

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: A First Look

Let's talk about interpersonal communication. How do you decide whether to speak with a person face-to-face or send a text? What if you had to choose between calling and texting? A lot depends on the situation and the other person. Or does it?

According to a report issued by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, we now communicate more often via text. In fact, more than one-third of young adults send on average more than one hundred texts per day, making the text message their focal communication strategy—their “go to” form of interaction.¹ Quite simply, for many of us texting is our dominant daily mode of communicating.²

Are you among the two-thirds of people more likely to use your cell phone to text your friend rather than talk to her on the cell? And how do you want your friend to get in touch with you? Do you prefer her to call and talk to you over the phone, or would

you rather she text too? Your answer likely depends on how frequently you text and whether you think of texting as easier and more convenient than other communication channels.

How do you decide whether to speak with a person face-to-face or send a text?

We have an abundance of communication choices at our disposal. With so many available options, making the right choice is not always easy, and not necessarily the one most favor. Our goal is to help you explore the benefits your choices present. While recognizing the range of communication technologies open to you, this book will help you improve your skills and develop your abilities to communicate most effectively and appropriately with others—to make sound decisions about how to communicate—whether by text messaging, using social networking sites, calling on a cell phone or landline, instant messaging, e-mailing, or talking face-to-face.



Interpersonal communication is a fact of life.

We do it daily. We do it with people we have known all our lives, and we do it with people we have just met. Every day, we engage in interpersonal communication with family, friends, and strangers alike, face-to-face and online, in person and via our phones. Through our personal contacts, we build connections and establish relationships to satisfy our social needs and realize our personal goals. As we relate to others, the messages we send and receive shape us. In fact, there is a direct link between how good we are at communicating and how satisfying or fulfilling we find life.³ Let's look more closely at the process known as interpersonal communication.

WHAT IS INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION?

Communication is our link to humanity. In its broadest sense, it is a process involving the deliberate or accidental transfer of meaning. One person does or says something, thereby engaging in symbolic behavior, while others observe what was done or said and attribute meaning to it. Whenever you observe or give meaning to behavior, communication is taking place.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False

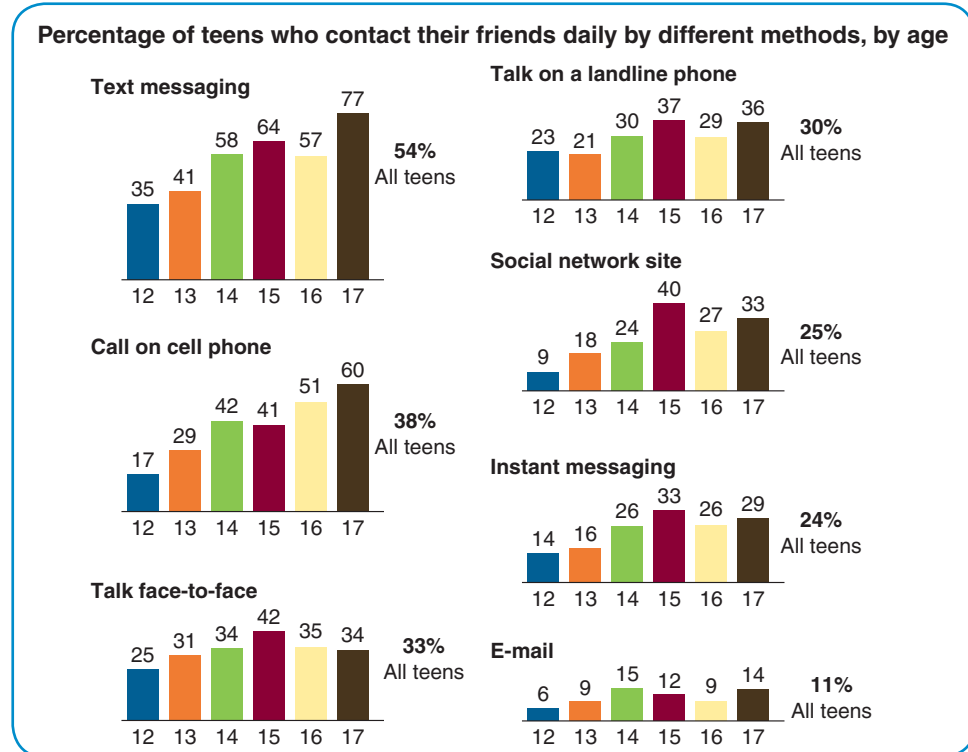
1. Communication is normally intentional.

False. Communication is also accidental or unintentional.

Communication:

A process involving both deliberate and accidental transfer of meaning.

Figure 1.1 Texting is Most Common Daily Communication Method for Teens



SOURCE: Based on information from the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

There are many kinds of communication. We distinguish one type of communication from others based on the number of persons involved, the formality of the interaction, and the opportunity to give and receive feedback. For example, since **intrapersonal communication** occurs when you think or talk to yourself, it requires only a single communicator—you! In contrast to intrapersonal communication, **interpersonal communication** is the ongoing, ever-changing process that occurs when you interact with another person, forming a **dyad**, which is defined as two people communicating with each other. Both individuals in a dyad share the responsibility for determining the nature of a relationship by creating meaning from the interaction. Thus, anytime we communicate with another person, whether a friend, parent, coworker, or employer, we are communicating interpersonally. It is very common for communicators to use digital media to get their messages across to one another or the public by blogging, texting, tweeting, Instant messaging, e-mailing, or posting in a social networking site such as Facebook (see Figure 1.1).

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION TAKES TWO

First, let's consider the quantitative aspects of our interpersonal interactions. The fact that interpersonal communication takes two people means that it is indivisible. Without the second person, interpersonal communication is impossible. Thus, the parties to interpersonal communication are a duo: a couple, a pair, or perhaps adversaries. From an interpersonal perspective, even groups of three or more individuals are viewed as composites of dyads, effectively serving as the foundations for separate pairings and potential coalitions. Without a dyad, a relationship does not exist, and without a relationship, there is no interpersonal communication.⁴ This means that if one person withdraws from the relationship, then that relationship terminates—at least for the time being or until the connection between them is reestablished. The qualitative aspect of interpersonal communication is another story. We measure the quality of an interpersonal relationship along a continuum, with “intimate communication” at one end and “impersonal communication” at the opposite end. The more personally we interact with another person, the more “interpersonal” our relationship becomes. When we engage in interpersonal communication, our goal is to treat one another as genuine persons, not as objects, and to respond to each other as unique individuals with whom we create a distinct relational culture, not as people merely playing roles.⁵

The more personal a relationship becomes, the more interdependent the two people become, sharing thoughts and feelings with each other. Our lives become interconnected, especially when contrasted with how we relate to persons with whom we are uninvolved and to whom we don't reveal much about ourselves. We develop personal relationships because of the intrinsic rewards we derive from them; we find them emotionally, intellectually, and perhaps even spiritually fulfilling. In contrast, we have impersonal relationships usually because of the extrinsic rewards they offer, such as maintaining professional working relationships with others to help us reach our goals. Which kinds of relationships do you have more of, those that are impersonal or those that are personal in nature?

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IS A LIFELONG PROJECT

The effectiveness of interpersonal relationships depends on the extent to which we practice and exhibit interpersonal skills. While we may be born communicators, we are not born with effective interpersonal skills—those we need to learn. Nor are effective skills static; the same techniques may not work for all people in all situations. The culture of each person, his or her gender, the environment, and the individual's goals will determine how that person approaches and processes interpersonal communication.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False

2. *Interpersonal Communication always is between two people.*

True. Interpersonal communication occurs when two people form a dyad, also known as two people communicating with one another.

Intrapersonal communication:

Communication requiring only a single communicator; communication with oneself.

Interpersonal communication:

The ongoing, ever-changing process that occurs when one person interacts with another person, forming a dyad; communication occurring within a relationship.

Dyad: Two individuals interacting; a two-person relationship.

Just as every person represents a unique combination of physical, psychological, education, gender, and cultural characteristics that distinguish us from one another, each new relationship teaches us a little bit more about the nature of people and interpersonal communication. Each new relationship increases our comfort at interacting not only with those who share our characteristics but also with those whose attitudes, life experiences, and perspectives differ from ours.

TRY THIS: *Today, Who Is a Stranger?*

When you were a young child, your parents and/or caregivers probably cautioned you not to speak to strangers. However, travel opportunities and social networks such as Facebook make interacting with strangers much more commonplace, even ordinary. Answer the following questions:

1. To what extent, if any, are you more willing to interact with a stranger online than at the mall or when on a trip? Explain.
2. How does the anonymity or privacy of online relationships increase or decrease your level of personal comfort?
3. To what extent, if any, do you think parents or caregivers should restrict the time young children spend interacting online? To what extent, if any, do you think you should limit the time you spend in social networks?
4. In your opinion, which is more likely to result in a lasting interpersonal relationship—a friendship that begins online, an “old-fashioned” pen-pal type of friendship that depends on U.S. mail delivery, or a relationship that begins with both parties face-to-face? Explain your answer with reasons.

As we grow and learn, we must continually revise and update our personal theories of what works during interpersonal contacts, or our assumptions will compel us to repeat interpersonal scenarios or scripts that are doomed to fail. The effective interpersonal communicator does not take others for granted. Instead of following stereotypes, the effective interpersonal communicator is guided by knowledge and skill.

Our sense of personal identity results from and influences our interpersonal relationships. When we do it well, interpersonal communication helps us work through problems, ultimately enhancing our feelings of self-worth. When we do it poorly, however, rather than enlarging us, it limits our growth and frustrates our achievement of our unique potential.

Whether an interpersonal relationship is productive or not depends on how satisfying the relationship is and how much attention we pay to its health. Having good interpersonal skills can mean the difference between happiness and unhappiness or success and failure in multiple arenas or life contexts—home, job, school, health care settings, and society—as well as across cultures and generations. Enhanced understanding of the factors in play when two people communicate, whether in a personal or a professional relationship, increases an individual’s chances of developing **interpersonal competence**—the ability to communicate effectively.⁶ We increase communication competence by observing ourselves and others, assessing what we observe, practicing specific behaviors, and then predicting and evaluating the outcomes of our interactions, with the goal of improving our communication skills.

Interpersonal competence:

The ability to use appropriate communication to build and maintain an effective relationship.

As you read the rest of this chapter, consider the following questions about yourself:

1. How effective am I at communicating with people from diverse cultures?
2. Am I equally effective interacting with males and females, and with individuals whose sexual orientations differ from my own?
3. How easy is it for me to develop relationships with people my own age and those of different ages?
4. To what extent am I able to maintain self-control when I interact with others? Under what conditions do I lose control?
5. How, and to what extent, do I use technology in my interpersonal relationships? In what ways is technology changing my interpersonal communication?



Having good interpersonal skills is key in achieving happiness and success.

Societal problems related to factors such as ethnocentrism, sexism, violence, and health can be lessened, at least to some degree, if we improve our ability to adapt to a changing world and connect interpersonally with others in more effective ways. To this end, we need to explore interpersonal communication, including the field's theories, practice, and contexts. By considering relevant research, putting theory into practice, and applying what we learn to the contexts of our lives, we can develop our interpersonal communication skills. The more we learn, the more extensive our repertoire of acceptable behavioral choices becomes and the more flexible we become, thereby improving our chances to sustain rather than sever needed relationships.

The effectiveness of our personal relationships depends on the communication choices we make. Using communication we present ourselves to others and either work out or compound relationship problems. Because interpersonal relationships can be destructive (yes, they can have a dark or destructive side that causes one or both parties to experience emotional or physical pain), our personal and professional well-being depends on their being effective. Thus, a key goal of this book is to help you build and maintain effective interpersonal connections with a broad array of people.

MODELS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Whether we are able to exchange messages and negotiate or share meaning during person-to-person encounters depends on how well we handle the essential elements active in the process. For example, depending on the situation, patting someone on the

ANALYZE THIS: *Are You in a Disguise?*

In the poem *Anonymous*, 21st-century poet Samuel Manashe suggests that when in the company of another person, too often we pretend to be someone we are not, keeping our actual identity secret and hoping to remain unknown or anonymous.

Have you ever asked a question like the one Manashe asks in the poem? Do you suppose anyone has asked such a question about you? How does maintaining anonymity online, for example, affect interaction?



Anonymous

*Truth to tell,
Seldom told
Under oath,
We live lies*

*And grow old
Self-disguised—
Who are you
I talk to?*

1. How might remaining anonymous be enabling to someone?
2. What could compel you to disguise yourself or wear a mask when interacting with another person on or offline?
3. How would you handle the pain, frustration, and anger caused by feeling the need to suppress your cultural identity or hide your feelings to maintain a relationship?

SOURCE: “Anonymous,” from *New and Selected Poems of Samuel Menashe* copyright © 2005 by Literary Classics of the United States, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

back may be perceived as friendly and supportive or as a form of sexual harassment. There are seven key elements that influence interpretation of this act (see Table 1.1):

1. The *people* involved
2. The *message(s)* that each person sends and/or perceives
3. The *channel(s)* in use
4. The amount of *noise* present
5. The communication *context*
6. The *feedback* sent in response
7. The act’s *effect(s)* on the individuals involved

The better we understand these essential elements of interpersonal communication, the more likely we are to improve our interpersonal communication competence and skills. The more we understand how interpersonal communication works, the greater the likelihood it will work for us. So, let us look more closely at each of the elements in play.

PEOPLE

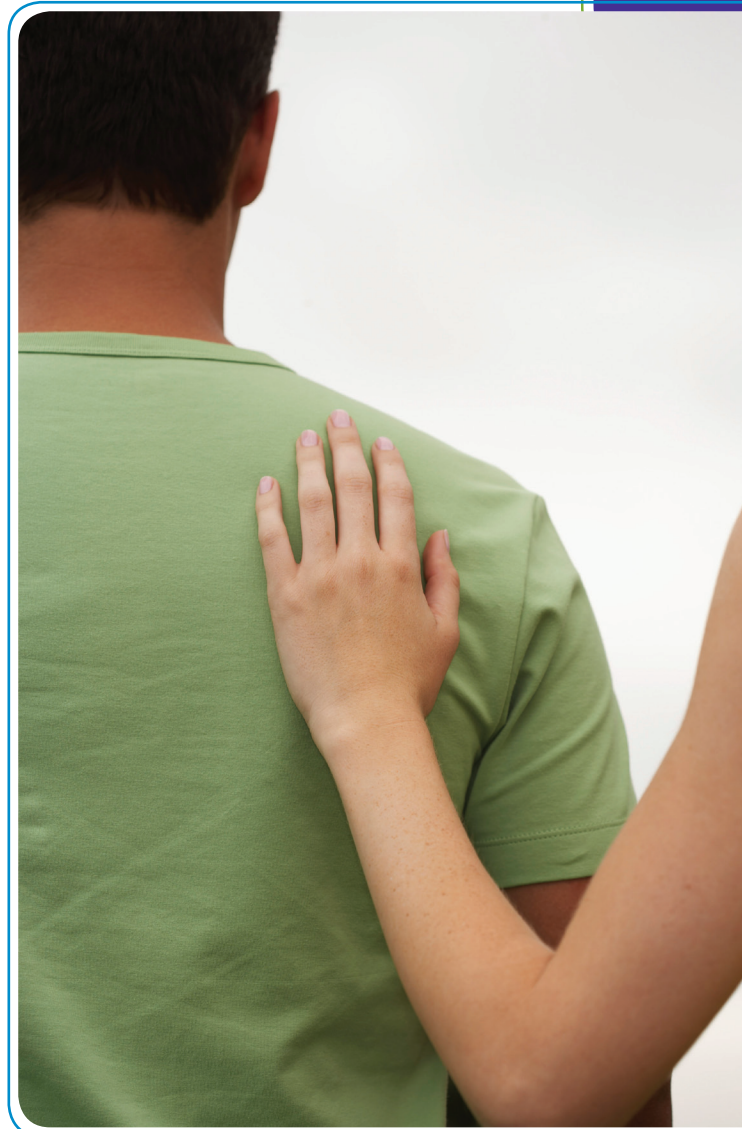
Recall that interpersonal communication between any two people ranges from “impersonal” at one end of an imaginary continuum to “intimate” at the other end.

When you respond impersonally to another person, you communicate with him based on your limited knowledge of the categories in which you place that person—that is, the social groups or the culture to which you believe he belongs—rather than on your personal experience interacting with that individual.

In contrast, when you respond to someone personally, you respond to her as an individual, drawing on your knowledge of her personality to guide your interactions. In other words, your past experience with the individual allows you to differentiate her from the groups to which she belongs. You now take this unique person and her needs into account when you communicate.

As a relationship develops and you get to know someone better, not only can you describe the person’s behavior, but you can also more accurately predict how he or she will behave when facing a particular situation or set of circumstances. When you know a person very well, sometimes you can also explain that person’s behavior, offering reasons for his or her actions. For instance, when you share an impersonal relationship with someone at work, you can likely describe his behavior—maybe his procrastination in completing an assignment. When you see a supervisor giving him a project to work on, you may be able to predict that he will not complete it on time. Were you to share a more personal relationship with your coworker, however, you might also be able to explain the reasons behind the procrastination—why he is unable to meet a deadline—such as concerns about a child’s illness or feelings of inadequacy.

Each party in an interpersonal relationship participates in the functions of sending and receiving messages. Each functions simultaneously as sender and receiver, both parties giving out



How you pat someone on the back communicates.

TABLE 1.1 The Essential Elements of Interpersonal Communication

People	The senders and receivers of communication messages
Messages	The content of communication
Channels	The media through which messages travel
Noise	Interference with the ability to send or receive messages
Feedback	Information received in exchange for messages
Context	The environmental, situational, or cultural setting in which communication takes place
Effect	The result of a communication episode



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False

3. *If you already consider yourself a good communicator, then how you engage others does not need to change.*

False. What worked at one point in time may not work at another point in time.

and taking in messages. For example, in the following exchange both Jana and Karl give and receive messages:

Jana: I'm so tired. I wish we didn't have to go to the Joneses' party.

Karl: You always feel tired whenever we have plans to go to a party for someone I work with.

Jana: Why do you have to attack me when I say how I feel?

Karl: What's the matter with you? I'm not attacking you. I'm only commenting on what I observe and experience directly.

Jana: Is that all? Give me a break. Don't I have a right to be tired?

Karl: Sure you do. Just tell me one thing. Why do you never feel tired when we're going to a party hosted by your friends?

Interpersonal communication is transactional in nature. It is a process in which transmission and reception occur simultaneously and source and receiver continually influence one another. What we think of each other and what we believe each other to know affect the messages we send.⁷ Each party in a dyad simultaneously performs the roles of sender and receiver, also known as a **role duality**. How the individuals perform the roles, or how good they are at sending and receiving, depends on what they bring to the relationship, including their feelings about themselves, their knowledge about communication, and their attitudes, values, and goals. All these elements influence how well a sender encodes his or her thoughts, feelings, emotions, and attitudes by putting them into a form another can relate to, and how the receiver decodes the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and attitudes of the sender by interpreting them into messages.

TRY THIS: Rating Relationships

Think about some of the relationships you have had over your lifetime.

1. Identify two of them: the first, an extremely satisfying interpersonal relationship and, the second, an extremely frustrating one.
2. Identify the specific aspects of each relationship that made it satisfying or frustrating for you.
3. After summarizing the characteristics and qualities that differentiate your most satisfying relationship from your most frustrating one, propose steps you might have taken to increase your satisfaction with the relationship you found frustrating.

MESSAGES

We negotiate the meaning we derive from interpersonal communication by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal **messages**. Whom we speak to, what we choose to speak about, what we do as we interact, the words we use, the sound of our voices, our posture, our facial expressions, our touch, and even our smell constitute the message or the content of our communication. Everything we do as a sender or a receiver has potential message value for the person with whom we are interacting or for someone observing the interaction.

Messages can be conveyed through any one of our five senses: auditory, visual, gustatory, olfactory, or tactile. They can be heard, seen, tasted, smelled, or felt, and they are situational/ manipulative, or communicated by the environment. Some messages—such as a caress, a kiss, or the words “I love you”—are more personal than others that could be sent to any

Role duality:

The simultaneous performance of the roles of sender and receiver by the members of a dyad.

Message: The content of communication.

numbers of persons. Some of our messages we send purposefully (“I want to be very clear about this”), while others, such as nervous tics, we emit unconsciously or accidentally (“I didn’t know you knew how I felt about this”). Everything we do when interacting with another person has potential message value as long as the other person is observant and gives meaning to our behavior. Whether we frown, jump for joy, move closer, turn away, or go on and on, we are communicating messages that have some effect on someone else.

CHANNELS

Messages travel via a **channel**, a medium that connects sender and receiver, much as a bridge connects two locations. In face-to-face communication, we send and receive messages through the five senses as discussed above. In effect, we may use multiple channels at the same time to communicate a single message. In fact, under most circumstances, interpersonal communication is a multichanneled interaction using visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and situational/manipulational means to convey both verbal and nonverbal messages. Consider a first date: to prepare, you make sure you look and smell nice; you choose a quiet setting to ensure you can hear each other; and you generally put your best face forward in both verbal and nonverbal ways in order to say, “I like you and I hope you like me too.”

Capable communicators are adept channel switchers. They know how to use sound, sight, touch, taste, smell, and the environment, as well as traditional words and nonverbal signs, to get messages across. However, if you find yourself consistently tuning in on just one channel, you might miss the most salient parts of a message. For instance, if you speak to people only over the phone, you might miss the underlying message when your best friend asks, “Is everything okay? I haven’t seen you in a while.” While we may prefer to send or receive messages through a particular channel, we should pay attention to and use all of the available channels.

Today, with computer-mediated communication, we have a richness of channels to choose from. In addition to face-to-face contact, we have texting and instant messaging, for example. If one channel is closed or damaged, we can open another to compensate. For instance, rather than assuming that a blind or sight-impaired person will be able to recognize us by our voice, we should also name ourselves. Since the blind person is unable to see the visual cues we use to color in or shade the meaning of a verbal message, we may also need to take special care to ensure that the meanings we want conveyed are contained in the words we choose and the expressiveness of our voice.

NOISE

In communication studies, **noise** includes anything that interferes with or impedes our ability to send or receive a message. Noise distracts communicators by focusing their attention on something extraneous to the communication act. Effective communicators find ways to ensure their messages get through accurately despite any interfering noise.

Noise emanates from both internal and external sources. The words used, the environment, physical discomfort, psychological state, and intellectual ability can all function as noise. As



We use each of our five senses to convey messages.



Channels are like bridges; they connect us to one another.

Channel: A medium or passageway through which a message travels.

Noise: Anything that interferes with or impedes the ability to send or receive a message.



In your opinion does a garage band constitute noise?

the level of noise increases, it becomes more and more unlikely that we will be successful at negotiating or sharing meaning. Among the external sources of noise are the sight, sound, smell, and feel of the environment. A drab room, an overly warm space, a loud siren, an offensive odor, and too many conversations occurring at the same time are all examples of environmental noise.

Among the internal sources of noise are personal thoughts and feelings. Racism, sexism, feelings of inadequacy, hunger, excessive shyness or extroversion, and deficient or excessive knowledge can all interfere with the ability to send and receive messages effectively. Most of us find it easier to cope with external noise than with internal noise because closing a window, for example, is usually a lot easier than opening a mind or changing a personality. Have you created or been influenced by noise in any of your relationships today? Which kind(s) of noise typically cause you the greatest problems? (See Table 1.2.)

FEEDBACK

Feedback is information we receive in response to messages we have sent. It can be both verbal and nonverbal and lets us know how another person is responding to us. Feedback provides clues as to “how we are coming across,” whether we were heard through the noise or interference, and how the receiver interpreted our communicative efforts. Feedback reveals whether or not our message was interpreted as we hoped and, if not, which portions of the message need to be resent.

Feedback can be positive or negative. **Positive feedback** enhances behavior in progress. It serves a reinforcing function, causing us to continue our behavior. In contrast, **negative feedback** stops behavior in progress. It serves a corrective function, prompting us to discontinue one or more behaviors because of their apparent ineffectiveness. In this way, negative feedback helps eliminate behavior that others judge inappropriate.

TABLE 1.2 Types of Noise

Semantic noise	Noise due to the failure to understand the intended meaning of one or more words or the context in which the words are being used (persons speaking different languages, using jargon and “technicalese”)
Physiological noise	Noise due to personal illness, discomfort, or a physical problem including speech, visual, auditory, or memory impairment (difficulty articulating, hearing or sight loss, fatigue, disease)
Psychological noise	Noise due to anxiety, confusion, bias, past experience, or emotional arousal that interferes with communication (sender or receiver prejudice, closed-mindedness, rage)
Intellectual noise	Noise due to information overload or underload (over- or underpreparedness)
Environmental noise	Noise due to the sound, smell, sight, and feel of the environment or physical communication space that distracts attention from what is being said or done (cars honking, garbage rotting, people talking at once, cellular or computer interference)

Feedback: Information received in exchange for a message sent.

Positive feedback: Responses that enhance behavior in progress.

Negative feedback: Responses that stop behavior in progress.

Because we constantly communicate with ourselves (even as we communicate interpersonally), feedback can emanate from both internal and external sources. **Internal feedback** is the feedback you give yourself as you assess your own performance during an interpersonal transaction. **External feedback** is feedback you receive from the other person. Competent communicators are sensitive to both feedback types, since both serve important functions.

Feedback often focuses on a person or a message. We can, for example, comment on a person's appearance or message effectiveness. In addition, we can be totally honest about feedback, offering **low-monitored feedback**, or we can carefully craft a response designed to serve a particular purpose, offering **high-monitored feedback**. Whether our feedback is spontaneous or guarded depends on how much we trust the other person and how much power that person has over our future.

We can also offer immediate or delayed feedback. Immediate feedback instantly reveals its effect on us. For example, after someone tells us a joke, we may laugh really hard. Other times, however, a gap occurs between the receipt of the message and the delivery of feedback. For example, we can nod our head yes or shake our head no every time the other person says something we do or do not agree with. Or we can withhold our reaction until after she or he has finished speaking. When we interview for a job, we are rarely told immediately after the interview whether we will be given the position. Instead, we receive delayed feedback; sometimes days, weeks, or even months pass before we know whether or not the interview was successful.

Feedforward is a variant of feedback. However, instead of being sent after a message is delivered, it is sent prior to a message's delivery as a means of revealing something about the message to follow. Feedforward introduces messages by opening the communication channel and previewing the message. **Phatic communication** (see Chapter 12), that is, a message that opens a communication channel, such as this text's cover or preface, serves as an example of feedforward.

CONTEXT

The environmental and situational or cultural **context** in which the communication occurs (its setting) can also affect its outcome. The environmental context is the physical location of the interaction. The situational or cultural context comprises the life spaces or cultural backgrounds of the parties in the dyad. In many ways, surrounding culture and physical, social, psychological, and temporal settings are integral parts of communication.

The physical setting includes the specific location for the interaction, that is the setting's appearance and condition. A candlelit exchange may have a different feel and outcome from one held in a busy, brightly lit office. The social setting derives from the status relationships and roles assumed by each party. Some relationships seem friendlier and are less formal than others. The psychological setting includes the interaction's emotional dimensions. It influences how individuals feel about and respond to each other. The temporal setting includes not only the time of day the interaction takes place but also the history, if any, that the parties to it share. Any previous communication experience that you and another person have had will influence the way you treat each other in the present. The cultural context is composed of the beliefs, values, and rules of communication that affect your behavior. If you and the other person are from different cultures, the rules you each follow may confuse the other or lead to missing chances for effective and meaningful exchanges. Sometimes the context is so obvious or intrusive that it exerts great control over our interaction by restricting or dominating how we relate to one another; other times it seems so natural that we virtually ignore it.

Internal feedback:

A person's response to his or her own performance.

External feedback:

Responses received from others.

Low-monitored feedback:

Feedback that is sincere and spontaneous; feedback delivered without careful planning.

High-monitored feedback:

Feedback offered to serve a specific purpose; feedback that is sent intentionally.

Feedforward:

A variant of feedback sent prior to a message's delivery as a means of revealing something about to follow.

Phatic communication:

Superficial interaction designed to open the channel between individuals.

Context: The setting in which communication takes place.



How does your current physical setting affect you?

EFFECT

As we interact with each other, we each experience an **effect**—meaning that we are influenced in some way by the interaction. One person may feel the effects more than the other person. One person may react more quickly than the other. The effects may be immediately observable or initially not observable at all.

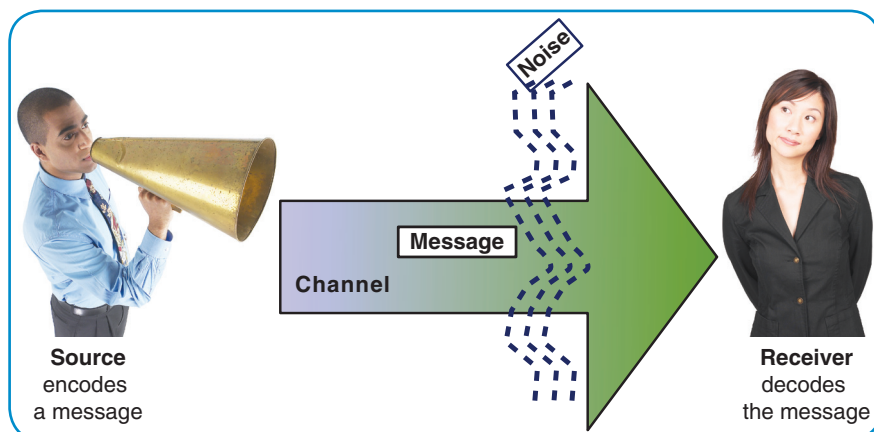
An effect can be emotional, physical, cognitive, or any combination of the three. As a result of interacting with another we can experience feelings of elation or depression (emotional); we fight and argue or walk away in the effort to avoid a fight or argument (physical); or we can develop new ways of thinking about events, increase our knowledge base, or become confused (cognitive).

There is a lot more to interpersonal communication and its ultimate effects than we may immediately realize. In fact, current relationships may best be considered examples of “unfinished business.”⁸

VISUALIZING COMMUNICATION

To be sure, the thinking about interpersonal communication has evolved over the years. The earliest model—a **linear or unidirectional model**—depicted communication as going in one direction only (see Figure 1.2). Questions such as “Did you get my message?,” statements such as “I gave you that idea,” and acts such as leaving someone a note with instructions give voice to this one-way perspective. While containing many of the elements identified earlier, notice that the linear model omits both feedback and context.

FIGURE 1.2 Linear Model of Interpersonal Communication



Effect: The result of a communication episode.

Linear or unidirectional model:

A representation of communication that depicts it as going in only one direction.

Gradually, a more realistic two-way model—known as an **interaction model**—came to be the model of choice (see Figure 1.3). The interaction model visualizes interpersonal communication not as a one-way event but as a back-and-forth process, much like a game of tennis; it also acknowledges the presence and effects of both feedback and context. However, though more accurate than the one-way model, the interaction model fails to capture the complexity of interpersonal communication, including the reality that interpersonal communication does not involve just a back-and-forth action and reaction as might occur when you send a text and your friend responds.

FIGURE 1.3 Interaction Model of Interpersonal Communication

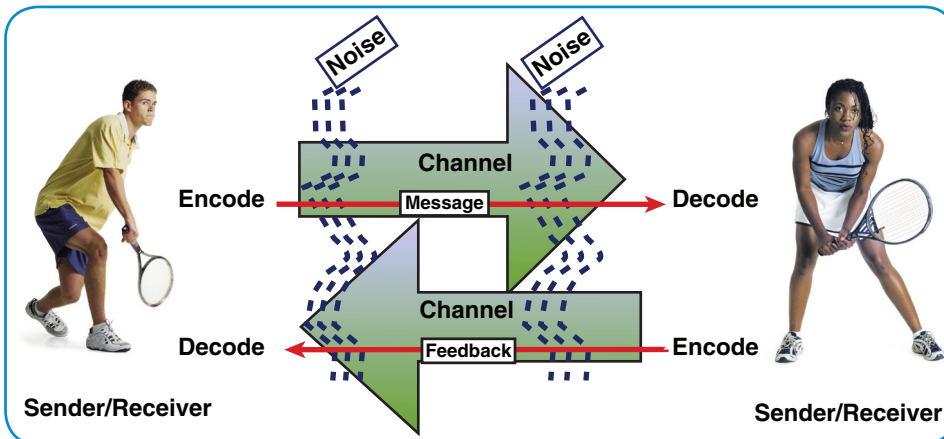
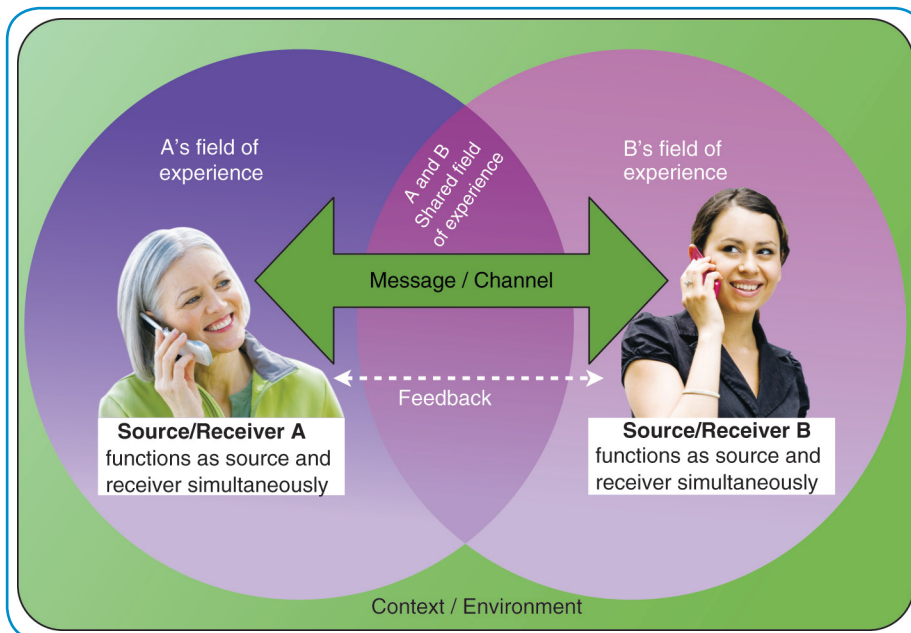


FIGURE 1.4 Transactional Model of Interpersonal Communication



Interaction model:
A representation of communication as a back-and-forth process.

Many communication exchanges involve source and receiver responding to one another simultaneously rather than sequentially. Thus, a more recently developed and even more realistic way to visualize how the elements at work during interpersonal communication dynamically relate to each other is a **transactional model**, as shown in Figure 1.4. The transactional model's strength is that it depicts sending and receiving as simultaneous rather than distinctly separate acts. By doing so, it helps us visualize the vital complexity of interpersonal interaction by showing us that source and receiver send messages to and receive messages from each other at the same time, reflecting the reality of a conversation. (See Table 1.3 for a summary of the various models' strengths and weaknesses.)

TABLE 1.3 Advantages and Limitations of Communication Models

Model	Communication Examples	Advantages	Limitations
Linear	Television and radio E-mail and texts Packaged presentations that do not allow for modifications	Simple and direct	Not useful for most face-to-face encounters
Interaction	Instant messaging Class presentations where content is adjusted based on feedback	Wider applicability	Still discounts receiver's active role in creating meaning
Transactional	Any encounter in which meaning is cocreated	Most realistic depiction of interpersonal communication	Does not apply to texting, tweeting, and posting

HOW DOES INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ENHANCE OUR LIVES?

Communicating interpersonally helps us discover who we are; it fulfills our need for human contact and personal relationships, and it can prompt us to change our attitudes and behavior. In these ways, interpersonal communication serves psychological, social, information, and influence functions.

Transactional model:

A representation of communication that depicts transmission and reception occurring simultaneously, demonstrating that source and receiver continually influence one another.

IT FULFILLS PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS

First and foremost, just as we need water, food, and shelter, we need people. When we are isolated or cut off from human contact, our health suffers. In fact, being in at least one good relationship appears to be a prerequisite of physical and psychological well-being.⁹ For example, maximum-security prisons used to keep inmates locked alone in their cells for up to twenty-three hours each day. The feelings of isolation the inmates experienced resulted in their becoming restless, angry, violent, and potentially suicidal. When restrictions were loosened, however, and inmates were allowed out of their cells



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False

4. Interpersonal communication affects your health.

True. Interpersonal communication is necessary for both physical and psychological well-being.

for hours each day, able to play sports and mingle and dine with others, their behavior and emotional health improved.¹⁰

Interpersonal communication also enhances self-other understanding; through our interactions with others, we learn how different individuals affect us. In fact, we depend on interpersonal communication to develop our self-awareness and maintain our sense of self. To quote communication theorist Thomas Hora: “To understand oneself, one needs to be understood by another. To be understood by another, one needs to understand the other.”¹¹

Because interpersonal communication is a fluid process that depends on constantly changing components, it offers myriad opportunities for self-other discovery. Different contexts help us figure out who likes or dislikes us and why, when and why to trust or distrust someone, what behaviors elicit the strongest reactions, under what conditions we have the power to influence another person, and whether we have the ability to resolve relational conflict.

IT FULFILLS SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Through interpersonal communication we are able to begin and sustain relationships. Our interpersonal contacts fulfill our social needs to varying degrees. Although we vary greatly in the extent to which we experience these needs, according to psychologist William Schutz our relationships reflect the following in particular:

- Our need for *affection*—to express or receive fondness
- Our need for *inclusion*—to be included or include others as full partners
- Our need for *control*—to direct or exert influence over the self and others so that we feel we are able to deal with and manage our lives and environment.¹²



Have you ever felt isolated when in a crowd?

When we are in a relationship with someone whose needs complement or balance our own, each of us is able to have our needs met. When our needs are not complementary, however, we are more apt to experience relationship struggles or conflict. Do your experiences confirm this? (We explore the work of William Schutz in more depth in Chapter 12.)

Good interpersonal communication also allows us a glimpse into another person’s reality. For example, developing an interpersonal relationship with someone whose culture differs from our own broadens our own point of view. Our interpersonal styles may differ from each other’s, but we adapt to the sound, form, and content of their messages and pay attention to how members of different cultures feel about displaying affection, exerting control, defining roles, and meeting goals. While it may be easier to identify with and associate with those who are like us, coming from different

cultures does not preclude our learning to share similar meanings.

Interpersonal communication similarly fulfills our need to be *friend*ed and *to friend* others. (Notice how *friend* has also become a verb.) It helps alleviate feelings of isolation, fulfilling our desire to feel needed, loved, wanted, and capable. Because of this, interpersonal communication may increase our personal satisfaction, helping us feel more positive about ourselves.

IT FULFILLS INFORMATION FUNCTIONS

During interpersonal contacts, as we share information we reduce the amount of uncertainty in our lives. By taking in information we meet the need to acquire knowledge.

Information is not the same thing as communication. Just as more communication is not necessarily better communication, more information is not necessarily better information. Sometimes no information and no communication may be the best course. We can, after all, talk a problem or issue to death. Thus, just as there is a time to talk, there is a time to stop talking and listen.

IT FULFILLS INFLUENCE FUNCTIONS

We use interpersonal communication to influence others—sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly. As we exercise influence, our need to gain compliance is met. Interpersonal communicators are both the users of and targets of persuasion.

As we observed earlier in this chapter, interpersonal communication is often goal directed. And even though we may not be conscious of it, we often use strategic communication to achieve our goals. We methodically plan how to get what we want. We seek contact with and advice from others whom we believe can help us. This is not to say that human beings are naturally manipulative or deceptive, as neither of these practices supports the interdependent and transactional nature of interpersonal communication.¹³ Communication is not something we do to others or have done to us. It is a mutually reinforcing activity we engage in together. How we interact is a two-way affair. We mutually influence each other. We are both affected by what each of us does and says.

How we think about interpersonal communication has evolved from a linear process in which one receiver influences another to an interactional process in which communication by each person precipitates a reaction in the other person to a mutually interactive transaction deriving meaning from the simultaneous sharing of ideas and feelings. From a transaction perspective, no single cause explains how you interpret or make sense of experience. Communication is more complex than that.



We use interpersonal communication to influence others.
Are you aware when others attempt to influence you?

UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL CONTACT: CHARACTERISTICS, PATTERNS, AND AXIOMS OF COMMUNICATION

As we see, every interpersonal communication contact shares certain essential elements and serves one or more functions. Every interpersonal communication contact also shares the following:

1. *Key characteristics*: descriptions of the communication that are common across different situations or contexts
2. *Core communication principles*: identifiable behavioral patterns and motivations
3. *Axioms*: the fundamental rules by which communication may be analyzed or explained.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Let's first explore the noteworthy characteristics of interpersonal communication (see Table 1.4).

TABLE 1.4 Characteristics of Interpersonal Communication

Communication Is . . .	In Other Words . . .
A dynamic process	It is ongoing, continuous, and in a constant state of flux.
Unrepeatable and irreversible	It is unique.
Learned	We find out over time what works for us and what does not work if we remain conscious of the communication.
Characterized by wholeness and nonsummativity	It operates as a complete entity, much like a team functions.

Interpersonal Communication Is a Dynamic Process. By **dynamic process** we mean that interpersonal communication is ongoing or continuous, and in a constant state of flux. All the components continually interact with and affect each other. They are interdependent or interconnected. They depend on and influence one another. What one person says or does influences what the other person says or does. Every interpersonal encounter is a point of arrival from a previous encounter and a point of departure for a future encounter.

Interpersonal Communication Is Unrepeatable. Every interpersonal contact is unique. It has never happened in just that way before, and it will never happen in just that way again. Why? Because every contact changes us in some way and, as a result, can never be exactly repeated or replicated. Try as we might, we can never recapture exactly the same feelings, thoughts, or relationship that existed at a specific point in time. We are no longer exactly the same persons we were before we made contact.

Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible. In addition to being unrepeatable, interpersonal communication is irreversible. Once we have said or done something to another, we cannot erase its impact. After exhibiting behavior, we cannot simply say, “Forget that!” and substitute a better or more appropriate behavior in its place (though we sometimes would like to try). We cannot rewind or restart communication as we can a TV program recorded on a DVR. We cannot unhear words, unsee sights, or undo acts. They are irretrievable. Presenting a new stimulus does not change the previous stimulus. It merely becomes part of a behavioral sequence.

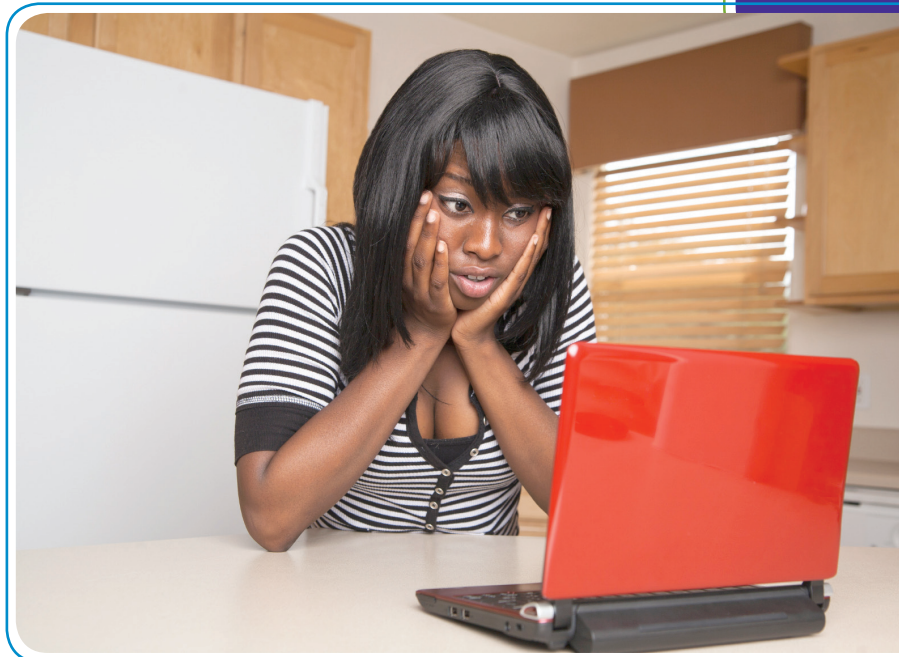
We Cannot Uncommunicate Online Either.

For one thing, a written message provides evidence of the message sent. E-mails are virtually impossible to erase. They remain on servers and workstations, even after we have “deleted” them. So do all entries made on social media sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and LinkedIn. You may try to soften their effects, but you cannot reverse their existence any more than you can try to squeeze toothpaste back into a tube. In fact, the online service Social Intelligence can provide a dossier on every faux pas, every sarcastic comment, every remark containing overt or implied prejudice, and every lewd personal picture you have posted. The Web is forever.¹⁴

Interpersonal Communication Is Learned. Over time we learn what works for us in an interpersonal relationship and what does not. We can hinder our communication with another person if we remain unconscious of how we affect him or her, and vice versa. Part of the art of interpersonal communication involves recognizing how our words and actions affect others, how their words and actions affect us, and then, based on our observations, making the necessary adjustments.

Interpersonal Communication Is Characterized by Wholeness and Nonsummativity.

When we say that the interpersonal relationship is characterized by “wholeness,” we are saying that it operates as a complete entity. We consider more than the individuals



Once sent, it is virtually impossible to take back an e-mail message.

Dynamic process: A process that is ongoing, continuous, and in a state of constant flux.

who are in the relationship; we look at the unique ways in which the persons involved influence each other. When we say that interpersonal communication is characterized by “nonsummativity,” we are saying that the whole is more than the sum of its parts; interpersonal communication is about more than just its participants per se. We cannot understand a couple by looking at only one-half of the partnership. We cannot understand a family by looking at only one of the children. The nature of the relationship must be examined. The “us” must be explored. The relationship takes on a quality that we cannot understand merely by possessing information about its parts. The system as a whole is simply different from the sum of its parts.¹⁵

INTERPERSONAL PATTERNS

Interpersonal communication involves understanding patterns of behavior, predicting what others will do and say, and providing reasons for their actions as well as our own.¹⁶ Thus, understanding the patterns of behavior an individual displays, not just a single behavior, provides the basis for understanding the person’s interpersonal communication. In other words, a single isolated behavior is not what we need to focus on; rather, we must take into account the entire behavioral sequence.

Interpersonal communication involves not only interpreting but also predicting and accounting for another person’s behavior. If we are able to distinguish individuals from a general group, then we recognize their uniqueness and are able to know and understand them. For example, were we to interact with a number of different professors over time yet treat all of them alike, or were we to date a number of different men or women yet not distinguish one date from another, we would not be very effective interpersonal communicators. To the extent that we can predict the behavior of a particular teacher or a specific romantic interest, and account for that behavior, what we term **reasoned sense making**, we can understand that individual more than we might understand other professors, or other dates.

We also reason retrospectively. **Retrospective sense making** means making sense of our own behavior once it has occurred. We interpret our own actions in light of the goals we have or have not attained. We look back on interactions and continually redefine our relationships, which is our way of making sense of them. As our interactions with another person progress, the events of our relationship increase in number, and, as a result, the relationship and how we feel about it changes.

Reasoned sense making: The ability to predict and account for the behavior of a particular person.

Retrospective sense making: The ability to make sense of one’s own behavior once it has occurred.

Axioms of communication: A paradigm of universally accepted principles used for understanding communication.

FIVE COMMUNICATION AXIOMS

Identified in a classic study by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson, there are five **axioms of communication**, or universally accepted principles, that enable us to understand interpersonal interactions more fully.¹⁷ (See Table 1.5.)

TABLE 1.5 Axioms of Communication

1. You cannot not communicate.
2. Interactions have content and relationship dimensions.
3. Interactions are defined by how they are punctuated.
4. Messages are verbal symbols and nonverbal cues.
5. Exchanges are symmetrical or complementary.

Axiom 1: You Cannot Not Communicate. Behavior has no opposite. We cannot voluntarily stop behaving. Even if we consciously decide not to respond, even if we do our utmost not to move a muscle or utter a sound, our stillness and silence are responses. As such, they have message value, influence others, and therefore communicate. No matter how hard we try, we cannot not communicate. Our behavior communicates whenever it is given meaning.

Axiom 2: Every Interaction Has a Content and Relationship Dimension. The content dimension of a message involves the expected response, and the relationship dimension indicates how the message is to be interpreted and reveals what one party to the interaction thinks of the other. For example, a husband says to his spouse, “Get over here right now.” The content level, or expected response, is that the spouse will approach immediately. But the message can be delivered in a number of ways: as an order, a plea, a flirtation, or an expression of sexual desire, for example. Each manner of delivery suggests a different kind of relationship. It is through such variations that we offer clues to another person regarding how we see ourselves in relationship to that person.

Axiom 3: Every Interaction is Defined by How It Is Punctuated. Though we often feel as if we can label the beginning and the end of an interaction, pointing to a traceable cause for a specific reaction, in actuality communication has no definitive starting or finishing line. It is difficult to determine exactly what is stimulus and what is response. Consider this example:

A woman is usually late getting home from work. When she does get home, she often finds her partner asleep. Both are angry. The woman might observe that she works so much because all her partner does is sleep. The partner might say that all he does is sleep because she's never home.

Neither of them interprets their own behavior as responses to the behavior of the other. For the woman, her partner's behavior is the stimulus and hers is the response; he causes her behavior. For the partner, it's just the opposite. Whereas he sees the sequence as going from working to sleeping, she sees it as going from sleeping to working; which is it, really?

We all segment experience somewhat differently because we each see it differently. We call the dividing of communication into segments punctuation. The way a communication is punctuated usually benefits the person doing the *punctuating*. Punctuation also reveals how an individual interprets a situation and offers insight into the nature of an interpersonal conflict in particular and the interpersonal relationship in general.

Axiom 4: Messages Consist of Verbal Symbols and Nonverbal Cues. During face-to-face or online interactions, we emit two kinds of messages: discrete, digital verbal symbols or words and continuous, analogic, nonverbal cues. Language is digital because it is composed of discrete words that are coded with meaning, while nonverbal communication is analogic because it is continuous behavior without a beginning or end. According to Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, the content of a message is more apt to be carried via the verbal or digital system, whereas the relationship level of the message is typically carried via the nonverbal or analogic system. Although we can usually control what we say or write, it is much more difficult to control the nonverbal cues we emit. Thus, we may not speak angry words, but our face may betray our rage. As a result, it is easy to lie with words but hard to produce behavior that supports the lie. Nonverbal behavior often gives us away.

Axiom 5: Interactions Are Either Symmetrical or Complementary. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson categorize relationships as either symmetrical or complementary, terms not descriptive of “good” and “bad,” but simply two types of relationships into which interactions can be divided. In a symmetrical relationship, the parties mirror each other’s behavior. If one person is solicitous, the other is as well. If one person whines, the other does also. In contrast, in a **complementary relationship**, the parties engage in opposite behaviors, with the behavior of one precipitating the behavior of the other. If one person is docile, the other is assertive. If one leads, the other follows. Complementary relationships maximize the differences between the parties, including the different positions each holds in the relationship at a point in time.

Neither symmetrical nor complementary relationships are trouble-free. In a symmetrical relationship the parties run the risk of experiencing “symmetrical escalation.” Believing they are “equal,” both persons might assert, for example, the right to exert control. Once this starts, each may feel compelled to engage in battle to demonstrate his or her equality. And so a status struggle begins. The main danger facing persons in a symmetrical relationship is a runaway sense of competitiveness.

In contrast, those who share complementary relationships may face a problem called “rigid complementarity”—extreme rigidity. This problem surfaces when one party begins to feel that control is automatically his or hers. For example, an overly protective mother who cannot accept that her child is grown, an employer unable to share leadership, and a teacher who cannot learn from others—all illustrate the rigidity that can develop in people who become locked into self-perpetuating, unchanging, unhealthy patterns of behavior. Switches in power are natural; we need to be prepared for them.

Taken together with the characteristics and principles of communication, the five axioms of communication provide additional knowledge as we seek to enhance our understanding and increase the effectiveness of our interpersonal contacts. Now let’s widen our focus.

THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY AND CULTURE

Because U.S. society is multicultural in makeup and becoming increasingly so, and because cultural values help shape our acceptance of and preference for specific communication styles, it is important that we understand the role cultural prescriptions play in our interpersonal contacts. Here’s the challenge: Even though the United States is the most demographically diverse country in the world, how regularly do you take cultural differences into account in your person-to-person interactions?

DIVERSITY AND COMMUNICATION STYLE

Developing **cultural awareness**, the ability to understand the role that cultural prescriptions play in shaping communication, is an asset. Why? Because people we once considered strangers are now our friends and coworkers, and intercultural ignorance too frequently slows our ability to create meaningful interpersonal relationships with people who are culturally different from us.

Whenever cultural variability influences the nature and outcomes of interpersonal communication, culture is having an effect. Learning about other cultures, including their systems of knowledge, belief, values, customs, and artifacts, facilitates

Complementary relationship: A relationship based on difference in which the parties engage in opposite behaviors.

Cultural awareness: The ability to understand the role cultural prescriptions play in shaping communication.

person-to-person interaction. Every culture can be subdivided into cocultures consisting of members of the same general culture who differ in some ethnic or sociological way from the dominant culture. In the United States, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, the physically challenged, homosexuals, and the elderly are examples of cocultural groups. To engage in effective interpersonal communication with members of these and other groups it is important to enhance your knowledge of the norms and rules that characterize their interactions. Remember, the lessons taught to you by your culture are not necessarily the lessons others have been taught by theirs.

Among culture's lessons are how to say hello and goodbye, when to speak and when to remain silent, how to behave when angry, how much eye contact to make when interacting, and how much gesturing and touching is appropriate. If cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall is right in saying that culture is communication and communication is culture, then culture guides behavior, and we must make the effort to understand someone's culture if we are to understand the person.¹⁸

Determining the answers to the following questions when interacting with someone whose cultural background differs from yours can improve your communication:

1. How do this person's feelings about socialization differ from mine?
2. How does his or her concept of self differ from mine?
3. To what extent do our attitudes, values, and thinking processes differ?
4. To what degree is he or she more or less competitive than me?
5. In what ways does his or her use of nonverbal cues differ from mine?

ORIENTATION AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

While an array of variables distinguish one culture from another, the two we focus on here are (1) individual and collective orientation and (2) high-context and low-context communication.¹⁹

Individual and Collective Orientation. Cultures that are more individualistic in nature, such as those of the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Germany, stress individual goals. In contrast, cultures more collectivistic in nature, such as those represented by many Muslim, African, Asian, and Latin American countries, stress group goals.²⁰ Whereas individualist cultures nurture individual initiative and achievement, collectivist cultures nurture loyalty to a group. In an individualist culture, you are responsible for yourself and maybe your immediate family (the "I" is dominant); in a collectivist culture, you are responsible for the entire group (the "we" is dominant). Likewise, whereas individualist cultures promote competition, collectivist ones stress cooperation.



Becoming culturally aware increases communication competence.

High-Context and Low-Context Communication. Cultures are also distinguished from each other by their use of high- or low-context communication. High-context cultures are tradition bound; cultural traditions guide members' interactions, causing them to appear to outsiders as overly polite and indirect in relationships. Members of low-context cultures, in contrast, usually exhibit a more direct communication style, one that is verbally explicit. Members of Western cultures tend to use low-context communication, whereas members of Asian and other Eastern cultures typically use high-context communication, preferring to interact indirectly and leaving much unstated.²¹ Because they also place a premium on face-saving behavior, members of high-context cultures are much less confrontational as well. Preferring to preserve harmony, they seek to avoid arguing for fear the other person might lose face. For similar reasons, members of high-context cultures are also reluctant to say “no” directly to another person. Thus, members of low-context cultures may have difficulty deciding when and if the “yes” of a member of a high-context culture really means yes.

THE IMPACT OF GENDER

Culture also shapes gender, and gender shapes communication.²² Socially accepted variations in the definitions and views of masculinity and femininity, gender differences, are taught to us as we grow up. As historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes, “To be an ‘I’ at all means to be gendered.”²³

GENDER AND COMMUNICATION STYLE

Gender is a social creation that imposes a sense of social order by reflecting the societal characteristics associated with the biological categories of male and female. Subtly or overtly, we are pressured to conform to social norms, encouraged to learn accepted interaction scripts, and usually develop preferences for using different communication styles. Though attitudes have evolved, in U.S. society, for example, women still are generally expected to be more nurturing, sensitive to others' needs, and emotional than men, whereas men are expected to be more independent, assertive, and emotionally restrained than women. Some families even persist in dividing responsibilities along gendered lines, assigning more physically demanding outdoor chores to males while expecting females to clean the home's interior, cook, and care for other family members, including younger siblings and aging parents. Hospitals often wrap baby girls in pink blankets and baby boys in blue blankets. Girls and boys similarly are provided with different kinds of toys—perhaps dolls for girls and action figures for boys. Even schools have been criticized for encouraging students to pursue different curricula depending on their gender. So from the delivery room to the home, to the school, and on to romantic relationships and career paths, we see gender helping to shape lifestyle. However, as we become more conscious of arbitrarily created gendered meanings, we are able to work to reconstruct and broaden our understanding of what is appropriate behavior and what we accept as “normal.”

Gender: The socially constructed roles and behaviors that the members of a given society believe to be appropriate for men and women.

While we all express gender through behavior that we believe is normal for a member of our sex, what we define as normal changes with time. By identifying how arbitrarily created gendered constructions, or conventions, affect interpersonal communication and our relationships, we take a step toward understanding what we hope for when it comes to our interpersonal lives. Do you see your options as unlimited? What tasks do you feel free to

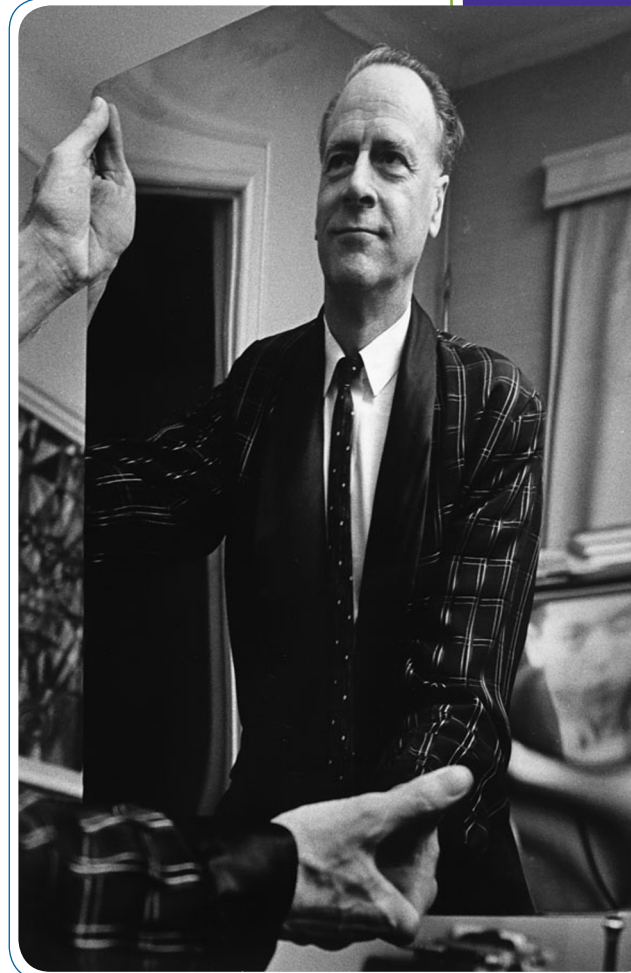
perform? What limits, if any, do you believe should be placed on the role gender plays in our social, professional, and family relationships? While all societies promote gender ideologies that specify appropriate behaviors for males and females, what should you do if you believe a gendered construction is privileging, disadvantaging, empowering, or paralyzing you or a partner?

As you proceed through this text, you will have numerous opportunities to answer questions like these. After all, gender is a relational construct that we clarify through person-to-person interaction.

THE IMPACT OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

“The medium is the message.” “The medium is the massage.” We can trace both of these sayings to the musings of the late media critic and communication theorist Marshall McLuhan. According to McLuhan, the channels of communication affect both the sending and the receiving of messages. The same words convey different messages depending on whether they are sent using face-to-face interaction, print, a cell phone, a video, or a podcast. The medium changes things, altering the message, massaging its contents. For the same reason, ending a relationship in person is different from terminating it via a text. It is now almost five decades since McLuhan predicted that the introduction of new technologies would transform our world into a mobile global village.²⁴ His prophecy has come true. Technology makes it increasingly possible for us to watch and listen to, introduce ourselves to, and have continuing contact with individuals across the country and around the world without ever leaving our homes. Technology is altering our sense of self, our social norms, our views of reality, our images of success and failure, our happiness, our interpersonal options, and the communication rules we adhere to.

Years ago, Apple’s Steve Jobs observed that computers are really personal and should be renamed “inter-personal computers.”²⁵ Today we use them, tablets, or smartphones to log on to Facebook, LinkedIn, or Foursquare so we can connect with others. In the year 2000, the average person spent 2.7 hours a week online. In 2010, that number jumped to 18 hours a week.²⁶ Now, we live our lives plus sometimes a “second life,” enacting a fantasy or alternative life online, perhaps in Farmville, or sharing our interests on Pinterest or other sites. However, when we form a relationship online, we are likely to idealize and create heightened expectations for it, expectations that might not be realized should we actually meet. In fact, online partners feel greater intimacy with and attraction for one another than when they actually meet one another face-to-face.²⁷ Have any of your online relationships developed into flourishing off-line ones? To what do you attribute their success or failure?



According to media guru Marshall McLuhan, the medium is both message and massage.

TRY THIS: What's Okay with You?

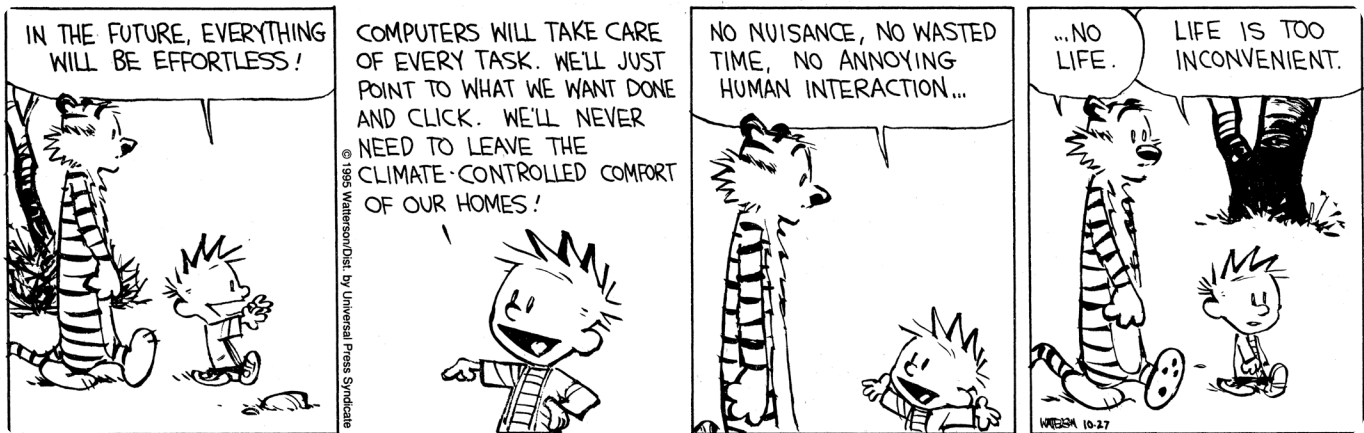
What guidelines do you think people ought to follow when using electronically enhanced communication? For example, have you ever engaged in any of the behaviors identified in the chart below yourself? Would you become annoyed, insulted, or feel at risk if another person engaged in any of the identified behaviors? Use the chart to record your answers.

The behavior	Exhibited the behavior myself	My reaction to another's exhibiting the behavior
Texting while walking in the street		
Texting another person while dining out with a friend		
Answering a cell during a movie		
Talking loudly on your cell on public transportation		
Texting back in response to a missed call		
Talking on a cell with one friend when out with someone who is talking on a cell to another friend		
Not checking into foursquare when solicited		
Tweeting about one friend to another		
Accessing Facebook while watching TV with a significant other		

1. What rules, if any, would you advise we adhere to when using digitally enhanced communication?
2. What makes certain uses of digitally enhanced communication either acceptable or unacceptable in your eyes?
3. How would you react if a rule important to you were violated?

In addition to broadening the network of people we communicate with, for those who experience communication apprehension when face-to-face with another person, technology makes it possible to connect without such fear. We can interact remotely or in person, be anonymous, someone else, or ourselves. If the choice were yours alone, would you opt to increase or decrease the number of your virtual interactions compared to those you experience face-to-face? Why?

As well as spending increased amounts of time online, we are also devoting more time to viewing and talking about reality and other programs. As a result, our mediated experiences are influencing our real-life experiences and relationships. Mediated reality is often sexier or more violent than real-life. Despite this, we sometimes try to apply what we learn from them to our own lives, only to end up disappointed. Our love affairs are rarely as poignant



Which of the two cartoon characters do you believe makes the stronger case and why?

or as passionate as those in the media. Our friends are rarely as attractive, giving, or fun to be with as those we see depicted. Physicians and lawyers are rarely as successful treating or representing us as their fictional counterparts are. Somehow, real life falls short of the lives we encounter either online or via television and film.

A generation ago, parents used to cajole, “Turn off the TV.” Their plea has now changed to something like “Turn off the computer and come watch television.” Or are your parents as plugged into Facebook and other online sites as you are? Do you or they take the computer to bed as you once did a stuffed animal? The claims we make about Internet addiction are much like the claims people used to make about television being a plug-in drug.

Whether it is the television or a computer, a machine is altering your consciousness and the nature of your interpersonal interactions.²⁸ And we all need to think about that. In coming chapters we will look at the extent to which it is personalizing or depersonalizing our contacts, fostering or impeding the development of what we call a community. Is it improving or harming your communication with friends and family members? When online, do you gravitate toward cliques of persons who share your interests, or do you seek to widen and diversify your interpersonal community?

ON THE WAY TO GAINING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Even though interpersonal communication is an inevitable part of life, few, if any, of us are as effective or as successful at it as we could be. Therefore, we invite you to treat this class as your interpersonal communication laboratory. Use the information you gain and the skills you practice as guides when you interact with others. There is no such thing as being too good at interpersonal communication. Whatever your capabilities are right now, to help yourself become better at communicating interpersonally, promise yourself you will do the following.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

True or False

5. *Machines are altering the nature of interpersonal communication.*

True. *Machines are transforming how we communicate with one another by increasing connection opportunities.*



Is the person you present online the same person you present face-to-face?

ADD TO YOUR STOREHOUSE OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Your chance of influencing your interpersonal encounters positively depends, at least to some extent, on your knowledge of how interpersonal relationships work. While our relationships vary significantly, with some being plagued by problems and others proceeding smoothly, one of our objectives in this book is to share with you a number of techniques you can use to enhance the quality of your relationships and the satisfaction you derive from them.

RECOGNIZE HOW YOUR RELATIONSHIPS AFFECT YOU

Every one of your relationships affects you in some way. Some influence your sense of others; some alter the quality of your life. Some add to your confidence; others diminish your belief in yourself. While healthy relationships enrich your life, unhealthy ones too often rob you of energy, leaving you demoralized or apathetic. Another goal of this course is to help you understand the complex ways in which interpersonal communication changes you and the complex forces at work during person-to-person contacts. If you understand the challenges you face, identify alternative modes of responding, and learn how to think about your relationships, then you will be better prepared to deal effectively with them.

ANALYZE YOUR OPTIONS

The interpersonal communication choices you make have impacts on you and your partner. Rather than responding automatically, take time to think about your options. What happens in a relationship usually is not beyond your control. In most situations, you have freedom to respond in any number of ways. Every contact you engage in offers opportunities to improve it if you remain flexible and open. Another of our goals is to help you learn to take advantage of this.

INTERACT ETHICALLY, RESPECT DIVERSITY, AND THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT YOUR PERSON-TO-PERSON CONTACTS

Effective interpersonal communicators act ethically in their relationships, demonstrate their respect for diversity, and think critically about the interactions they share. Ethical communicators demonstrate the ability to adhere to standards of right and wrong. They follow appropriate interaction rules, treat other persons as they would like to be treated, and never knowingly harm someone else in an effort to achieve personal goals.

Interpersonal communicators who respect diversity understand culture's role in person-to-person interactions, tolerate difference and dissent, willingly interact with persons from a variety of backgrounds, demonstrate a decreased use of stereotypes to guide behavior, process experience from the viewpoints of others, avoid imposing their cultural values on other persons, and refrain from holding discriminatory attitudes.

Individuals who think critically about their relationships know that communication is complex, and they don't know all there is to know. They are open-minded; reflect on

others' ideas rather than respond impulsively; open themselves to new ideas and new ways of perceiving; challenge themselves to reexamine their beliefs, values, and behaviors; and concern themselves with unstated assumptions in addition to overt discourse. They think things out, analyzing and evaluating outcomes, seeking to understand and remember what worked or didn't, and creating opportunities for their own personal growth together with the personal growth of others.

PRACTICE AND APPLY SKILLS TO IMPROVE INTERPERSONAL PERFORMANCE

This text shares with you skills you can practice to enhance your interpersonal effectiveness. Commit to practicing them. How you present yourself, perceive others, use words and nonverbal cues, listen, progress in a relationship, overcome relational obstacles, demonstrate trust and trustworthiness, and handle your emotions all affect your interaction with friends, family members, coworkers, and health providers. The extent to which you practice and apply the skills we discuss will determine whether you add to your interpersonal behavioral repertoire, demonstrating your interpersonal versatility and resourcefulness.



How omnipresent is technology in your life? Could you live without it? Would you want to?