strategies that you can use to more effectively influence audience members' beliefs, attitudes, and values: ethos, logos, and pathos.

Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

Ethos, logos, and pathos were Aristotle's three forms of rhetorical proof, meaning they were primary to his theories of persuasion. **Ethos** refers to the credibility of a speaker and includes three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism. The two most researched dimensions of credibility are competence and trustworthiness. James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, Persuasive Communication, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 105.

Competence refers to the perception of a speaker's expertise in relation to the topic being discussed. A speaker can enhance their perceived competence by presenting a speech based in solid research and that is well organized and practiced. Competent speakers must know the content of their speech and be able to effectively deliver that content. **Trustworthiness** refers to the degree that audience members perceive a speaker to be presenting accurate, credible information in a nonmanipulative way. Perceptions of trustworthiness come from the content of the speech and the personality of the speaker. In terms of content, trustworthy speakers consider the audience throughout the speech-making process, present information in a balanced way, do not coerce the audience, cite credible sources, and follow the general principles of communication ethics. In terms of personality, trustworthy speakers are also friendly and warm. James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, Persuasive Communication, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 105.

Dynamism refers to the degree to which audience members perceive a speaker to be outgoing and animated. James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, Persuasive Communication, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 105. Two components of dynamism are charisma and energy. Charisma refers to a mixture of abstract and concrete qualities that make a speaker attractive to an audience. Charismatic people usually know they are charismatic because they've been told that in their lives, and people have been attracted to them.

Unfortunately, charisma is difficult to intentionally develop, and some people seem to have a naturally charismatic personality, while others do not. Even though everyone can't embody the charismatic aspect of dynamism, the other component of dynamism, energy, is something that everyone can tap into. Communicating enthusiasm for your topic and audience by presenting relevant content and using engaging delivery strategies such as vocal variety and eye contact can increase your dynamism.

Logos refers to the reasoning or logic of an argument. The presence of fallacies would obviously undermine a speaker's appeal to logos. Speakers employ logos by presenting credible information as supporting material and verbally citing their sources during their speech. Using the guidelines from our earlier discussion of reasoning will

also help a speaker create a rational appeal. Research shows that messages are more persuasive when arguments and their warrants are made explicit. James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, Persuasive Communication, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 142. Carefully choosing supporting material that is verifiable, specific, and unbiased can help a speaker appeal to logos. Speakers can also appeal to logos by citing personal experience and providing the credentials and/or qualifications of sources of information. Martha D. Cooper and William L. Nothstine, Power Persuasion: Moving an Ancient Art into the Media Age (Greenwood, IN: Educational Video Group, 1996), 48. Presenting a rational and logical argument is important, but speakers can be more effective persuaders if they bring in and refute counterarguments. The most effective persuasive messages are those that present two sides of an argument and refute the opposing side, followed by single argument messages, followed by messages that present counterarguments but do not refute them. James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, Persuasive Communication, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 142. In short, by clearly showing an audience why one position is superior to another, speakers do not leave an audience to fill in the blanks of an argument, which could diminish the persuasive opportunity.

Pathos refers to emotional appeals. Aristotle was suspicious of too much emotional appeal, yet this appears to have become more acceptable in public speaking. Stirring emotions in an audience is a way to get them involved in the speech, and involvement can create more opportunities for persuasion and action. Reading in the paper that a house was burglarized may get your attention, but think about how different your reaction would be if you found out it was your own home. Intentionally stirring someone's emotions to get them involved in a message that has little substance would be unethical. Yet such spellbinding speakers have taken advantage of people's emotions to get them to support causes, buy products, or engage in behaviors that they might not otherwise, if given the chance to see the faulty logic of a message.

Effective speakers should use emotional appeals that are also logically convincing, since audiences may be suspicious of a speech that is solely based on emotion. Emotional appeals are effective when you are trying to influence a behavior or you want your audience to take immediate action. James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, Persuasive Communication, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 146. Emotions lose their persuasive effect more quickly than other types of persuasive appeals. Since emotions are often reactionary, they fade relatively quickly when a person is removed from the provoking situation. Leon Fletcher, How to Design and Deliver Speeches, 7th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), 342.

Emotional appeals are also difficult for some because they require honed delivery skills and the ability to use words powerfully and dramatically. The ability to use vocal variety, cadence, and repetition to rouse an audience's emotion is not easily attained. Think of how stirring Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was due to his ability to evoke the emotions of the audience. Dr. King used powerful and creative language in conjunction with his vocalics to deliver one of the most famous speeches in our history. Using concrete and descriptive examples can paint a picture in your audience member's minds. Speakers can also use literal images, displayed using visual aids, to appeal to pathos.

Speakers should strive to appeal to ethos, logos, and pathos within a speech. A speech built primarily on ethos might lead an audience to think that a speaker is full of himself or herself. A speech full of facts and statistics appealing to logos would result in information overload. Speakers who rely primarily on appeals to pathos may be seen as overly passionate, biased, or unable to see other viewpoints.

Review of Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

Ethos relates to the credibility of a speaker. Speakers develop ethos by

- appearing competent, trustworthy, and dynamic;
- sharing their credentials and/or relevant personal experience;
- presenting a balanced and noncoercive argument;
- citing credible sources;
- using appropriate language and grammar;
- being perceived as likable; and
- appearing engaged with the topic and audience through effective delivery.

Logos relates to the reasoning and logic of an argument. Speakers appeal to logos by

- presenting factual, objective information that serves as reasons to support the argument;

- presenting a sufficient amount of relevant examples to support a proposition;
- deriving conclusions from known information; and
- using credible supporting material like expert testimony, definitions, statistics, and literal or historical analogies.

Pathos relates to the arousal of emotion through speech. Speakers appeal to pathos by

- using vivid language to paint word pictures for audience members;
- providing lay testimony (personal stories from self or others);
- using figurative language such as metaphor, similes, and personification; and
- using vocal variety, cadence, and repetition.

"Getting Competent"

Identifying Persuasive Strategies in Mary Fisher's "Whisper of AIDS" Speech

Mary Fisher's speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention, "A Whisper of AIDS," is one of the most moving and powerful speeches of the past few decades. She uses, more than once, all the persuasive strategies discussed in this chapter. The video and transcript of her speech can be found at the following link: http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/maryfisher1992rnc.html. As you watch the speech, answer the following questions:

Ethos. List specific examples of how the speaker develops the following dimensions of credibility: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism.

Logos. List specific examples of how the speaker uses logic to persuade her audience.

Pathos. How did the speaker appeal to emotion? What metaphors did she use? What other communicative strategies (wording, imagery, etc.) appealed to your emotions?

Sample Persuasive Speech

Title: Education behind Bars Is the Key to Rehabilitation

General purpose: To persuade

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, my audience will believe that prisoners should have the right to an education.

Thesis statement: There should be education in all prisons, because denying prisoners an education has negative consequences for the prisoner and society, while providing them with an education provides benefits for the prisoner and society.

Introduction

Attention getter: "We must accept the reality that to confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short-term benefits—winning battles while losing the war." These words were spoken more than thirty years ago by Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger, and they support my argument today that prisoners should have access to education.

Introduction of topic: While we value education as an important part of our society, we do not value it equally for all. Many people don't believe that prisoners should have access to an education, but I believe they do.

Credibility and relevance: While researching this topic, my eyes were opened up to how much an education can truly affect a prisoner, and given my desire to be a teacher, I am invested in preserving the right to learn for everyone, even if they are behind bars. While I know from our audience analysis activity that some of you do not agree with me, you never know when this issue may hit close to home. Someday, someone you love might make a mistake in their life and end up in prison, and while they are there I know you all would want them to receive an education so that when they get out, they will be better prepared to make a contribution to society.

Preview: Today, I invite you listen with an open mind as I discuss the need for prisoner education, a curriculum that will satisfy that need, and some benefits of prisoner education.

Transition: First I'll explain why prisoners need access to education.

Body

I. According to a 2012 article in the journal Corrections Today on correctional education programs, most states have experienced an increase in incarceration rates and budgetary constraints over the past ten years, which has led many to examine best practices for reducing prison populations.

A. In that same article, criminologist and former research director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons states that providing correctional education is one of the most productive and important reentry services that our prisons offer.

1. His claim is supported by data collected directly from prisoners, 94 percent of whom identify education as a personal reentry need—ranking it above other needs such as financial assistance, housing, or employment.

2. Despite the fact that this need is clearly documented, funding for adult and vocational education in correctional education has decreased.

B. Many prisoners have levels of educational attainment that are far below those in the general population.

1. According to statistics from 2010, as cited in the Corrections Today article, approximately 40 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school, as compared to 19 percent of the general population.

2. Additionally, while about 48 percent of the general public have taken college classes, only about 11 percent of state prisoners have.

3. At the skill level, research from the United Kingdom, cited in the 2003 article from Studies in the Education of Adults titled "Learning behind Bars: Time to Liberate Prison Education," rates of illiteracy are much higher among the prison population than the general population, and there is a link between poor reading skills and social exclusion that may lead people to antisocial behavior.

C. Prisoner education is also needed to break a cycle of negativity and stigma that many prisoners have grown accustomed to.

1. The article from Studies in the Education of Adults that I just cited states that prisoners are often treated as objects or subjected to objectifying labels like "addict, sexual offender, and deviant."

2. While these labels may be accurate in many cases, they do not do much to move the prisoner toward rehabilitation.

3. The label student, however, has the potential to do so because it has positive associations and can empower the prisoner to make better choices to enhance his or her confidence and self-worth.

Transition: Now that I've established the need for prisoner education, let's examine how we can meet that need.

II. In order to meet the need for prisoner education that I have just explained, it is important to have a curriculum that is varied and tailored to various prisoner populations and needs.

A. The article from Corrections Today notes that education is offered to varying degrees in most US prisons, but its presence is often debated and comes under increased scrutiny during times of budgetary stress.

1. Some states have implemented programs that require inmates to attend school for a certain amount of time if they do not meet minimum standards for certain skills such as reading or math.

2. While these are useful programs, prisoner education shouldn't be limited to or focused on those with the least amount of skills.

3. The article notes that even prisoners who have attended or even graduated from college may benefit from education, as they can pursue specialized courses or certifications.

B. Based on my research, I would propose that the prison curriculum have four tiers: one that addresses basic skills that prisoners may lack, one that prepares prisoners for a GED, one that prepares prisoners for college-level work, and one that focuses on life and social skills.

1. The first tier of the education program should focus on remediation and basic skills, which is the most common form of prisoner education as noted by Foley and Gao in their 2004 article from the Journal of Correctional Education that studied educational practices at several institutions.

a. These courses will teach prisoners basic reading, writing, and math skills that may be lacking.

b. Since there is a stigma associated with a lack of these basic skills, early instruction should be one-one-one or in small groups.

2. The second tier should prepare prisoners who have not completed the equivalent of high school to progress on to a curriculum modeled after that of most high schools, which will prepare them for a GED.

3. The third tier should include a curriculum based on the general education learning goals found at most colleges and universities and/or vocational training.

a. Basic general education goals include speaking, writing, listening, reading, and math.

b. Once these general education requirements have been met, prisoners should be able to pursue specialized vocational training or upper-level college courses in a major of study, which may need to be taken online through distance learning, since instructors may not be available to come to the actual prisons to teach.

4. The fourth tier includes training in social and life skills that most people learn through family and peer connections, which many prisoners may not have had.

a. Some population-specific areas of study that wouldn't be covered in a typical classroom include drug treatment and anger management.

b. Life skills such as budgeting, money management, and healthy living can increase confidence.

c. Classes that focus on social skills, parenting, or relational communication can also improve communication skills and relational satisfaction; for example, workshops teaching parenting skills have been piloted to give fathers the skills needed to more effectively communicate with their children, which can increase feelings of self-worth.

C. According to a 2007 article by Behan in the Journal of Correctional Education, prisons should also have extracurricular programs that enhance the educational experience.

1. Under the supervision of faculty and/or staff, prisoners could be given the task of organizing an outside speaker to come to the prison or put together a workshop.

2. Students could also organize a debate against students on the outside, which could allow the prisoners to interact (face-to-face or virtually) with other students and allow them to be recognized for their academic abilities.

3. Even within the prison, debates, trivia contests, paper contests, or speech contests could be organized between prisoners or between prisoners and prison staff as a means of healthy competition.

4. Finally, prisoners who are successful students should be recognized and put into peer-mentoring roles, because, as Behan states in the article, "a prisoner who…has had an inspirational learning experience acts as a more positive advocate for the school than any [other method]."

Transition: The model for prisoner education that I have just outlined will have many benefits.

III. Educating prisoners can benefit inmates, those who work in prisons, and society at large.

A. The article I just cited from the Journal of Correctional Education states that the self-reflection and critical thinking that are fostered in an educational setting can help prisoners reflect on how their actions affected them, their victims, and/or their communities, which may increase self-awareness and help them better reconnect with a civil society and reestablish stronger community bonds.

B. The Corrections Today article I cited earlier notes that a federally funded three-state survey provided the strongest evidence to date that prisoner education reduces the recidivism rate and increases public safety.

1. The Corrections Today article also notes that prisoners who completed a GED reoffended at a rate 20 percent lower than the general prison population, and those that completed a college degree reoffended at a rate 44 percent lower than the general prison population.

2. So why does prisoner education help reduce recidivism rates?

a. Simply put, according to the article in the Studies in the Education of Adults I cited earlier, the skills gained through good prison education programs make released prisoners more desirable employees, which increases their wages and helps remove them from a negative cycles of stigma and poverty that led many of them to crime in the first place.

b. Further, the ability to maintain consistent employment has been shown to reduce the rate of reoffending.

3. Education doesn't just improve the lives of the prisoners; it also positively affects the people who work in prisons.

a. An entry on eHow.com by Kinney about the benefits of prisoners getting GEDs notes that a successful educational program in a prison can create a more humane environment that will positively affect the officers and staff as well.

b. Such programs also allow prisoners to do more productive things with their time, which lessens violent and destructive behavior and makes prison workers' jobs safer.

4. Prisoner education can also save cash-strapped states money.

a. Giving prisoners time-off-sentence credits for educational attainment can help reduce the prison population, as eligible inmates are released earlier because of their educational successes.

b. As noted by the Corrections Today article, during the 2008–9 school year the credits earned by prisoners in the Indiana system led to more than $68 million dollars in avoided costs.

Conclusion

Transition to conclusion and summary of importance: In closing, it's easy to see how beneficial a good education can be to a prisoner. Education may be something the average teenager or adult takes for granted, but for a prisoner it could be the start of a new life.

Review of main points: There is a clear need for prisoner education that can be met with a sound curriculum that will benefit prisoners, those who work in prisons, and society at large.

Closing statement: While education in prisons is still a controversial topic, I hope you all agree with me and Supreme Court Justice Burger, whose words opened this speech, when we say that locking a criminal away may offer a short-term solution in that it gets the criminal out of regular society, but it doesn't better the prisoner and it doesn't better us in the long run as a society.

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Key Takeaways

Logos refers to the reasoning or logic of an argument. Speakers appeal to logos by presenting factual objective information, using sound reasoning, and avoiding logical fallacies.

Pathos refers to emotional appeals. Speakers appeal to pathos by using vivid language, including personal stories, and using figurative language.

Exercises

Ethos, or credibility, is composed of three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism. Of those dimensions, which is most important for you when judging someone's credibility and why?

How ethical do you think it is for a speaker to rely on fear appeals? When do fear appeals cross the line?

Chapter 13

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.

13.1 Understanding Small Groups

Learning Objectives

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

Most of the communication skills discussed in this book are directed toward dyadic communication, meaning that they are applied in two-person interactions. While many of these skills can be transferred to and used in small group contexts, the more complex nature of group interaction necessitates some adaptation and some additional skills. **Small group communication** refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. In this section, we will learn about the characteristics, functions, and types of small groups.

Characteristics of Small Groups

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

Size of Small Groups

There is no set number of members for the ideal small group. A small group requires a minimum of three people (because two people would be a pair or dyad), but the upper range of group size is contingent on the purpose of the group. When groups grow beyond fifteen to twenty members, it becomes difficult to consider them a small group based on the previous definition. An analysis of the number of unique connections between members of small groups shows that they are deceptively complex. For example, within a six-person group, there are fifteen separate potential dyadic connections, and a twelve-person group would have sixty-six potential dyadic connections. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 452–53. As you can see, when we double the number of group members, we more than double the number of connections, which shows that network connection points in small groups grow exponentially as membership increases. So, while there is no set upper limit on the number of group members, it makes sense that the number of group members should be limited to those necessary to accomplish the goal or serve the purpose of the group. Small groups that add too many members increase the potential for group members to feel overwhelmed or disconnected.

Structure of Small Groups

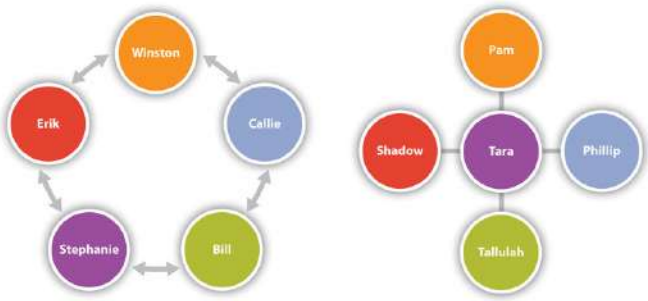
Internal and external influences affect a group's structure. In terms of internal influences, member characteristics play a role in initial group formation. For instance, a person who is well informed about the group's task and/or highly motivated as a group member may emerge as a leader and set into motion internal decision-making processes, such as recruiting new members or assigning group roles, that affect the structure of a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 57. Different members will also gravitate toward different roles within the group and will advocate for certain procedures and courses of action over others. External factors such as group size, task, and resources also affect group structure. Some groups will have more control over these external factors through decision making than others. For example, a commission that is put together by a legislative body to look into ethical violations in athletic organizations will likely have less control over its external factors than a self-created weekly book club.

Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections. In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. This type of formal network is especially important in groups that have to report to external stakeholders. These external stakeholders may influence the group's formal network, leaving the group little or no control over its structure. Conversely, groups have more control over their informal networks, which are connections among individuals within the group and among group members and people outside of the group that aren't official. For example, a group member's friend or relative may be able to secure a space to hold a fundraiser at a discounted rate, which helps the group achieve its task. Both types of networks are important because they may help facilitate information exchange within a group and extend a group's reach in order to access other resources.

Size and structure also affect communication within a group. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 66–74. In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. Reachability refers to the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in Figure 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 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. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 68. But decentralized groups are more effective at solving complex problems. In centralized groups like the wheel, the person with the most connections, person C, is also more likely to be the leader of the group or at least have more status among group members, largely because that person has a broad perspective of what's going on in the group. The most central person can also act as a gatekeeper. Since this person has access to the most information, which is usually a sign of leadership or status, he or she could consciously decide to limit the flow of information. But in complex tasks, that person could become overwhelmed by the burden of processing and sharing information with all the other group members. The circle structure is more likely to emerge in groups where collaboration is the goal and a specific task and course of action isn't required under time constraints. While the person who initiated the group or has the most expertise in regards to the task may emerge as a leader in a decentralized group, the equal access to information lessens the hierarchy and potential for gatekeeping that is present in the more centralized groups.

Interdependence

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

Shared Identity

The shared identity of a group manifests in several ways. Groups may have official charters or mission and vision statements that lay out the identity of a group. For example, the Girl Scout mission states that "Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place." Girl Scouts, "Facts," accessed July 15, 2012, http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/facts. The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds dynamism to the group as it looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

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

Functions of Small Groups

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

Groups Meet Instrumental Needs

Groups have long served the instrumental needs of humans, helping with the most basic elements of survival since ancient humans first evolved. Groups helped humans survive by providing security and protection through increased numbers and access to resources. Today, groups are rarely such a matter of life and death, but they still serve important instrumental functions. Labor unions, for example, pool efforts and resources to attain material security in the form of pay increases and health benefits for their members, which protects them by providing a stable and dependable livelihood. Individual group members must also work to secure the instrumental needs of the group, creating a reciprocal relationship. Members of labor unions pay dues that help support the group's efforts. Some groups also meet our informational needs. Although they may not provide material resources, they enrich our knowledge or provide information that we can use to then meet our own instrumental needs. Many groups provide referrals to resources or offer advice. For example, several consumer protection and advocacy groups have been formed to offer referrals for people who have been the victim of fraudulent business practices. Whether a group forms to provide services to members that they couldn't get otherwise, advocate for changes that will affect members' lives, or provide information, many groups meet some type of instrumental need.

Groups Meet Interpersonal Needs

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

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

Groups Meet Identity Needs

Our affiliations are building blocks for our identities, because group membership allows us to use reference groups for social comparison—in short, identifying us with some groups and characteristics and separating us from others. Some people join groups to be affiliated with people who share similar or desirable characteristics in

terms of beliefs, attitudes, values, or cultural identities. For example, people may join the National Organization for Women because they want to affiliate with others who support women's rights or a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because they want to affiliate with African Americans, people concerned with civil rights, or a combination of the two. Group memberships vary in terms of how much they affect our identity, as some are more prominent than others at various times in our lives. While religious groups as a whole are too large to be considered small groups, the work that people do as a part of a religious community—as a lay leader, deacon, member of a prayer group, or committee—may have deep ties to a person's identity.

The prestige of a group can initially attract us because we want that group's identity to "rub off" on our own identity. Likewise, the achievements we make as a group member can enhance our self-esteem, add to our reputation, and allow us to create or project certain identity characteristics to engage in impression management. For example, a person may take numerous tests to become a part of Mensa, which is an organization for people with high IQs, for no material gain but for the recognition or sense of achievement that the affiliation may bring. Likewise, people may join sports teams, professional organizations, and honor societies for the sense of achievement and affiliation. Such groups allow us opportunities to better ourselves by encouraging further development of skills or knowledge. For example, a person who used to play the oboe in high school may join the community band to continue to improve on his or her ability.

Types of Small Groups

There are many types of small groups, but the most common distinction made between types of small groups is that of task-oriented and relational-oriented groups. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 434. **Task-oriented groups** are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information. Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 254. In such groups, like a committee or study group, interactions and decisions are primarily evaluated based on the quality of the final product or output. The three main types of tasks are production, discussion, and problem-solving tasks. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 44. Groups faced with production tasks are asked to produce something tangible from their group interactions such as a report, design for a playground, musical performance, or fundraiser event. Groups faced with discussion tasks are asked to talk through something without trying to come up with a right or wrong answer. Examples of this type of group include a support group for people with HIV/AIDS, a book club, or a group for new fathers. Groups faced with problem-solving tasks have to devise a course of action to meet a specific need. These groups also usually include a production and discussion component, but the end goal isn't necessarily a tangible product or a shared social reality through discussion. Instead, the end goal is a well-thought-out idea. Task-oriented groups require honed problem-solving skills to accomplish goals, and the structure of these groups is more rigid than that of relational-oriented groups.

Relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections and are more focused on quality interactions that contribute to the well-being of group members. Decision making is directed at strengthening or repairing relationships rather than completing discrete tasks or debating specific ideas or courses of action. All groups include task and relational elements, so it's best to think of these orientations as two ends of a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive. For example, although a family unit works together daily to accomplish tasks like getting the kids ready for school and friendship groups may plan a surprise party for one of the members, their primary and most meaningful interactions are still relational. 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. David B. Barker, "The Behavioral Analysis of Interpersonal Intimacy in Group Development," Small Group Research 22, no. 1 (1991): 79. While we are more likely to participate in secondary groups based on self-interest, our primary-group interactions are often more reciprocal or other oriented. For example, we may join groups because of a shared interest or need.

Groups formed based on shared interest include social groups and leisure groups such as a group of independent film buffs, science fiction fans, or bird watchers. Some groups form to meet the needs of individuals or of a particular group of people. Examples of groups that meet the needs of individuals include study groups or support groups like a weight loss group. These groups are focused on individual needs, even though they meet as a group, and they are also often discussion oriented. Service groups, on the other hand, work to meet the needs of individuals but are task oriented. Service groups include Habitat for Humanity and Rotary Club chapters, among others. Still other groups form around a shared need, and their primary task is advocacy. For example, the Gay Men's Health Crisis is a group that was formed by a small group of eight people in the early 1980s to advocate for resources and support for the still relatively unknown disease that would later be known as AIDS. Similar groups form to advocate for everything from a stop sign at a neighborhood intersection to the end of human trafficking.

As we already learned, other groups are formed primarily to accomplish a task. Teams are task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members. Carl E. Larson and Frank M. J. LaFasto, TeamWork: What Must Go Right/What Must Go Wrong (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 73. In professional and civic contexts, the word team has become popularized as a means of drawing on the positive connotations of the term—connotations such as "high-spirited," "cooperative," and "hardworking." Scholars who have spent years studying highly effective teams have identified several common factors related to their success. Successful teams have: Ronald B. Adler and Jeanne Marquardt Elmhorst, Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Businesses and the Professions, 8th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 248–50.

- clear and inspiring shared goals,
- a results-driven structure,
- competent team members,
- a collaborative climate,
- high standards for performance,
- external support and recognition, and
- ethical and accountable leadership.

Increasingly, small groups and teams are engaging in more virtual interaction. Virtual groups take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal. Some virtual groups may complete their task without ever being physically face-to-face. Virtual groups bring with them distinct advantages and disadvantages that you can read more about in the "Getting Plugged In" feature next.

"Getting Plugged In"

Virtual Groups

Virtual groups are now common in academic, professional, and personal contexts, as classes meet entirely online, work teams interface using webinar or video-conferencing programs, and people connect around shared interests in a variety of online settings. Virtual groups are popular in professional contexts because they can bring together people who are geographically dispersed. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 163. Virtual groups also increase the possibility for the inclusion of diverse members. The ability to transcend distance means that people with diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives are more easily accessed than in many offline groups.

One disadvantage of virtual groups stems from the difficulties that technological mediation presents for the relational and social dimensions of group interactions. Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 830. As we will learn later in this chapter, an important part of coming together as a group is the socialization of group members into the desired norms of the group. Since norms are implicit, much of this information is learned through observation or conveyed informally from one group member to another. In fact, in traditional groups, group members passively acquire 50 percent or more of their knowledge about group norms and procedures, meaning they observe rather than directly ask. Debra R. Comer, "Organizational Newcomers' Acquisition of Information from Peers," Management Communication Quarterly 5, no. 1 (1991): 64–89. Virtual groups experience more difficulty with this part of socialization than 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. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 164–65. Group members should also contribute often, even if just supporting someone else's contribution, because increased participation has been shown to increase liking among members of virtual groups. Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 831–32. Virtual group members should also make an effort to put relational content that might otherwise be conveyed through nonverbal or contextual means into the verbal part of a message, as members who include little social content in their messages or only communicate about the group's task are more negatively evaluated. Virtual groups who do not overcome these challenges will likely struggle to meet deadlines, interact less frequently, and experience more absenteeism. What follows are some guidelines to help optimize virtual groups: Joseph B. Walther and Ulla Bunz, "The Rules of Virtual Groups: Trust, Liking, and Performance in Computer-Mediated Communication," Journal of Communication 55, no. 4 (2005): 834–35.

- 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.

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?

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. James R. Larson Jr., In Search of Synergy in Small Group Performance (New York: Psychology Press, 2010). Because of synergy, the final group product can be better than what any individual could have produced alone. When I worked in housing and residence life, I helped coordinate a "World Cup Soccer Tournament" for the international students that lived in my residence hall. As a group, we created teams representing different countries around the world, made brackets for people to track progress and predict winners, got sponsors, gathered prizes, and ended up with a very successful event that would not have been possible without the synergy created by our collective group membership. The members of this group were also exposed to international diversity that enriched our experiences, which is also an advantage of group communication.

Participating in groups can also increase our exposure to diversity and broaden our perspectives. Although groups vary in the diversity of their members, we can strategically choose groups that expand our diversity, or we can unintentionally end up in a diverse group. When we participate in small groups, we expand our social networks, which increase the possibility to interact with people who have different cultural identities than ourselves. Since group members work together toward a common goal, shared identification with the task or group can give people with diverse backgrounds a sense of commonality that they might not have otherwise. Even when group members share cultural identities, the diversity of experience and opinion within a group can lead to broadened perspectives as alternative ideas are presented and opinions are challenged and defended. One of my favorite parts of facilitating class discussion is when students with different identities and/or perspectives teach one another things in ways that I could not on my own. This example brings together the potential of synergy and diversity. People who are more introverted or just avoid group communication and voluntarily distance themselves from groups—or are rejected from groups—risk losing opportunities to learn more about others and themselves.

There are also disadvantages to small group interaction. In some cases, one person can be just as or more effective than a group of people. Think about a situation in which a highly specialized skill or knowledge is needed to get something done. In this situation, one very knowledgeable person is probably a better fit for the task than a group of less knowledgeable people. Group interaction also has a tendency to slow down the decision-making process. Individuals connected through a hierarchy or chain of command often work better in situations where decisions must be made under time constraints. When group interaction does occur under time constraints, having one "point person" or leader who coordinates action and gives final approval or disapproval on ideas or suggestions for actions is best.

Group communication also presents interpersonal challenges. A common problem is coordinating and planning group meetings due to busy and conflicting schedules. Some people also have difficulty with the other-centeredness and self-sacrifice that some groups require. The interdependence of group members that we discussed earlier can also create some disadvantages. Group members may take advantage of the anonymity of a group and engage in social loafing, meaning they contribute less to the group than other members or than they would if working alone. Steven J. Karau and Kipling D. Williams, "Social Loafing: A Meta-Analytic Review and Theoretical Integration," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 65, no. 4 (1993): 681. **Social loafers** expect that no one will notice their behaviors or that others will pick up their slack. It is this potential for social loafing that makes many students and professionals dread group work, especially those who have a tendency to cover for other group members to prevent the social loafer from diminishing the group's productivity or output.

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.

"Getting Competent"

Improving Your Group Experiences

Like many of you, I also had some negative group experiences in college that made me think similarly to a student who posted the following on a teaching blog: "Group work is code for 'work as a group for a grade less than what you can get if you work alone.'" Maryellen Weimer, "Why Students Hate Groups," The Teaching Professor, July 1, 2008, accessed July 15, 2012, http://www.teachingprofessor.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/why-students-hate-groups. But then I took a course called "Small Group and Team Communication" with an amazing teacher who later became one of my most influential mentors. She emphasized the fact that we all needed to increase our knowledge about group communication and group dynamics in order to better our group communication experiences—and she was right. So the first piece of advice to help you start improving your group experiences is to closely study the group communication chapters in this textbook and to apply what you learn to your group interactions. Neither students nor faculty are born knowing how to function as a group, yet students and faculty often think we're supposed to learn as we go, which increases the likelihood of a negative experience.

A second piece of advice is to meet often with your group. Scott A. Myers and Alan K. Goodboy, "A Study of Grouphate in a Course on Small Group Communication," Psychological Reports 97, no. 2 (2005): 385. Of course, to do this you have to overcome some scheduling and coordination difficulties, but putting other things aside to work as a group helps set up a norm that group work is important and worthwhile. Regular meetings also allow members to interact with each other, which can increase social bonds, build a sense of interdependence that can help diminish social loafing, and establish other important rules and norms that will guide future group interaction. Instead of committing to frequent meetings, many student groups use their first meeting to equally divide up the group's tasks so they can then go off and work alone (not as a group). While some group work can definitely be done independently, dividing up the work and assigning someone to put it all together doesn't allow group members to take advantage of one of the most powerful advantages of group work—synergy.

Last, establish group expectations and follow through with them. I recommend that my students come up with a group name and create a contract of group guidelines during their first meeting (both of which I learned from

my group communication teacher whom I referenced earlier). The group name helps begin to establish a shared identity, which then contributes to interdependence and improves performance. The contract of group guidelines helps make explicit the group norms that might have otherwise been left implicit. Each group member contributes to the contract and then they all sign it. Groups often make guidelines about how meetings will be run, what to do about lateness and attendance, the type of climate they'd like for discussion, and other relevant expectations. If group members end up falling short of these expectations, the other group members can remind the straying member of the contact and the fact that he or she signed it. If the group encounters further issues, they can use the contract as a basis for evaluating the other group member or for communicating with the instructor.

Do you agree with the student's quote about group work that was included at the beginning? Why or why not?

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?

What are some guidelines that you think you'd like to include in your contract with a future group?

Key Takeaways

Several characteristics influence small groups, including size, structure, interdependence, and shared identity.

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 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.

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 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.

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.

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

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

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.

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?

13.2 Small Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

Explain the relationship between group cohesion and group climate.

Describe the process of group member socialization.

Explain the relationship between conformity and groupthink.

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

Group Cohesion and Climate

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

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

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness: Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 445.

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

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. Following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale: Peter J. Marston and Michael L. Hecht, "Group Satisfaction," in Small Group Communication, 5th ed., eds. Robert Cathcart and Larry Samovar (Dubuque, IA: Brown, 1988), 236–46.

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

Group cohesion and climate is also demonstrated through symbolic convergence. Ernest G. Bormann, "Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Communication Formulation," Journal of Communication, 35, no. 4 (1985): 128–38. **Symbolic convergence** refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of **group fantasies** creates symbolic convergence. Fantasy, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, group fantasies are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group. Em Griffin, A First Look at Communication Theory, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 28. For example, as a graduate student, I spent a lot of time talking with others in our small group about research, writing, and other things related to our classes and academia in general. Most of this communication wouldn't lead to symbolic convergence or help establish the strong social bonds that we developed as a group. Instead, it was our grad student "war stories" about excessive reading loads and unreasonable paper requirements we had experienced in earlier years of grad school, horror stories about absent or vindictive thesis advisors, and "you won't believe this" stories from the classes that we were teaching that brought us together.

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

"Getting Real"

Working in Teams

Although most college students hate working in groups, in the "real world" working in teams has become a regular part of professional expectations. Following Japan's lead, corporations in the United States began adopting a more team-based approach for project management decades ago. Anshu K. Jain, Jon M. Thompson, Joseph Chaudry, Shaun McKenzie, and Richard W. Schwartz, "High-Performance Teams for Current and Future Physician Leaders: An Introduction," Journal of Surgical Education 65 (2008): 145. This model has become increasingly popular in various organizational settings since then as means to increase productivity and reduce bureaucracy. Teams in the workplace have horizontally expanded the traditional vertical hierarchy of organizations, as the aim of creating these teams was to produce smaller units within an organization that are small enough to be efficient and self-manageable but large enough to create the synergy that we discussed in the earlier part of the chapter.

Aside from efficiency, teams are also valued for the potential for innovation. The strategic pooling of people with diverse knowledge, experience, and skills can lead to synergistic collaborative thinking that produces new knowledge. Elisa du Chatenier, Jos A. A. M. Verstegen, Harm J. A. Biemans, Martin Mulder, and Onno S. W. F. Omta, "Identification of Competencies in Open Innovation Teams," Research and Development Management 40, no. 3 (2010): 271. This potential for innovation makes teams ideal in high-stakes situations where money, contracts, or lives are at stake. Large corporations are now putting together what has been termed 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. Lisa J. Daniel and Charles R. Davis, "What Makes High-Performance Teams Excel?" Research Technology Management 52, no. 4 (2009): 40–41. In markets where companies race to find the next generation of technological improvement, such research and development teams are critical for an organization's success. Research on such teams in real-world contexts has found that in order to be successful, high-performance teams should have a clear base such as a project mission, a leader who strategically assigns various tasks to members based on their specialized expertise, and shared leadership in which individual experts are trusted to make decisions relevant to their purview within the group. Although these high-performance teams are very task oriented, research has also found that the social element cannot be ignored, even under extreme internal and external pressures. In fact, cohesion and interdependence help create a shared reality that in turn improves productivity, because team members feel a sense of shared ownership over their charge. Stephanie T. Solansky, "Team Identification: A Determining Factor of Performance," Journal of Managerial Psychology 26, no. 3 (2011): 250.

Some challenges associated with working in teams include the potential for uncertainty or conflict due to the absence of traditional hierarchy, pressures that become overwhelming, lack of shared history since such teams are usually future oriented, and high expectations without resources necessary to complete the task. Elisa du Chatenier, Jos A. A. M. Verstegen, Harm J. A. Biemans, Martin Mulder, and Onno S. W. F. Omta, "Identification of Competencies in Open Innovation Teams," Research and Development Management 40, no. 3 (2010): 275–77. To overcome these challenges, team members can think positively but realistically about the team's end goal, exhibit trust in the expertise of other team members, be reliable and approachable to help build a good team spirit, take initiative with actions and ideas, ask critical questions, and provide critical but constructive feedback.

Given your career goals, what sorts of teamwork do you think you might engage in?

Would you welcome the opportunity to work on a high-performance team? Why or why not?

Members of teams are often under intense pressures to produce or perform at high levels. What is the line at which the pressure becomes too much? Ethically, how far should companies push teams and how far should team members go to complete a task?

Socializing Group Members

Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group norms, rules, and cohesion can only be created and maintained through socialization. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 163. It is also through socialization that a shared identity and social reality develops among group members, but this development is dependent on several factors. For example, groups with higher levels of cohesion are more likely to have members that "buy into" rules and norms, which aids in socialization. The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's life span. If membership in a group is stable, long-term members should not need much socialization. However, when new members join a group, existing members must take time to engage in socialization. When a totally new group is formed, socialization will be an ongoing process as group members negotiate rules and procedures, develop norms, and create a shared history over time.

The information exchanged during socialization can be broken down into two general categories: technical and social knowledge. Manju K. Ahuja and John E. Galvin, "Socialization in Virtual Groups," Journal of Management 29, no. 2 (2003): 164. Technical knowledge focuses on skills and information needed to complete a task, and social knowledge focuses on behavioral norms that guide interaction. Each type of information is usually conveyed through a combination of formal and informal means. Technical knowledge can be fairly easily passed along through orientations, trainings, manuals, and documents, because this content is often fairly straightforward. Social knowledge is more ambiguous and is usually conveyed through informal means or passively learned by new members through observation. To return to our earlier terminology, technical knowledge relates more to group rules and social knowledge relates more to group norms.

Companies and social organizations socialize new members in different ways. A new training cohort at an established company may be given technical rule-based information in the form of a manual and a history of the organization and an overview of the organizational culture to help convey social knowledge about group norms. Members of some small groups like fraternities or professional organizations have to take pledges or oaths that may convey a mixture of technical and social knowledge. Social knowledge may be conveyed in interactions that are separate from official group time. For example, literally socializing as a group is a good way to socialize group members. Many large and successful businesses encourage small groups within the company to socialize outside of work time in order to build cohesion and group solidarity.

Socialization continues after initial membership through the enforcement of rules and norms. When someone deviates from the rules and norms and is corrected, it serves as a reminder for all other members and performs a follow-up socializing function. Since rules are explicitly stated and documented, deviation from the rules can have consequences ranging from verbal warnings, to temporary or permanent separation from the group, to fines or other sanctions. And although norms are implicit, deviating from them can still have consequences. Even though someone may not actually verbally correct the deviation, the self-consciousness, embarrassment, or awkwardness that can result from such deviations is often enough to initiate corrective actions. Group norms can be so implicit that they are taken for granted and operate under group members' awareness.

Group rules and norms provide members with a sense of predictability that helps reduce uncertainty and increase a sense of security for one's place within the group. They also guide group members' involvement with the group, help create a shared social reality, and allow the group to function in particular ways without having actual people constantly educating, monitoring, and then correcting member behaviors. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 441. Of course, the degree to which this is successful depends on the buy-in from group members.

Group Pressures

There must be some kind of motivating force present within groups in order for the rules and norms to help govern and guide a group. Without such pressure, group members would have no incentive to conform to group norms or buy into the group's identity and values. In this section, we will discuss how rules and norms gain their power through internal and external pressures and how these pressures can have positive and negative effects.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 133. Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity. Deviating from the group's rules and norms that a member internalized during socialization can lead to self-imposed feelings of guilt or shame that can then initiate corrective behaviors and discourage the member from going against the group.

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

Conformity pressure can also stem from external forces when the whole group stands to receive a reward or punishment based on its performance, which ties back to the small group characteristic of interdependence. Although these pressures may seem negative, they also have positive results. Groups that exert an appropriate and ethical amount of conformity pressure typically have higher levels of group cohesion, which as we learned leads to increased satisfaction with group membership, better relationships, and better task performance. Groups with a strong but healthy level of conformity also project a strong group image to those outside the group, which can raise the group's profile or reputation. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 444. Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that results from high levels of cohesion and/or high conformity pressures. Irving L. Janis, Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascos (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink. Donald G. Ellis and B. Aubrey Fisher, Small Group Decision Making: Communication and the Group Process, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 134. When people rush to agreement or fear argument, groupthink has a tendency to emerge. Decisions made as a result of groupthink may range from a poorly-thought-out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

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

To Avoid Groupthink, Groups Should: Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 447.

- 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.

Key Takeaways

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.

Exercises

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.

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)

Chapter 14

Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups

What makes a good leader? What are some positive and negative roles that people play in groups? How do groups solve problems and make decisions in order to accomplish their task? This chapter will begin to answer those questions, because leadership and group member roles influence the performance of small groups. Whether you consider yourself a leader or not, all members of a group can perform leadership functions, and being familiar with these behaviors can improve your group's performance. Likewise, knowing the various roles that typically emerge in a group can help you better understand a group's dynamics and hopefully improve your overall group experience.

14.1 Leadership and Small Group Communication

Learning Objectives

Discuss the various perspectives on how and why people become leaders.

Compare and contrast various leadership styles.

Discuss the types of power that a leader may tap into.

Leadership is one of the most studied aspects of group communication. Scholars in business, communication, psychology, and many other fields have written extensively about the qualities of leaders, theories of leadership, and how to build leadership skills. It's important to point out that although a group may have only one official leader, other group members play important leadership roles. Making this distinction also helps us differentiate between leaders and leadership. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 456. The **leader** is a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members. **Leadership** is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task. A person in the role of leader may provide no or poor leadership. Likewise, a person who is not recognized as a "leader" in title can provide excellent leadership. In the remainder of this section, we will discuss some approaches to the study of leadership, leadership styles, and leadership and group dynamics.

Why and How People Become Leaders

Throughout human history, some people have grown into, taken, or been given positions as leaders. Many early leaders were believed to be divine in some way. In some indigenous cultures, shamans are considered leaders because they are believed to be bridges that can connect the spiritual and physical realms. Many early kings, queens, and military leaders were said to be approved by a god to lead the people. Today, many leaders are elected or appointed to positions of power, but most of them have already accumulated much experience in leadership roles. Some leaders are well respected, some are feared, some are hated, and many elicit some combination of these reactions. This brief overview illustrates the centrality of leadership throughout human history, but it wasn't until the last hundred years that leadership became an object of systematic study.

Before we move onto specific approaches to studying leadership, let's distinguish between designated and emergent leaders. In general, some people gravitate more toward leadership roles than others, and some leaders are designated while other are emergent. Owen Hargie, Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and

Practice (London: Routledge, 2011), 456. **Designated leaders** are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected by people inside or outside the group. Designated leaders can be especially successful when they are sought out by others to fulfill and are then accepted in leadership roles. On the other hand, some people seek out leadership positions not because they possess leadership skills and have been successful leaders in the past but because they have a drive to hold and wield power. Many groups are initially leaderless and must either designate a leader or wait for one to emerge organically. **Emergent leaders** gain status and respect through engagement with the group and its task and are turned to by others as a resource when leadership is needed. Emergent leaders may play an important role when a designated leader unexpectedly leaves. We will now turn our attention to three common perspectives on why some people are more likely to be designated leaders than others and how leaders emerge in the absence of or in addition to a designated leader.

Leaders Emerge Because of Their Traits

The trait approach to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 313. Some traits that leaders, in general, share are related to physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 120. In terms of physical appearance, designated leaders tend to be taller and more attractive than other group members. This could be because we consciously and/or subconsciously associate a larger size (in terms of height and build, but not body fat) with strength and strength with good leadership. As far as communication abilities, leaders speak more fluently, have a more confident tone, and communicate more often than other group members. Leaders are also moderately more intelligent than other group members, which is attractive because leaders need good problem-solving skills. Interestingly, group members are not as likely to designate or recognize an emergent leader that they perceive to be exceedingly more intelligent than them. Last, leaders are usually more extroverted, assertive, and persistent than other group members. These personality traits help get these group members noticed by others, and expressivity is often seen as attractive and as a sign of communication competence.

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

Leaders Emerge Because of the Situation

The emergent approach to studying leadership considers how leaders emerge in groups that are initially leaderless and how situational contexts affect this process. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 314. The situational context that surrounds a group influences what type of leader is best. Situations may be highly structured, highly unstructured, or anywhere in between. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 126. Research has found that leaders with a high task orientation are likely to emerge in both highly structured contexts like a group that works to maintain a completely automated factory unit and highly unstructured contexts like a group that is responding to a crisis. Relational-oriented leaders are more likely to emerge in 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. Fred E. Fiedler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). For example, a group of local business owners who form a group for professional networking would likely prefer a leader with a relational-oriented style, since these group members are likely already leaders in their own right and therefore might resent a person who takes a rigid task-oriented style over a more collegial style.

Leaders emerge differently in different groups, but there are two stages common to each scenario. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 1988), 130–33. The first stage only covers a brief period, perhaps no longer than a portion of one meeting. During this first stage, about half of the group's members are eliminated from the possibility of being the group's leader. Remember that this is an informal and implicit process—not like people being picked for a kickball team or intentionally vetted. But there are some communicative behaviors that influence who makes the cut to the next stage of informal leader consideration. People will likely be eliminated as leader candidates if they do not actively contribute to initial group interactions, if they contribute but communicate poorly, if they contribute but appear too rigid or inflexible in their beliefs, or if they seem uninformed about the task of the group.

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

Leaders Emerge Based on Communication Skill and Competence

This final approach to the study of leadership is considered a functional approach, because it focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This last approach is the most useful for communication scholars and for people who want to improve their leadership skills, because leadership behaviors (which are learnable and adaptable) rather than traits or situations (which are often beyond our control) are the primary focus of study. As we've already learned, any group member can exhibit leadership behaviors, not just a designated or emergent leader. Therefore leadership behaviors are important for all of us to understand even if we don't anticipate serving in leadership positions. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 126.

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

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

This can allow the leader to keep his or her eye on the "big picture" and challenge group members to make their ideas more concrete or discuss their implications beyond the group without adding his or her own opinion. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the task-related functions of a group include the following: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 131–32.

- Contributing ideas

- Seeking ideas
- Evaluating ideas
- Seeking idea evaluation
- Visualizing abstract ideas
- Generalizing from specific ideas.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's procedural-related functions help guide the group as it proceeds from idea generation to implementation. Some leaders are better at facilitating and managing ideas than they are at managing the administrative functions of a group. So while a group leader may help establish the goals of the group and set the agenda, another group member with more experience in group operations may step in to periodically revisit and assess progress toward completion of goals and compare the group's performance against its agenda. It's also important to check in between idea-generating sessions to clarify, summarize, and gauge the agreement level of group members. A very skilled and experienced leader may take primary responsibility for all these behaviors, but it's often beneficial to share them with group members to avoid becoming overburdened. To review, some of the key leadership behaviors that contribute to the procedural functions of a group include the following: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 132–34.

- Goal setting
- Agenda making
- Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Verbalizing consensus
- Generalizing from specific ideas.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's relational functions include creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection and self-analysis, and managing conflict. By encouraging participation among group members, a leader can help quell people who try to monopolize discussion and create an overall climate of openness and equality. Leaders want to make sure that people don't feel personally judged for their ideas and that criticism remains idea centered, not person centered. A safe and positive climate typically leads to higher-quality idea generation and decision making. Leaders also encourage group members to 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: John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 134–36.

- Regulating participation
- Climate making
- Instigating group self-analysis
- Resolving conflict
- Instigating productive conflict.

Leadership Styles

Given the large amount of research done on leadership, it is not surprising that there are several different ways

to define or categorize leadership styles. In general, effective leaders do not fit solely into one style in any of the following classifications. Instead, they are able to adapt their leadership style to fit the relational and situational context. Julia T. Wood, "Leading in Purposive Discussions: A Study of Adaptive Behavior," Communication Monographs 44, no. 2 (1977): 152–65. One common way to study leadership style is to make a distinction among autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leaders. Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt, and Ralph K. White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created 'Social Climates,'" Journal of Social Psychology 10, no. 2 (1939): 269–99. These leadership styles can be described as follows:

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

While this is a frequently cited model of leadership styles, we will focus in more detail on a model that was developed a few years after this one. I choose to focus on this later model because it offers some more specifics in terms of the communicative elements of each leadership style. The four leadership styles used in this model are directive, participative, supportive, and achievement oriented. Robert J. House and Terrence R. Mitchell, "Path-Goal Theory of Leadership," Journal of Contemporary Business3 (1974): 81–97.

Directive Leaders

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

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

Participative Leaders

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

The participative method of leadership is similar to the democratic style discussed earlier, and it is a style of leadership practiced in many organizations that have established work groups that meet consistently over long periods of time. US companies began to adopt a more participative and less directive style of management in the 1980s after organizational scholars researched teamwork and efficiency in Japanese corporations. Japanese managers included employees in decision making, which blurred the line between the leader and other group members and enhanced productivity. These small groups were called quality circles, because they focused

on group interaction intended to improve quality and productivity. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 122–23.

Supportive Leaders

Supportive leaders show concern for their followers' needs and emotions. They want to support group members' welfare through a positive and friendly group climate. These leaders are good at reducing the stress and frustration of the group, which helps create a positive climate and can help increase group members' positive feelings about the task and other group members. As we will learn later, some group roles function to maintain the relational climate of the group, and several group members often perform these role behaviors. With a supportive leader as a model, such behaviors would likely be performed as part of established group norms, which can do much to enhance social cohesion. Supportive leaders do not provide unconditionally positive praise. They also competently provide constructive criticism in order to challenge and enhance group members' contributions.

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

Achievement-Oriented Leaders

Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations. These leaders often engage in systematic social comparison, keeping tabs on other similar high-performing groups to assess their expectations and the group's progress. This type of leadership is similar to what other scholars call transformational or visionary leadership and is often associated with leaders like former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, talk show host and television network CEO Oprah Winfrey, former president Bill Clinton, and business magnate turned philanthropist Warren Buffett. Achievement-oriented leaders are likely less common than the other styles, as this style requires a high level of skill and commitment on the part of the leader and the group. Although rare, these leaders can be found at all levels of groups ranging from local school boards to Fortune 500 companies. Certain group dynamics must be in place in order to accommodate this leadership style. Groups for which an achievement-oriented leadership style would be effective are typically intentionally created and are made up of members who are skilled and competent in regards to the group's task. In many cases, the leader is specifically chosen because of his or her reputation and expertise, and even though the group members may not have a history of working with the leader, the members and leader must have a high degree of mutual respect.

"Getting Plugged In"

Steve Jobs as an Achievement-Oriented Leader

"Where can you find a leader with Jobs' willingness to fail, his sheer tenacity, persistence, and resiliency, his grandiose ego, his overwhelming belief in himself?" Alan Deutschman, "Exit the King," The Daily Beast, September 21, 2011, accessed August 23, 2012, http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/08/28/steve-jobs-american-genius.html. This closing line of an article following the death of Steve Jobs clearly illustrates the larger-than-life personality and extraordinary drive of achievement-oriented leaders. Jobs, who founded Apple Computers, was widely recognized as a visionary with a brilliant mind during his early years at the helm of Apple (from 1976 to 1985), but he hadn't yet gained respect as a business leader. Jobs left the company and later returned in 1997. After his return, Apple reached its height under his leadership, which was now enhanced by

business knowledge and skills he gained during his time away from the company. The fact that Jobs was able to largely teach himself the ins and outs of business practices is a quality of achievement-oriented leaders, who are constantly self-reflective and evaluate their skills and performance, making adaptations as necessary.

Achievement-oriented leaders also often possess good instincts, allowing them to make decisions quickly while acknowledging the potential for failure but also showing a resiliency that allows them to bounce back from mistakes and come back stronger. Rather than bringing in panels of experts, presenting ideas to focus groups for feedback, or putting a new product through market research and testing, Jobs relied on his instincts, which led to some embarrassing failures and some remarkable successes that overshadowed the failures. Although Jobs made unilateral decisions, he relied heavily on the creative and technical expertise of others who worked for him and were able to make his creative, innovative, and some say genius ideas reality. As do other achievement-oriented leaders, Jobs held his group members to exceptionally high standards and fostered a culture that mirrored his own perfectionism. Constant comparisons to other technological innovators like Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft, pushed Jobs and those who worked for him to work tirelessly to produce the "next big thing." Achievement-oriented leaders like Jobs have been described as maniacal, intense, workaholics, perfectionists, risk takers, narcissists, innovative, and visionary. These descriptors carry positive and negative connotations but often yield amazing results when possessed by a leader, the likes of which only seldom come around.

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?

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?

Do some research on another achievement-oriented leader. Discuss how that leader's traits are similar to and/or different from those of Steve Jobs.

Leadership and Power

Leaders help move group members toward the completion of their goal using various motivational strategies. The types of power leaders draw on to motivate have long been a topic of small group study. A leader may possess or draw on any of the following five types of power to varying degrees: legitimate, expert, referent, information, and reward/coercive. John R. P. French Jr. and Bertram Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in Studies in Social Power, ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 150–67. Effective leaders do not need to possess all five types of power. Instead, competent leaders know how to draw on other group members who may be better able to exercise a type of power in a given situation.

Legitimate Power

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

Expert Power

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.

Key Takeaways

There are many perspectives on how and why people become leaders:

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.

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 can adopt a directive, participative, supportive, or achievement-oriented style.

Participative leaders work to include group members in the decision-making process by soliciting and considering their opinions and suggestions.

Achievement-oriented leaders strive for excellence and set challenging goals, constantly seeking improvement and exhibiting confidence that group members can meet their high expectations.

Legitimate power flows from the officially recognized power, status, or title of a group member.

Referent power comes from the attractiveness, likeability, and charisma of the group member.

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

In what situations would a designated leader be better than an emergent leader, and vice versa? Why?

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.

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.

14.2 Group Member Roles

Learning Objectives

Identify and discuss task-related group roles and behaviors.

Identify and discuss maintenance group roles and behaviors.

Identify and discuss negative group roles and behaviors.

Just as leaders have been long studied as a part of group communication research, so too have group member roles. Group roles are more dynamic than leadership roles in that a role can be formal or informal and played by more than one group member. Additionally, one group member may exhibit various role behaviors within a single group meeting or play a few consistent roles over the course of his or her involvement with a group. 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. Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats, "Functional Roles of Group Members," Journal of Social Issues 4, no. 2 (1948): 41–49.

Task-Related Roles and Behaviors

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

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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 147. 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. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 317. The substantive leader is the "idea person" who communicates "big picture" thoughts and suggestions that feed group discussion. The procedural leader is the person who gives the most guidance, perhaps following up on the ideas generated by the substantive leader. A skilled and experienced task leader may be able to perform both of these roles, but when the roles are filled by two different people, the person considered the procedural leader is more likely than the substantive leader to be viewed by members as the overall group leader. This indicates that task-focused groups assign more status to the person who actually guides the group toward the completion of the task (a "doer") than the person who comes up with ideas (the "thinker").

Expediter

The **expediter** is a task-related role that functions to keep the group on track toward completing its task by managing the agenda and setting and assessing goals in order to monitor the group's progress. An expediter doesn't push group members mindlessly along toward the completion of their task; an expediter must have a good sense of when a topic has been sufficiently discussed or when a group's extended focus on one area has led to diminishing returns. In such cases, the expediter may say, "Now that we've 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."

If you've ever worked in a restaurant, you're probably familiar with an expediter's role in the kitchen. The person working "expo" helps make sure that the timing on all the dishes for a meal works out and that each plate is correct before it goes out to the table. This is by no means an easy job, since some entrées cook quicker than others and not everyone orders their burger the same way. So the expediter helps make order out of chaos by calling the food out to the kitchen in a particular order that logically works so that all the food will come up at the same time. Once the food is up, he or she also checks what's on the plate against what's on the ticket to make sure

it matches. Expediting in a restaurant and in a small group is like a dance that requires some flexible and creative thinking and an ability to stick to a time frame and assess progress. To avoid the perception that group members are being rushed, a skilled expediter can demonstrate good active-listening skills by paraphrasing what has been discussed and summarizing what has been accomplished in such a way that makes it easier for group members to see the need to move on.

Information Provider

The role of **information provider** includes behaviors that are more evenly shared than in other roles, as ideally, all group members present new ideas, initiate discussions of new topics, and contribute their own relevant knowledge and experiences. When group members are brought together because they each have different types of information, early group meetings may consist of group members taking turns briefing each other on their area of expertise. In other situations, only one person in the group may be chosen because of his or her specialized knowledge and this person may be expected to be the primary information provider for all other group members. For example, 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.

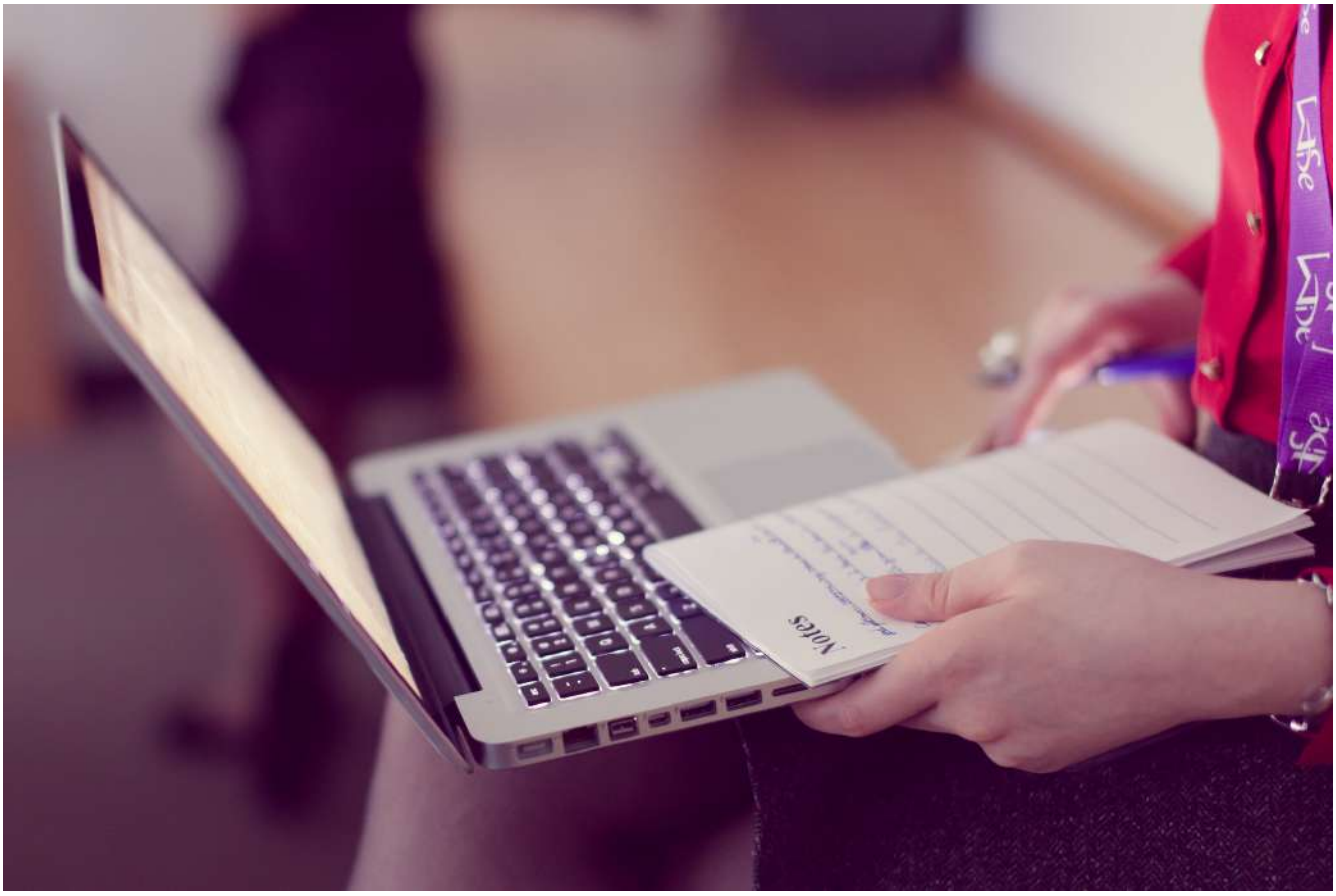
Gatekeeper

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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 150.



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. Charles Pavitt, "Theorizing about the Group Communication-Leadership Relationship," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 318.

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.

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. Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats, "Functional Roles of Group Members," Journal of Social Issues 4, no. 2 (1948): 41–49. 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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 152–53.

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. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 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.

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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Groups: Theory, Practice, Skills, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 142. 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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Groups: Theory, Practice, Skills, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 142. Since exhibiting airhead behaviors gets a person out of performing tasks, they can also be a tactic of a withdrawer, which we will discuss next.

Withdrawer

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

Aggressor

An **aggressor** exhibits negative behaviors such as putting others' ideas down, attacking others personally when they feel confronted or insecure, competing unnecessarily to "win" at the expense of others within the group, and being outspoken to the point of distraction. An aggressor's behaviors can quickly cross the fine line between being abrasive or dominant and being unethical. For example, a person vigorously defending a position that is relevant and valid is different from a person who claims others' ideas are stupid but has nothing to contribute. As with most behaviors, the aggressor's fall into a continuum based on their intensity. On the more benign end of the

continuum is assertive behavior, toward the middle is aggressive behavior, and on the unethical side is bullying behavior. 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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Groups: Theory, Practice, Skills, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), 142. 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

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

Which of the task-related roles do you think has the greatest potential of going wrong and causing conflict within the group and why?

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?

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?

14.3 Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

Learning Objectives

Discuss the common components and characteristics of problems.

Explain the five steps of the group problem-solving process.

Describe the brainstorming and discussion that should take place before the group makes a decision.

Compare and contrast the different decision-making techniques.

Discuss 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: Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 220–21.

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

Discussion of these three elements of a problem helps the group tailor its problem-solving process, as each problem will vary. While these three general elements are present in each problem, the group should also address specific characteristics of the problem. Five common and important characteristics to consider are task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in problem, group member familiarity with problem, and the need for solution acceptance. Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 222–23.

1. **Task difficulty.** Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing a difficult and complex task in order to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information.
2. **Number of possible solutions.** There are usually multiple ways to solve a problem or complete a task, but some problems have more potential solutions than others. Figuring out how to prepare a beach house for an approaching hurricane is fairly complex and difficult, but there are still a limited number of things to do—for example, taping and boarding up windows; turning off water, electricity, and gas; trimming trees; and securing loose outside objects. Other problems may be more creatively based. For example, designing a new restaurant may entail using some standard solutions but could also entail

many different types of innovation with layout and design.

3. **Group member interest in problem.** When group members are interested in the problem, they will be more engaged with the problem-solving process and invested in finding a quality solution. Groups with high interest in and knowledge about the problem may want more freedom to develop and implement solutions, while groups with low interest may prefer a leader who provides structure and direction.
4. **Group familiarity with problem.** Some groups encounter a problem regularly, while other problems are more unique or unexpected. A family who has lived in hurricane alley for decades probably has a better idea of how to prepare its house for a hurricane than does a family that just recently moved from the Midwest. Many groups that rely on funding have to revisit a budget every year, and in recent years, groups have had to get more creative with budgets as funding has been cut in nearly every sector. When group members aren't familiar with a problem, they will need to do background research on what similar groups have done and may also need to bring in outside experts.
5. **Need for solution acceptance.** In this step, groups must consider how many people the decision will affect and how much "buy-in" from others the group needs in order for their solution to be successfully implemented. Some small groups have many stakeholders on whom the success of a solution depends. Other groups are answerable only to themselves. When a small group is planning on building a new park in a crowded neighborhood or implementing a new policy in a large business, it can be very difficult to develop solutions that will be accepted by all. In such cases, groups will want to poll those who will be affected by the solution and may want to do a pilot implementation to see how people react. Imposing an excellent solution that doesn't have buy-in from stakeholders can still lead to failure.

Group Problem-Solving Process

There are several variations of similar problem-solving models based on US American scholar John Dewey's reflective thinking process. Ernest G. Bormann and Nancy C. Bormann, Effective Small Group Communication, 4th ed. (Santa Rosa, CA: Burgess CA, 1988), 112–13. As you read through the steps in the process, think about how you can apply what we learned regarding the general and specific elements of problems. Some of the following steps are straightforward, and they are things we would logically do when faced with a problem. However, taking a deliberate and systematic approach to problem solving has been shown to benefit group functioning and performance. A deliberate approach is especially beneficial for groups that do not have an established history of working together and will only be able to meet occasionally. Although a group should attend to each step of the process, group leaders or other group members who facilitate problem solving should be cautious not to dogmatically follow each element of the process or force a group along. Such a lack of flexibility could limit group member input and negatively affect the group's cohesion and climate.

Step 1: Define the Problem

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way. Katherine Adams and Gloria G. Galanes, Communicating in Groups: Applications and Skills, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 229. At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some good questions to ask during this stage: What is the current difficulty? How did we come to know that the difficulty exists? Who/what is involved? Why is it meaningful/urgent/important? What have the effects been so far? What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification? At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a **problem statement**. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of city officials could use the following problem statement: "Our state does not currently have a mechanism for citizens to report suspected ethical violations by city officials."

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

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

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

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

Step 4: Evaluate Solutions

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

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

Step 5: Implement and Assess the Solution

Implementing the solution requires some advanced planning, and it should not be rushed unless the group is

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

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

"Getting Competent"

Problem Solving and Group Presentations

Giving a group presentation requires that individual group members and the group as a whole solve many problems and make many decisions. Although having more people involved in a presentation increases logistical difficulties and has the potential to create more conflict, a well-prepared and well-delivered group presentation can be more engaging and effective than a typical presentation. The main problems facing a group giving a presentation are (1) dividing responsibilities, (2) coordinating schedules and time management, and (3) working out the logistics of the presentation delivery.

In terms of dividing responsibilities, assigning individual work at the first meeting and then trying to fit it all together before the presentation (which is what many college students do when faced with a group project) is not the recommended method. Integrating content and visual aids created by several different people into a seamless final product takes time and effort, and the person "stuck" with this job at the end usually ends up developing some resentment toward his or her group members. While it's OK for group members to do work independently outside of group meetings, spend time working together to help set up some standards for content and formatting expectations that will help make later integration of work easier. Taking the time to complete one part of the presentation together can help set those standards for later individual work. Discuss the roles that various group members will play openly so there isn't role confusion. There could be one point person for keeping track of the group's progress and schedule, one point person for communication, one point person for content integration, one point person for visual aids, and so on. Each person shouldn't do all that work on his or her own but help focus the group's attention on his or her specific area during group meetings. Chaunce Stanton, "How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach," Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills, November 3, 2009, accessed August 28, 2012, http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/group-presentations-unified-team-approach.

Scheduling group meetings is one of the most challenging problems groups face, given people's busy lives. From the beginning, it should be clearly communicated that the group needs to spend considerable time in face-to-face meetings, and group members should know that they may have to make an occasional sacrifice to attend. Especially important is the commitment to scheduling time to rehearse the presentation. Consider creating a contract of group guidelines that includes expectations for meeting attendance to increase group members' commitment.

Group presentations require members to navigate many logistics of their presentation. While it may be easier for a group to assign each member to create a five-minute segment and then transition from one person to the next, this is definitely not the most engaging method. Creating a master presentation and then assigning individual speakers creates a more fluid and dynamic presentation and allows everyone to become familiar with the content, which can help if a person doesn't show up to present and during the question-and-answer section. Once the content of the presentation is complete, figure out introductions, transitions, visual aids, and the use of

time and space. Chaunce Stanton, “How to Deliver Group Presentations: The Unified Team Approach,” Six Minutes Speaking and Presentation Skills, November 3, 2009, accessed August 28, 2012, http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/group-presentations-unified-team-approach. In terms of introductions, figure out if one person will introduce all the speakers at the beginning, if speakers will introduce themselves at the beginning, or if introductions will occur as the presentation progresses. In terms of transitions, make sure each person has included in his or her speaking notes when presentation duties switch from one person to the next. Visual aids have the potential to cause hiccups in a group presentation if they aren’t fluidly integrated. Practicing with visual aids and having one person control them may help prevent this. Know how long your presentation is and know how you’re going to use the space. Presenters should know how long the whole presentation should be and how long each of their segments should be so that everyone can share the responsibility of keeping time. Also consider the size and layout of the presentation space. You don’t want presenters huddled in a corner until it’s their turn to speak or trapped behind furniture when their turn comes around.

> Of the three main problems facing group presenters, which do you think is the most challenging and why?

> Why do you think people tasked with a group presentation (especially students) prefer to divide the parts up and have members work on them independently before coming back together and integrating each part? What problems emerge from this method? In what ways might developing a master presentation and then assigning parts to different speakers be better than the more divided method? What are the drawbacks to the master presentation method?

Decision Making in Groups

We all engage in personal decision making daily, and we all know that some decisions are more difficult than others. When we make decisions in groups, we face some challenges that we do not face in our personal decision making, but we also stand to benefit from some advantages of group decision making. Rodney W. Napier and Matti K. Gershenfeld, Groups: Theory and Experience, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 292. Group decision making can appear fair and democratic but really only be a gesture that covers up the fact that certain group members or the group leader have already decided. Group decision making also takes more time than individual decisions and can be burdensome if some group members do not do their assigned work, divert the group with self-centered or unproductive role behaviors, or miss meetings. Conversely, though, group decisions are often more informed, since all group members develop a shared understanding of a problem through discussion and debate. The shared understanding may also be more complex and deep than what an individual would develop, because the group members are exposed to a variety of viewpoints that can broaden their own perspectives. Group decisions also benefit from synergy, one of the key advantages of group communication that we discussed earlier. Most groups do not use a specific method of decision making, perhaps thinking that they’ll work things out as they go. This can lead to unequal participation, social loafing, premature decisions, prolonged discussion, and a host of other negative consequences. So in this section we will learn some practices that will prepare us for good decision making and some specific techniques we can use to help us reach a final decision.

Brainstorming before Decision Making

Before groups can make a decision, they need to generate possible solutions to their problem. The most commonly used method is brainstorming, although most people don’t follow the recommended steps of brainstorming. As you’ll recall, brainstorming refers to the quick generation of ideas free of evaluation. The originator of the term brainstorming said the following four rules must be followed for the technique to be effective: Alex F. Osborn, Applied Imagination (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 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. John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, Communication in Small Group Discussions: An Integrated Approach, 3rd ed. (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1991), 77–78.

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

Discussion before Decision Making

The **nominal group technique** guides decision making through a four-step process that includes idea generation and evaluation and seeks to elicit equal contributions from all group members. Andre L. Delbecq and Andrew H. Ven de Ven, "A Group Process Model for Problem Identification and Program Planning," The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 7, no. 4 (1971): 466–92. This method is useful because the procedure involves all group members systematically, which fixes the problem of uneven participation during discussions. Since everyone contributes to the discussion, this method can also help reduce instances of social loafing. To use the nominal group technique, do the following:

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

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

During the second step, the facilitator goes around the group in a consistent order asking each person to share one idea at a time. As the idea is shared, the facilitator records it on a master list that everyone can see. Keep track of how many times each idea comes up, as that could be an idea that warrants more discussion. Continue this process until all the ideas have been shared. As a note to facilitators, some group members may begin to edit their list or self-censor when asked to provide one of their ideas. To limit a person's apprehension with sharing his

or her ideas and to ensure that each idea is shared, I have asked group members to exchange lists with someone else so they can share ideas from the list they receive without fear of being personally judged.

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

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

Specific Decision-Making Techniques

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

Diversity in Group Interactions

International Diversity in Group Interactions

Cultural value orientations such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles all manifest on a continuum of communication behaviors and can influence group decision making. Group members from individualistic cultures are more likely to value task-oriented, efficient, and direct communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as dividing up tasks into individual projects before collaboration begins and then openly debating ideas during discussion and decision making. Additionally, people from cultures that value individualism are more likely to openly express dissent from a decision, essentially expressing their disagreement with the group. Group members from collectivistic cultures are more likely to value relationships over the task at hand. Because of this, they also tend to value conformity and face-saving (often indirect) communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as establishing norms that include periods of socializing to build relationships before task-oriented communication like negotiations begin or norms that limit public disagreement in favor of more indirect communication that doesn't challenge the face of other group members or the group's leader. In a group composed of people from a collectivistic culture, each member would likely play harmonizing roles, looking for signs of conflict and resolving them before they become public.

Power distance can also affect group interactions. Some cultures rank higher on power-distance scales, meaning they value hierarchy, make decisions based on status, and believe that people have a set place in society that is fairly unchangeable. Group members from high-power-distance cultures would likely appreciate a strong designated leader who exhibits a more directive leadership style and prefer groups in which members have clear and assigned roles. In a group that is homogenous in terms of having a high-power-distance orientation, members

with higher status would be able to openly provide information, and those with lower status may not provide information unless a higher status member explicitly seeks it from them. Low-power-distance cultures do not place as much value and meaning on status and believe that all group members can participate in decision making. Group members from low-power-distance cultures would likely freely speak their mind during a group meeting and prefer a participative leadership style.

How much meaning is conveyed through the context surrounding verbal communication can also affect group communication. Some cultures have a high-context communication style in which much of the meaning in an interaction is conveyed through context such as nonverbal cues and silence. Group members from high-context cultures may avoid saying something directly, assuming that other group members will understand the intended meaning even if the message is indirect. So if someone disagrees with a proposed course of action, he or she may say, "Let's discuss this tomorrow," and mean, "I don't think we should do this." Such indirect communication is also a face-saving strategy that is common in collectivistic cultures. Other cultures have a low-context communication style that places more importance on the meaning conveyed through words than through context or nonverbal cues. Group members from low-context cultures often say what they mean and mean what they say. For example, if someone doesn't like an idea, they might say, "I think we should consider more options. This one doesn't seem like the best we can do."

In any of these cases, an individual from one culture operating in a group with people of a different cultural orientation could adapt to the expectations of the host culture, especially if that person possesses a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Additionally, people with high ICC can also adapt to a group member with a different cultural orientation than the host culture. Even though these cultural orientations connect to values that affect our communication in fairly consistent ways, individuals may exhibit different communication behaviors depending on their own individual communication style and the situation.

Domestic Diversity and Group Communication

While it is becoming more likely that we will interact in small groups with international diversity, we are guaranteed to interact in groups that are diverse in terms of the cultural identities found within a single country or the subcultures found within a larger cultural group.

Gender stereotypes sometimes influence the roles that people play within a group. For example, the stereotype that women are more nurturing than men may lead group members (both male and female) to expect that women will play the role of supporters or harmonizers within the group. Since women have primarily performed secretarial work since the 1900s, it may also be expected that women will play the role of recorder. In both of these cases, stereotypical notions of gender place women in roles that are typically not as valued in group communication. The opposite is true for men. In terms of leadership, despite notable exceptions, research shows that men fill an overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of leadership positions. We are socialized to see certain behaviors by men as indicative of leadership abilities, even though they may not be. For example, men are often perceived to contribute more to a group because they tend to speak first when asked a question or to fill a silence and are perceived to talk more about task-related matters than relationally oriented matters. Both of these tendencies create a perception that men are more engaged with the task. Men are also socialized to be more competitive and self-congratulatory, meaning that their communication may be seen as dedicated and their behaviors seen as powerful, and that when their work isn't noticed they will be more likely to make it known to the group rather than take silent credit. Even though we know that the relational elements of a group are crucial for success, even in high-performance teams, that work is not as valued in our society as the task-related work.

Despite the fact that some communication patterns and behaviors related to our typical (and stereotypical) gender socialization affect how we interact in and form perceptions of others in groups, the differences in group communication that used to be attributed to gender in early group communication research seem to be diminishing. This is likely due to the changing organizational cultures from which much group work emerges, which have now had more than sixty years to adjust to women in the workplace. It is also due to a more nuanced understanding of gender-based research, which doesn't take a stereotypical view from the beginning as many of the early male researchers did. Now, instead of biological sex being assumed as a factor that creates inherent communication differences, group communication scholars see that men and women both exhibit a range of behaviors that are more or less feminine or masculine. It is these gendered behaviors, and not a person's gender, that seem to have more of an influence on perceptions of group communication. Interestingly, group interactions are still masculinist in that male and female group members prefer a more masculine communication style for task leaders and that both males and females in this role are more likely to adapt to a more masculine

communication style. Conversely, men who take on social-emotional leadership behaviors adopt a more feminine communication style. In short, it seems that although masculine communication traits are more often associated with high status positions in groups, both men and women adapt to this expectation and are evaluated similarly. Beth Bonniwell Haslett and Jenn Ruebush, "What Differences Do Individual Differences in Groups Make?: The Effects of Individuals, Culture, and Group Composition," in The Handbook of Group Communication Theory and Research, ed. Lawrence R. Frey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 122.

Other demographic categories are also influential in group communication and decision making. In general, group members have an easier time communicating when they are more similar than different in terms of race and age. This ease of communication can make group work more efficient, but the homogeneity may sacrifice some creativity. As we learned earlier, groups that are diverse (e.g., they have members of different races and generations) benefit from the diversity of perspectives in terms of the quality of decision making and creativity of output.

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

The group problem-solving process has five steps:

Analyze the problem and create a problem question that can guide solution generation.

Evaluate the solutions based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Groups should also assess the potential effects of the narrowed list of solutions.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

Chapter 16

New Media and Communication

Media and communication work together in powerful ways. New technologies develop and diffuse into regular usage by large numbers of people, which in turn shapes how we communicate and how we view our society and ourselves. The transition over the past twenty or so years from “old media” to “new media” marks a significant change in how we use technology to communicate, as devices and the messages carried on them move from “mass” to “micro” and our relationship with new media becomes much more personal and social than it was with old media. This chapter is just an introduction to the dynamic area of research and development involving new media and communication.

16.1 New Media Technologies

Learning Objectives

Trace the evolution of new media.

Discuss how new media are more personal and social than old media.

So what makes “new media” new media? When we consider “old media,” which consist of mainly print, radio, and television/movies, we see that their presence in our lives and our societies was limited to a few places. For example, television and radio have long been key technology features in the home. Movies were primarily enjoyed in theaters until VCRs and DVD players brought them into our homes. The closest thing to a portable mass medium was reading a book or paper on a commute to and from work. New media, however, are more personal and more social than old media, which creates a paradox we will explore later in this chapter, as we discuss how new media simultaneously separate and connect us. In this section, we will trace the evolution of new media and discuss how personal media and social media fit under the umbrella of new media.

The Evolution of New Media

New media, as we are discussing them here, couldn’t exist without the move from analogue to digital technology, as all the types of new media we will discuss are digitally based. Eugenia Siapera, Understanding New Media (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 3. **Digital media** are composed of and/or are designed to read numerical codes (hence the root word digit). The most commonly used system of numbers is **binary code**, which converts information into a series of 0s and 1s. This shared code system means that any machine that can decode (read) binary code can make sense of, store, and replay the information. **Analogue media** are created by encoding information onto a physical object that must then be paired with another device capable of reading that specific code. So what most distinguishes analogue media from digital media are their physicality and their need to be matched with a specific decoding device. In terms of physicality, analogue media are a combination of mechanical and physical parts, while digital media can be completely electronic and have no physicality; think of an MP3 music file, for example. To understand the second distinction between analogue and digital media, we can look at predigital music and how various types of analogue music had to be paired with a specific decoding device. To make recordings using old media technology, grooves were carved into vinyl to make records or changes were made in the electromagnetic signature of ribbon or tape to make cassette tapes. So each of these physical objects must be paired with a specific device, such as a record player or a cassette deck, to be able to decode and listen to the music. New media changed how we collect and listen to music. Many people who came of age

in the digital revolution are now so used to having digital music that the notion of a physical music collection is completely foreign to them. Now music files are stored electronically and can be played on many different platforms, including iPods, computers, and smartphones.

In news coverage and academic scholarship, you will see several different terms used when discussing new media. Other terms used include *digital media*, *online media*, *social media*, and *personal media*. For the sake of our discussion, we will subsume all these under the term new media. The term *new media* itself has been critiqued by some for setting up a false dichotomy between new and old. The technology that made new media possible has been in development for many years. The Internet has existed in some capacity for more than forty years, and the World Wide Web, which made the Internet accessible to the masses, just celebrated its twenty-first birthday in August of 2012.

So in addition to the word *new* helping us realize some key technological changes from older forms of media, we should also think of *new* as present and future oriented, since media and technology are now changing faster than ever before. In short, what is new today may not be considered new in a week. Despite the rapid changes in technology, the multiplatform compatibility of much of new media paradoxically allows for some stability. Whereas new technology often made analogue media devices and products obsolete, the format of much of the new media objects stays the same even as newer and updated devices with which to access digital media become available. Key to new media is the notion of technological convergence. Most new media are already digital, and the ongoing digitalization of old media allows them to circulate freely and be read/accessed/played by any digital media platform without the need for conversion. Eugenia Siapera, Understanding New Media (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 47. This multiplatform compatibility has never existed before, as each type of media had a corresponding platform. For example, you couldn't play records in an eight-track cassette tape player or a VHS tape in a DVD player. Likewise, whereas machines that printed words on paper and the human eye were the encoding and decoding devices needed to engage with analogue forms of print media, you can read this textbook in print, on a computer, or on an e-reader, iPad, smartphone, or other handheld device. Another characteristic of new media is the blurring of lines between producers and consumers, as individual users now have a more personal relationship with their media.

Personal Media

Personal media is so named because users are more free to choose the media content to which they want to be exposed, to generate their own content, to comment on and link to other content, to share content with others, and, in general, to create personalized media environments. To better understand personal media, we must take a look at personal media devices and the messages and social connections they facilitate.

In terms of devices, the label *personal media* entered regular usage in the late 1970s when the personal computer was first being produced and plans were in the works to create even more personal (and portable) computing devices. Marika Lüders, "Conceptualizing Personal Media," New Media and Society 10, no. 5 (2008): 684. The 1980s saw an explosion of personal media devices such as the Walkman, the VCR, the camcorder, the cell phone, and the personal computer. At this time, though, personal media devices lacked the connectivity that later allowed personal media to become social media. Still, during this time, people created personalized media environments that allowed for more control over the media messages with which they engaged. For example, while portable radios had been around for years, the Walkman allowed people to listen to any cassette tape they owned instead of having to listen to whatever the radio station played. Beyond that, people began creating mix tapes by recording their favorite songs from the radio or by dubbing select songs from other cassette tapes. Although a little more labor intensive, these mix tapes were the precursor to the playlists of digital music that we create today. Additionally, VCRs allowed people to watch specific movies on their own schedule rather than having to watch movies shown on television or at the movie theater.

While mass media messages are the creation of institutions and professionals, many personal media messages are the creation of individuals or small groups whose skills range from amateur to professional. Marika Lüders, "Conceptualizing Personal Media," New Media and Society 10, no. 5 (2008): 683. Personal computers allowed amateurs and hobbyists to create new computer programs that they could circulate on discs or perhaps through early Internet connections. Camcorders allowed people to create a range of products from home videos to amateur or independent films. As was mentioned earlier, portable music recording and listening devices also allowed people to create their own mix tapes and gave amateur musicians an affordable and accessible way to make demo tapes. These amateur personal media creations weren't as easily distributed as they are today, as the analogue technology still required that people send their messages on discs or tapes.

Personal media crossed the line to new and social media with the growing accessibility of the Internet and digital media. As media products like videos, music, and pictures turned digital, the analogue personal media devices that people once carried around were no longer necessary. New online platforms gave people the opportunity to create and make content that could be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection. For example, the singer who would have once sold demo tapes on cassettes out of his or her car might be now discovered after putting his or her music on MySpace.

Social Media

Media and mass media have long been discussed as a unifying force. The shared experience of national mourning after President Kennedy was assassinated and after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was facilitated through media. Online media, in particular, is characterized by its connectivity. This type of connectivity is different from that of the mass media. Whereas a large audience was connected to the same radio or television broadcast, newspaper story, book, or movie via a one-way communication channel sent from one place to many, online media connects mass media outlets to people and allows people to connect back to them. The basis for this connectivity is the Internet, which connects individual computers, smartphones, and other devices in an interactive web, and it is this web of connected personal media devices like computers and smartphones that facilitates and defines social media. Technology has allowed for mediated social interaction since the days of the telegraph, but these connections were not at the mass level they are today. So even if we think of the telegram as a precursor to a "tweet," we can still see that the potential connection points and the audience size are much different. While a telegraph went to one person, Olympian Michael Phelps can send a tweet instantly to 1.2 million people, and Justin Bieber's tweets reach 23 million people! Social media doesn't just allow for connection; it allows us more control over the quality and degree of connection that we maintain with others. Eugenia Siapera, Understanding New Media (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 5.

The potential for social media was realized under the conditions of what is called Web 2.0, which refers to a new way of using the connectivity of the Internet to bring people together for collaboration and creativity—to harness collective intelligence. Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0?" O'Reilly: Spreading the Knowledge of Innovators, accessed November 3, 2012, http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html. This entails using the web to collaborate on projects and problem solving rather than making and protecting one's own material. Megan Boler, "Introduction," in Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times, ed. Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 39. Much of this was achieved through platforms and websites such as Napster, Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia that encouraged and enable user-generated content. It is important to note that user-generated content and collaboration have been a part of the World Wide Web for decades, but much of it was in the form of self-publishing information such as user reviews, online journal entries/diaries, and later blogs, which cross over between the "old" web and Web 2.0.

The most influential part of the new web is **social networking sites** (**SNSs**), which allow users to build a public or semipublic profile, create a network of connections to other people, and view other people's profiles and networks of connections. Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," Journal of Computer Mediated Communication 13, no. 1 (2008): 211. Although SNSs have existed for over a decade, earlier iterations such as Friendster and MySpace have given way to the giant that is Facebook. Facebook, which now has more than 955 million monthly active users is unquestionably the most popular SNS. "Key Facts," Facebook Newsroom, accessed November 8, 2012, http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22. And the number of users is predicted to reach one billion by the end of 2012. Christy Hunter, "Number of Facebook Users Could Reach 1 Billion by 2012," The Exponent Online, January 12, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://www.purdueexponent.org/features/article_8815d757-8b7c-566f-8fbe-49528d4d8037 .html. More specific SNSs like LinkedIn focus on professional networking. In any case, the ability to self-publish information, likes/dislikes, status updates, profiles, and links allows people to craft their own life narrative and share it with other people. Likewise, users can follow the narratives of others in their network as they are constructed. The degree to which we engage with others' narratives varies based on the closeness of the relationship and situational factors, but SNSs are used to sustain strong, moderate, and weak ties with others. Kathleen Richardson and Sue Hessey, "Archiving the Self?: Facebook as Biography of Social and Relational Memory," Journal of Information, Communication, and Ethics in Society 7, no. 1 (2009): 29.

Let's conceptualize social media in another way—through the idea of collaboration and sharing rather than just through interpersonal connection and interaction. The growth of open source publishing and creative commons

licensing also presents a challenge to traditional media outlets and corporations and copyrights. Open source publishing first appeared most notably with software programs. The idea was that the users could improve on openly available computer programs and codes and then the new versions, sometimes called derivatives, would be made available again to the community. **Crowdsourcing** refers more to the idea stage of development where people from various perspectives and positions offer proposals or information to solve a problem or create something new. Daren C. Brabham, "Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving: An Introduction and Cases," Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies 14, no. 1 (2008): 76. This type of open access and free collaboration helps encourage participation and improve creativity through the synergy created by bringing together different perspectives and has been referred to as the biggest shift in innovation since the Industrial Revolution. Wendy Kaufman, "Crowd Sourcing Turns Business on Its Head," NPR, August 20, 2008, accessed November 8, 2012, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93495217. In short, the combination of open source publishing and crowdsourcing allows a community of users to collectively improve on and create more innovative ideas, products, and projects. Unlike most media products that are tightly copyrighted and closely monitored by the companies that create them, open source publishing and crowdsourcing increase the democratizing potential of new media.

The advent of these new, collaborative, participative, and democratizing media has been both resisted and embraced by old media outlets. Increased participation and feedback means that traditional media outlets that were used to one-way communication and passive audiences now have to listen to and respond to feedback, some of which is critical and/or negative. User-generated content, both amateur and professional, can also compete directly with traditional mass media content that costs much more to produce. Social media is responsible for the whole phenomenon of viral videos, through which a video of a kitten doing a flip or a parody of a commercial can reach many more audience members than a network video blooper show or an actual commercial. Media outlets are again in a paradox. They want to encourage audience participation, but they also want to be able to control and predict the media consumption habits and reactions of audiences. Eugenia Siapera, Understanding New Media (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 56.

Key Takeaways

New media are distinct from old media in that they are less linked to a specific media platform and are therefore more transferable from device to device. They are also less bound to a physical object, meaning that information can be stored electronically rather than needing to be encoded onto a physical object.

New media are also distinct from old media in that they are more personal and social. As the line between consumers and producers of media blur in new media, users gain more freedom to personalize their media experiences. Additionally, the interactive web of personal media devices also allows people to stay in touch with each other, collaborate, and share information in ways that increase the social nature of technology use.

Exercises

Getting integrated: Identify some ways that you might use new media in each of the following contexts: academic, professional, personal, and civic.

How do you personalize the media that you use? How do digital media make it easier for you to personalize your media experiences than analogue media?

Aside from using social media to maintain interpersonal connections, how have you used social media to collaborate or share information?

16.2 New Media, the Self, and Relationships

Learning Objectives

Discuss the relationship between new media and the self.

Identify positive and negative impacts of new media on our interpersonal relationships.

Think about some ways that new media have changed the way you think about yourself and the way you think about and interact in your relationships. Have you ever given your Facebook page a "once-over" before you send or accept a friend request just to make sure that the content displayed is giving off the desired impression? The technological changes of the past twenty years have affected you and your relationships whether you are a heavy user or not. Even people who don't engage with technology as much as others are still affected by it, since the people they interact with use and are affected by new media to varying degrees.

New Media and the Self

The explicit way we become conscious of self-presentation when using new media, social networking sites (SNSs) in particular, may lead to an increase in self-consciousness. You'll recall that in Chapter 1 "Introduction to Communication Studies" we talked about the role that communication plays in helping us meet our identity needs and, in Chapter 2 "Communication and Perception", the role that self-discrepancy theory plays in self-perception. The things that we "like" on Facebook, the pictures we are tagged in, and the news stories or jokes that we share on our timeline all come together to create a database of information that new and old friends can access to form and reform impressions of us. Because we know that others are making impressions based on this database of information and because we have control over most of what appears in this database, people may become overfocused on crafting their online presence to the point that they neglect their offline relationships. This extra level of self-consciousness has also manifested in an increase in self-image and self-esteem issues for some users. For example, some cosmetic surgeons have noted an uptick in patients coming in to have facial surgeries or procedures specifically because they don't like the way their chin looks on the webcam while chatting on Skype or because they feel self-conscious about the way they look in the numerous digital pictures that are now passed around and stored on new media. Since new media are being increasingly used in professional capacities, some people are also seeking cosmetic surgery or procedures as a way of investing in their personal brand or as a way of giving them an edge in a tight job market. Jessica Roy, "Facebook, Skype Give Cosmetic Surgery Industry a Lift," BetaBeat.com, July 11, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://betabeat.com/2012/07/facebook-skype-plastic-surgery-cosmetic-increase-07112012.

The personal and social nature of new media also creates an openness that isn't necessarily part of our offline social reality. Although some people try to address this problem by creating more than one Facebook account, according to the terms of use we all agreed to, we are not allowed to create more than one personal profile. People may also have difficulty managing their different commitments, especially if they develop a dependence on or even addiction to new media devices and/or platforms. New media blur the lines between personal and professional in many ways, which can be positive and negative. For example, the constant connection offered by laptops and smartphones increases the expectation that people will continue working from home or while on vacation. At the same time, however, people may use new media for non-work-related purposes while at work, which may help even out the work/life balance. **Cyberslacking**, which is the non-work-related use of new media while on the job, is seen as a problem in many organizations and workplaces. However, some research shows that occasional use of new media for personal reasons while at work can have positive effects, as it may relieve boredom, help reduce stress, or lead to greater job satisfaction. Jessica Vitak, Julia Crouse, and Robert LaRose, "Personal Internet Use at Work: Understanding Cyberslacking," Computers in Human Behavior 27, no. 5 (2011): 1752.

The constant availability of the Internet allows people to engage in a wide variety of cyberslacking at work, such as online gaming, shopping, and chatting.
Pexel.com – CC0 public domain.

Personal media devices bring with them a sense of **constant connectivity** that makes us "reachable" nearly all the time and can be comforting or anxiety inducing. Devices such as smartphones and computers, and platforms such as e-mail, Facebook, and the web, are within an arm's reach of many people. While this can be convenient and make things more efficient in some cases, it can also create a dependence that we might not be aware of until those connections are broken or become unreliable. You don't have to look too far to see people buried in their smartphones, tablets, or laptops all around. While some people have learned to rely on peripheral vision in order to text and walk at the same time, others aren't so graceful. In fact, London saw the creation of a "text safe" street with padding on street signs and lamp poles to help prevent injuries when people inevitably bump into them while engrossed in their gadgets' screens. Follow this link to read a story in *Time* magazine and see a picture of the street: http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1724522,00.html. Additionally, a survey conducted in the United Kingdom found that being away from social networks causes more anxiety than being a user of them. Another study found that 73 percent of people would panic if they lost their smartphone. Brittney Fitzgerald, "Social Media Is Causing Anxiety, Study Finds," Huffington Post, July 11, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/10/social-media-anxiety_n_1662224.html.

Of course, social media can also increase self-esteem or have other social benefits. A recent survey of fifteen thousand women found that 48 percent of the respondents felt that social media helped them stay in touch with others while also adding a little stress in terms of overstimulation. Forty-two percent didn't mention the stress of overstimulation and focused more on the positive effects of being in touch with others and the world in general. When asked about how social media affects their social lives, 30 percent of the women felt that increased use of social media helped them be more social offline as well. Bonnie Kintzer, "Women Find Social Media Make Them More Social Offline, Too," Advertising Age, July 9, 2012, accessed November 8, 2012, http://adage.com/article/guest-columnists/women-find-social-media-makes-social-offline/235712. Other research supports this finding for both genders, finding that Facebook can help people with social anxiety feel more confident and socially connected. Tracii Ryan and Sophia Xenos, "Who Uses Facebook? An Investigation into the Relationship between

the Big Five, Shyness, Narcissism, Loneliness, and Facebook Usage," Computers in Human Behavior 27, no. 5 (2011): 1659.

New Media and Interpersonal Relationships

How do new media affect our interpersonal relationships, if at all? This is a question that has been addressed by scholars, commentators, and people in general. To provide some perspective, similar questions and concerns have been raised along with each major change in communication technology. New media, however, have been the primary communication change of the past few generations, which likely accounts for the attention they receive. Some scholars in sociology have decried the negative effects of new technology on society and relationships in particular, saying that the quality of relationships is deteriorating and the strength of connections is weakening. Kathleen Richardson and Sue Hessey, "Archiving the Self?: Facebook as Biography of Social and Relational Memory," Journal of Information, Communication, and Ethics in Society 7, no. 1 (2009): 29.

Facebook greatly influenced our use of the word *friend*, although people's conceptions of the word may not have changed as much. When someone "friends you" on Facebook, it doesn't automatically mean that you now have the closeness and intimacy that you have with some offline friends. And research shows that people don't regularly accept friend requests from or send them to people they haven't met, preferring instead to have met a person at least once. Kathleen Richardson and Sue Hessey, "Archiving the Self?: Facebook as Biography of Social and Relational Memory," Journal of Information, Communication, and Ethics in Society 7, no. 1 (2009): 32. Some users, though, especially adolescents, engage in what is called "friend-collecting behavior," which entails users friending people they don't know personally or that they wouldn't talk to in person in order to increase the size of their online network. Emily Christofides, Amy Muise, and Serge Desmarais, "Hey Mom, What's on Your Facebook? Comparing Facebook Disclosure and Privacy in Adolescents and Adults," Social Psychological and Personality Science 3, no. 1 (2012): 51. As we will discuss later, this could be an impression management strategy, as the user may assume that a large number of Facebook friends will make him or her appear more popular to others.

Although many have critiqued the watering down of the term friend when applied to SNSs, specifically Facebook, some scholars have explored how the creation of these networks affects our interpersonal relationships and may even restructure how we think about our relationships. Even though a person may have hundreds of Facebook friends that he or she doesn't regularly interact with on- or offline, just knowing that the network exists in a somewhat tangible form (catalogued on Facebook) can be comforting. Even the people who are distant acquaintances but are "friends" on Facebook can serve important functions. Rather than Facebook users seeing these connections as pointless, frivolous, or stressful, they are often comforting background presences. A **dormant network** is a network of people with whom users may not feel obligated to explicitly interact but may find comfort in knowing the connections exist. Such networks can be beneficial, because when needed, a person may be able to more easily tap into that dormant network than they would an offline extended network. It's almost like being friends on Facebook keeps the communication line open, because both people can view the other's profile and keep up with their lives even without directly communicating. This can help sustain tenuous friendships or past friendships and prevent them from fading away, which as we learned in Chapter 7 "Communication in Relationships" is a common occurrence as we go through various life changes.

A key part of interpersonal communication is impression management, and some forms of new media allow us more tools for presenting ourselves than others. Social networking sites (SNSs) in many ways are platforms for self-presentation. Even more than blogs, web pages, and smartphones, the environment on an SNS like Facebook or Twitter facilitates self-disclosure in a directed way and allows others who have access to our profile to see our other "friends." This convergence of different groups of people (close friends, family, acquaintances, friends of friends, colleagues, and strangers) can present challenges for self-presentation. Although Facebook is often thought of as a social media outlet for teens and young adults, research shows half of all US adults have a profile on Facebook or another SNS. Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, "'There's a Network Out There You Might as Well Tap': Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook," New Media and Society (in press). The fact that Facebook is expanding to different generations of users has coined a new phrase—"the graying of Facebook." This is due to a large increase in users over the age of fifty-five. In fact, it has been stated the fastest-growing Facebook user group is women fifty-five and older, which is up more than 175 percent since fall 2008. Anita Gates, "For Baby Boomers, the Joys of Facebook," New York Times, March 19, 2009, accessed November 8, 2012,http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/22/nyregion/new-jersey/22Rgen.html. So now we likely have people from personal, professional, and academic contexts in our Facebook

network, and those people are now more likely than ever to be from multiple generations. The growing diversity of our social media networks creates new challenges as we try to engage in impression management.

We should be aware that people form impressions of us based not just on what we post on our profiles but also on our friends and the content that they post on our profiles. In short, as in our offline lives, we are judged online by the company we keep. Joseph B. Walther, Brandon Van Der Heide, Sang-Yeon Kim, David Westerman, and Stephanie Tom Tong, "The Role of Friends' Appearance and Behavior on Evaluations of Individuals on Facebook: Are We Known by the Company We Keep?" Human Communication Research 34 (2008): 29. The difference is, though, that via Facebook a person (unless blocked or limited by privacy settings) can see our entire online social network and friends, which doesn't happen offline. The information on our Facebook profiles is also archived, meaning there is a record the likes of which doesn't exist in offline interactions. Recent research found that a person's perception of a profile owner's attractiveness is influenced by the attractiveness of the friends shown on the profile. In short, a profile owner is judged more physically attractive when his or her friends are judged as physically attractive, and vice versa. The profile owner is also judged as more socially attractive (likable, friendly) when his or her friends are judged as physically attractive. The study also found that complimentary and friendly statements made about profile owners on their wall or on profile comments increased perceptions of the profile owner's social attractiveness and credibility. An interesting, but not surprising, gender double standard also emerged. When statements containing sexual remarks or references to the profile owner's excessive drinking were posted on the profile, perceptions of attractiveness increased if the profile owner was male and decreased if female. Joseph B. Walther, Brandon Van Der Heide, Sang-Yeon Kim, David Westerman, and Stephanie Tom Tong, "The Role of Friends' Appearance and Behavior on Evaluations of Individuals on Facebook: Are We Known by the Company We Keep?" Human Communication Research 34 (2008): 41–45.

Self-disclosure is a fundamental building block of interpersonal relationships, and new media make self-disclosures easier for many people because of the lack of immediacy, meaning the fact that a message is sent through electronic means arouses less anxiety or inhibition than would a face-to-face exchange. SNSs provide opportunities for social support. Research has found that Facebook communication behaviors such as "friending" someone or responding to a request posted on someone's wall lead people to feel a sense of attachment and perceive that others are reliable and helpful. Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, "'There's a Network Out There You Might as Well Tap': Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook," New Media and Society (in press). Much of the research on Facebook, though, has focused on the less intimate alliances that we maintain through social media. Since most people maintain offline contact with their close friends and family, Facebook is more of a supplement to interpersonal communication. Since most people's Facebook "friend" networks are composed primarily of people with whom they have less face-to-face contact in their daily lives, Facebook provides an alternative space for interaction that can more easily fit into a person's busy schedule or interest area. For example, to stay connected, both people don't have to look at each other's profiles simultaneously. I often catch up on a friend by scrolling through a couple weeks of timeline posts rather than checking in daily.

The space provided by SNSs can also help reduce some of the stress we feel in regards to relational maintenance or staying in touch by allowing for more convenient contact. The expectations for regular contact with our Facebook friends who are in our extended network are minimal. An occasional comment on a photo or status update or an even easier click on the "like" button can help maintain those relationships. However, when we post something asking for information, help, social support, or advice, those in the extended network may play a more important role and allow us to access resources and viewpoints beyond those in our closer circles. And research shows that many people ask for informational help through their status updates. Jessica Vitak and Nicole B. Ellison, "'There's a Network Out There You Might as Well Tap': Exploring the Benefits of and Barriers to Exchanging Informational and Support-Based Resources on Facebook," New Media and Society (in press).

These extended networks serve important purposes, one of which is to provide access to new information and different perspectives than those we may get from close friends and family. For example, since we tend to have significant others that are more similar to than different from us, the people that we are closest to are likely to share many or most of our beliefs, attitudes, and values. Extended contacts, however, may expose us to different political views or new sources of information, which can help broaden our perspectives. The content in this section hopefully captures what I'm sure you have already experienced in your own engagement with new media—that new media have important implications for our interpersonal relationships. Given that, we will end this chapter with a "Getting Competent" feature box that discusses some tips on how to competently use social media.

"Getting Competent"

Using Social Media Competently

We all have a growing log of personal information stored on the Internet, and some of it is under our control and some of it isn't. We also have increasingly diverse social networks that require us to be cognizant of the information we make available and how we present ourselves. While we can't control all the information about ourselves online or the impressions people form, we can more competently engage with social media so that we are getting the most out of it in both personal and professional contexts.

A quick search on Google for "social media dos and don'ts" will yield around 100,000 results, which shows that there's no shortage of advice about how to competently use social media. I'll offer some of the most important dos and don'ts that I found that relate to communication. Alison Doyle, "Top 10 Social Media Dos and Don'ts," About.com, accessed November 8, 2012, http://jobsearch.about.com/od/onlinecareernetworking/tp/socialmediajobsearch.htm. Feel free to do your own research on specific areas of concern.

Be consistent. Given that most people have multiple social media accounts, it's important to have some degree of consistency. At least at the top level of your profile (the part that isn't limited by privacy settings), include information that you don't mind anyone seeing.

Know what's out there. Since the top level of many social media sites are visible in Google search results, you should monitor how these appear to others by regularly (about once a month) doing a Google search using various iterations of your name. Putting your name in quotation marks will help target your results. Make sure you're logged out of all your accounts and then click on the various results to see what others can see.

Think before you post. Software that enable people to take "screen shots" or download videos and tools that archive web pages can be used without our knowledge to create records of what you post. While it is still a good idea to go through your online content and "clean up" materials that may form unfavorable impressions, it is even a better idea to not put that information out there in the first place. Posting something about how you hate school or your job or a specific person may be done in the heat of the moment and forgotten, but a potential employer might find that information and form a negative impression even if it's months or years old.

Be familiar with privacy settings. If you are trying to expand your social network, it may be counterproductive to put your Facebook or Twitter account on "lockdown," but it is beneficial to know what levels of control you have and to take advantage of them. For example, I have a "Limited Profile" list on Facebook to which I assign new contacts or people with whom I am not very close. You can also create groups of contacts on various social media sites so that only certain people see certain information.

Be a gatekeeper for your network. Do not accept friend requests or followers that you do not know. Not only could these requests be sent from "bots" that might skim your personal info or monitor your activity; they could be from people that might make you look bad. Remember, we learned earlier that people form impressions based on those with whom we are connected. You can always send a private message to someone asking how he or she knows you or do some research by Googling his or her name or username.

Identify information that you might want to limit for each of the following audiences: friends, family, and employers.

Google your name (remember to use multiple forms and to put them in quotation marks). Do the same with any usernames that are associated with your name (e.g., you can Google your Twitter handle or an e-mail address). What information came up? Were you surprised by anything?

What strategies can you use to help manage the impressions you form on social media?

Key Takeaways

New media affect interpersonal relationships, as conceptions of relationships are influenced by new points of connection such as “being Facebook friends.” While some people have critiqued social media for lessening the importance of face-to-face interaction, some communication scholars have found that online networks provide important opportunities to stay connected, receive emotional support, and broaden our perspectives in ways that traditional offline networks do not.

Getting integrated: Social networking sites (SNSs) can present interpersonal challenges related to self-disclosure and self-presentation since we use them in academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts. Given that people from all those contexts may have access to our profile, we have to be competent in regards to what we disclose and how we present ourselves to people from different contexts (or be really good at managing privacy settings so that only certain information is available to certain people).

Exercises

Discuss the notion that social media has increased our degree of self-consciousness. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Do you find the constant connectivity that comes with personal media overstimulating or comforting?

Have you noticed a “graying” of social media like Facebook and Twitter in your own networks? What opportunities and challenges are presented by intergenerational interactions on social media?

Appendix-Sample Speeches

Citation Formats and Sample Outlines

The author uses APA style in several examples, but you may also use MLA 8th edition format to prepare works cited lists for speech outlines. Compared to MLA 7, MLA 8 requires much less information in citations. Be sure to include URLs of web sources for our course. Also, be sure to double-check citations if you use EasyBib or another citation generator.

The sample student speech outlines below are simpler than the author's examples above. Feel free to use or adapt elements of either format but be consistent. Follow the Outline Check Sheet in the speech assignment handout as you complete your outlines.

Informative Outline Example

Radiographic Imaging

Specific Purpose: At the end of this speech, my audience will know of a few imaging techniques and their benefits, so they will be able to identify what is happening when these tests are mentioned.

Introduction:
I. How many of you have bombarded someone else with hundreds of thousands of radioactive particles per second?
II. As someone who is going into Radiography and has participated on a number of Nuclear Imaging runs I can say that it has become a routine process for me.
III. I have run across multiple people who don't even know the meaning or difference between an X-ray, CT scan or even a PET scan when ordered one by their physician. If you know what the different techniques are and how they are applied in the diagnosing procedure, then you will have a better understanding of what the physicians are looking for.

Body:
I. Radiation is a very useful tool when it comes to the medical field.

A. There are three distinct particles that can be emitted as radiation.

B. Alpha particles can be stopped very easily.

C. Beta particles can be blocked by skin.

D. Gamma particles can penetrate a lot of things, however they are very hazardous due to the amount of energy they contain.

II. X-rays have the same properties as Gamma rays however they have less energy, which is highly beneficial in the imaging environment.

A. X-ray is where you use a stationary Gamma camera and a stationary radiation source.

B. The radiation source is directed at the gamma camera and the area that is desired is placed in the path of the radiation.

C. The radiation is absorbed by heavy calcium deposits.

D. These scans only take a few seconds to complete.

E. This technique is best when trying to see abnormalities in bones.

III. CT scan is Computed Tomography, which uses a rotating gamma camera sensor and a rotating radiation source.

A. The radiation source and the gamma camera rotate at 180 degrees from each other around the patient.

B. The scan gives a transverse view of the human body.

C. This scan takes minutes to complete.

D. CT allows us to see a full 3D reconstruction of the human body as well as some prevalent organs.

E. This technique is best to see abnormal organs or hard tissues within the body.

IV. PET scans have a rotating gamma camera and the radiation source is stationary.

A. The radiation source is injected into the patient either orally or intravenously.

B. The radiation is attached to another molecule such as glucose as a tracer.

C. The molecule is taken up by the site of interest and concentrates in the area.

D. The PET scan is able to detect these concentrated areas and where they are in our body.

E. We can detect levels of high metabolic activity in and their relevance within the body without having invasive surgery.

F. This technique is best to see possible cancerous or defective regions.

Conclusion:

I. There are a plethora of other imaging techniques out there however not near enough time to talk about them. The different styles of imaging give us a variety of different information we can use to assist in diagnosing a person. X-ray gives us good detailed images of bones while CT gives us good details of organs and PET gives us great information on hyperactive tissues.

II. The more knowledge you have of the medical field and of imaging modalities, then the greater your knowledge of what the physicians are looking for.

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Persuasive Outline Example

The Benefits of Volunteering

Specific Purpose: My specific purpose is to persuade the audience that volunteering is an easy thing to do that benefits oneself along with the others involved.

Introduction:

I. People in the United States today need to volunteer and give back to their communities.

II. I have seen firsthand what volunteering can do for one's self and for the other people involved.

III. In today's world, the need for volunteering is increasing because of the way Americans live and the way our country is. Depending on what one likes, there are many different ways for someone to get involved and volunteer. When someone becomes a volunteer, they will discover the ways it can impact and benefit their life.

Body:

I. The amount of people that are needed to volunteer is increasing.

A. The state in which our country is today, more places need people to volunteer their time.

B. The lifestyles of many Americans interfere with volunteering, which causes the needed amount of people to increase.

II. There are many ways for someone to get involved with volunteering.

A. Different organizations offer different volunteering activities so that one can choose which activity they would enjoy doing the most.

B. There are many places for one to find a volunteering opportunity that are close to them.

III. A person can find different ways that volunteering can impact and benefit their life.

A. Volunteering can have many benefits on a person when they donate their time along with those who are affected or helped by the volunteers.

B. A person can gain experience for a particular job, hobby, or interest through volunteering.

C. Volunteering one's time can enable a person to build their resume.

Conclusion:

I. In conclusion, the need for volunteers is going to continue to increase unless we act today and donate our time. When one volunteers they can find an opportunity to volunteer in something they enjoy doing. Once one starts to volunteer they will figure out the impact and benefits that come along with giving up some of their time for others.

II. The United States needs more volunteering done by its citizens to make an impact on our country.

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H5P Lessons to Review Outlining

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://kirkwood.pressbooks.pub/tarduini/?p=92#h5p-1