Chapter 1
Communication: Essential Human Behavior

CHAPTER OUTCOMES

- Define the communication process
- Describe the functions of communication
- Assess the quality or value of communication by examining its six characteristics
- Define what communication scholars consider to be competent communication
- Describe the visual representations, or models, of communication
- Describe why communication is vital to everyone

LECTURE NOTES

- Communication is the process by which individuals use symbols, signs, and behaviors to exchange information.
  - Communication helps us satisfy our human needs.
  - We take communication for granted, but failures in communication happen all the time.
- We Must Communicate: The Functional Perspective examines how communication behaviors helps (or don’t help) us accomplish our goals in personal, group, organizational, public, or technologically mediated situations. Goal-oriented communication serves one or more of the following primary functions:
  - Expressing Affiliation
    - Affiliation is the feeling of connectedness we have for others.
    - Affiliation can be expressed verbally or nonverbally, face-to-face or through mediated channels.
  - Managing Relationships
    - All communication “works” (or not) within the context of relationships—the interconnections between two or more people.
    - Relationships also involve interdependence, meaning that what we do affects others and what others do affects us.
  - Influencing Others
    - Influence may be intentional or unintentional.
    - Control is the ability of a person, group, or organization to influence others and the manner in which their relationships are conducted.
    - Control is finite: The more control one person has, the less the other has.
    - Control is negotiated through communication (what is said and how it is said).
    - Control is based on situation and status and can shift.
- How We Communicate explores the characteristics of communication.
  - Six characteristics of communication include the following:
    - Communication relies on symbols, or arbitrary constructions that refer to people, things, and concepts; people agree on the meaning of symbols.
Communication requires a shared **code**, a set of symbols that are joined to create a meaningful message.

- **Encoding** is the process of mentally constructing a message for production.
- **Decoding** is the process of receiving a message by interpreting and assigning meaning to it.

Communication is linked to culture, or the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a group of people. Co-cultures are smaller groups within a culture.

Communication can be unintentional, as in the case of spontaneous, involuntary messages that “give off” information and seem more honest and reliable.

Communication occurs through various **channels**, or methods. We need to think about how to adapt our communication for the channel being used.

Communication is a **transactional process** that involves two or more people acting in both *sender* and *receiver* roles, and their messages are dependent on and influenced by those of their partner.

- **Assessing communicative value** requires assessing the quality of your communication as it relates to the six communication characteristics.

**Communicating Competently** examines the different aspects of *competent*, or effective and appropriate for a given situation, communication.

**Competent Communication Is Process-Oriented**
- An **outcome** has to do with the product of an interchange.
- **Process** measures the success of communication by looking at how the outcome is accomplished.
  - Mutual satisfaction is the gauge of success.
  - Process involves ethical considerations related to constructing and receiving messages.

**Competent Communication is appropriate and effective** and requires adjusting our behavior to suit the situation.
- Appropriate behavior depends on *behavioral flexibility*, meeting both the demands of the situation and the expectations of one’s specific communication partner and any other people present.
- Effective behavior requires prioritizing goals that are appropriate to each situation.

**Competent communication involves communication skills**, or behavioral abilities based on social understandings that are used to achieve specific goals.

**Competent communication involves using technology** that may assist communicators in meeting certain goals but may be inappropriate when used in some situations.

**Modeling Communication** examines different models scholars have applied to the communication process.

**The Linear Model**
- A *sender* sends a *message* that is carried through a specific *channel*. *Noise* occurs during this process, and then the message arrives at the *receiver*.
- Lacks the receiver’s active role in message interpretation.

**The Interaction Model**
- Exhibits communication as a two-directional process between sender and receiver that incorporates *feedback*, a verbal and/or nonverbal message from the receiver to the sender.
Illustrates responses that occur when two or more people communicate; instant messaging is an example of this model.

- **The Competent Communication Model**
  - A transactional process where communication takes place between interdependent parties simultaneously encoding and decoding within a relational context, a situational context, and a cultural context.
  - The communicators send and receive messages based on cognitions (thoughts, awareness, and understanding) that in turn influence behavior (observable communication). Successful communicators have a high degree of cognitive complexity, or the ability to consider multiple scenarios, theories, and interpretations.
  - The relational context refers to the sum of the shared experiences of the individuals involved in the relationship and helps define what is appropriate in specific circumstances. It also includes goals and expectations for the relationship.
  - The situational context includes the social environment, physical place, specific situation, and details related to the time and place.
  - The cultural context refers to culture as the backdrop for the other communication contexts; cultural identity influences our communication choices and is reinforced by messages from those in similar cultures. A successful communicator needs to determine what is appropriate and what is not in a variety of cultures and situations.

- **The Study of Communication** explores how communication skills, concepts, and theories apply to various communication situations and offers scholarship from four distinct areas of the discipline.
  - Basic Communication Processes refer to perception, intercultural interaction, language, nonverbal communication, and listening (Part 1 of the text).
  - Interpersonal Communication examines the study of communication between dyads, or pairs of individuals (Part 2 of the text).
  - Group and Organizational Communication examines the study of the interactions in groups and organizations (Part 3 of the text).
  - Public Speaking presents strategies on how to become a competent public speaker (Part 4 of the text).
  - Mass Communication explores how the professional communicators in the mass media industries work hard to get and keep our attention, and the power audiences have to reject these messages (Appendix B).

**CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How does communication function in your everyday life? Where do you see yourself having strengths in communication? Weaknesses?
   - You may find that your students are hesitant to share about a topic as personal as their communication strengths and weaknesses so early in the semester. Therefore, you might want to share a personal or funny story about yourself (if you feel comfortable). You might consider using some pop culture examples to help students warm up. For example, pick a celebrity they are likely to be familiar with and have your class consider his or her strengths and weaknesses in communication (as noted in the popular media).
   - Be prepared for some very surface-level answers here (for example, “Sometimes I fight with my mother.”) You’ll likely need to probe students for more information in order to
get them thinking about the course concepts, so have some secondary questions ready to go.

2. Looking at the competent communicator model, how do the different layers of context work on the communication we have in the classroom?
   • When discussing the cultural context, make sure that students focus on less obvious aspects of culture—like socioeconomic status, hobbies, college majors, and so on, as they may be tempted to focus on more obvious factors like race or gender.
   • Be sure to point out the situational and relational contexts. (Many students are excited to discuss culture but forget about these other contexts.) For example, you might discuss the “noise” created by uncomfortable chairs or the temperature of the room. You could also point out different relational contexts such as knowing students from previous classes as opposed to having students who are new to your course.

3. What constitutes effective and appropriate communication in the classroom? How might communication need to change to be appropriate and effective when you’re spending time with friends or family? What if you’re communicating online?
   • If your students seem hesitant, you might want to open up with a funny communication story of your own (e.g., someone you overheard on a cell phone sharing way too much personal information in a public space).
   • Students tend to enjoy discussions on online vs. other written or face-to-face communication. For example, is it effective and appropriate to write LOL (laughing out loud) in a journal entry that will be handed in to your professor? Should you write IDK (I don’t know) in response to an essay question on an exam?
   • As always, it’s useful to remind students of the cultural, relational, and situational contexts here. Text speak may be fine when sending a quick note to a friend, but is it appropriate for an e-mail to grandma?

4. Take a look at the table The Broad Field of Communication Research Today on p. 29 of the text. What types of careers do you think will be open to you if you choose to major in communication or specialize in one of these areas?
   • This is a particularly useful discussion to have with students if your department uses the human communication course to recruit majors. It’s important to let them know, up front, about the opportunities that our discipline will afford them in the future—both personally and professionally.
   • Students will likely know about certain fields in which a degree in communication is particularly useful (e.g., media fields, public relations, and so on), but you may want to point out some truly unique opportunities that they may not think of on their own. Think back to your own friends and colleagues from college and graduate school. Where are they now? You can also consider some of the highlighted individuals in the Real Communicator feature throughout the book.
   • Finally, you may wish to point out the ways in which communication research benefits all majors and fields. For example, see how many nursing students are in your course (or perhaps biology majors with an interest in medicine). Point out that interpersonal communication is essential for their job success.

5. How does communication work in your relationships? Where do you think the most issues come up? Why do you think they come up?
   • The hardest thing here is going to be reining in the conversation. Be ready to guide students continually back to the communication concepts they have learned in this chapter. How do these concepts come into play in relationships?
PERSONAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Identify Your Communication Goals
   Ask students to consider a communication goal that they hope to accomplish in the near future. How will they accomplish it? Have them consider the specific steps that they will need to take and reflect on different ways they can approach the issue.
   Guide students to be very specific in their plans—Whom will they talk to? What will they say? How will they say it? As students answer these questions, probe to find out how those aspects will help students to pull together a successful communication event.

2. Why Are You Here?
   On the first day of class, assign students the question about their goals and motivations for taking this course (see And You? on p. 30). Have students bring their responses to class and turn them in. At the end of the semester, pass them back and ask students to share how their goals have changed, how their view of the discipline has changed, and so forth.

3. Redo the E-Mail
   Have students rewrite the e-mail given in the Wired for Communication box on p. 17. Ask them to provide a one-paragraph analysis of why their e-mail might be more effective and appropriate than the e-mail sample offered in the textbook.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. GOAL Puzzles
   Goal: To demonstrate the definition and challenge of achieving communication goals
   Time Required: Twenty minutes
   Materials:
   1. Piece of paper or transparency with the word GOAL! written in large letters. Cut the paper into six to eight pieces with straight edges to make a puzzle. (Pieces may be laminated for repeated use.)
   2. Adjustable blindfold, such as a scarf or bandana
   3. Timer or stopwatch
   4. Document camera or transparency reader
   Directions:
   1. Break students into teams of four to five people; each team should have the same number of students. Use extra students as timers or observers to see how the interaction progresses. Blindfold one student on each team. The other team members should decide an order in which they will give directions and get in a line to represent that order.
   2. Put the puzzle pieces on top of the transparency or document reader so that all the pieces are visible to the audience on the screen.
   3. The student who is first in line should begin directing the blindfolded student on how to assemble the puzzle. The student has one minute to give directions. When time is called, it is the next person’s turn to give directions for one minute. This process continues either until everyone has had a chance to direct or until the puzzle has been put together.
   4. The team with the most pieces in the right places (or with the fastest time correctly putting the puzzle together) wins.
Debriefing: Direct the students to discover how challenging achieving goals through communication can be. Even when we think our communication is very clear, other factors, such as noise, can interfere in such a way as to make it very difficult for us to achieve our communication goals.

2. **Bag Me**

*Goals:* To demonstrate the process of encoding and decoding in communication; to demonstrate how the different contexts of communication affect the encoding and decoding process

*Time Required:* Twenty to thirty minutes

*Materials:* Have each student bring an object to class that expresses who they are. Students should keep their objects in an opaque bag to maintain secrecy. Remind them not to tell other students what their objects are.

*Directions:*

1. Have students place the bags containing their objects in one area of the room.
2. Randomly hand out one bag to each student and have students check to make sure that they don’t have their own object.
3. Have students take the object out of the bag and write a short description about the kind of person who would own this object. Students don’t have to (in fact, shouldn’t) know who the true owner of the object is until the end.
4. Ask students to read their descriptions out loud, and then ask the students who own the objects to reveal themselves. Ask the owners if they agree with the descriptions given by their peers. Repeat until time is up and have students return the objects to their rightful owners.

*Debriefing:* Point out to students that this is the process of encoding (constructing a message, in this case a nonverbal one, for production) and decoding (receiving and interpreting the message and assigning meaning to it). Ask them what led them to make the interpretations they did. How might those assumptions relate to the different contexts pointed out in the chapter? Ask students why people may have “misinterpreted” their objects. What kinds of contexts and noise may have affected the encoding and decoding process?

3. **Modeling Communication Through Paper Wars**

*Goals:* To illustrate the different models of communication; to reinforce the idea of transactional communication

*Time Required:* Fifteen to twenty minutes

*Materials:*

1. Piece of full-size scrap paper for each student
2. Three to four pieces of scrap paper for instructor

*Directions:*

1. Have students crumple their pieces of paper into balls. Tell them to hang onto them for the present. Do the same for your pieces of paper.
2. As you explain the model of linear communication, throw your paper balls to various students in the room and ask the students to catch the balls. If they fail to catch one of the balls, explain that not all intended messages are received. If a ball bounces off something, explain that noise is communication interference that may prevent the message from getting to the receiver or may distort it so that it doesn’t get to the receiver in the way it was intended.
3. Take one of your paper balls and play a game of “catch” with a student in the front row. Ask students how this type of communication differs from the previous style. They will likely answer that feedback is now present.

4. Finally, ask students how communication in the classroom differs from what you have seen before. If none of their answers point this out, prod students, asking them if they ever communicate in the classroom when they are not raising their hands. Ask them if they ever communicate to the instructor at the same time the instructor is communicating with them. Explain to them that this is indicative of the transactional nature of communication, where communication is simultaneous.

5. At this point, ask students to pick up their paper balls. If you preface with “Ready? One . . . two . . . three!”, students will generally get the idea that they are to throw their paper balls. Most will try to throw them to you—do your best to try to catch a few. Some will throw them to other students.

6. Use this opportunity to talk about how competent communication happens as described in the text.

Debriefing: Have students explain back the strengths and weaknesses of the various models of communication. Be sure to have them clean up and recycle the paper balls.

4. Drawing Your Model

Goal: To have students understand the various models of communication

Time Required: Twenty minutes

Materials:
1. Piece of paper or transparency for each group of students
2. Permanent marker for each group
3. Transparency projector or document camera

Directions:
1. Break students up into groups of three to four.
2. Have each group, without opening their texts, draw what they think is a model of two people communicating on the paper or transparency. Make it clear to students that this is not a test of what they remember from the reading—encourage them to be creative.
3. Collect each model of communication and sort through them for elements of the linear, interaction, and competent communication (transactional) models of communication.
4. Pull out some of the models of communication that the students have drawn. For those that most resemble the linear model, point out the various parts that exemplify the linear model, such as sender and receiver, one-way communication, and noise. For those that most resemble the interaction model, point out the various parts that exemplify the interaction model, especially focusing on feedback. For those that resemble the competent communication model, point out the different aspects of the model, such as transactional communication and various kinds of context. Talk about how transactional communication happens between instructor and student and between students in the classroom.

Debriefing: Have students discuss how they might now change their models based on what they have learned about the strengths and weaknesses of these various models.

5. How Should We Talk?

Goal: To write a code of communication for this class

Time Required: Fifteen to twenty minutes
Materials: Real Communication, 3e

Directions:

1. If you plan to have your students work in a set group this semester, encourage them to meet before or after class. Have them read the National Communication Association Credo for Ethical Communication on p. 14 in the text and ask them to write their own code for their group.

2. Have the groups share their codes with the rest of the class. Ask them to share how their code differs from the official one. Do they think this credo for ethical communication might help their group? Why or why not?

Debriefing: Encourage students to discuss why they chose particular aspects of the credo, and why they chose others. How does the context of the classroom affect the ethics the students felt necessary to point out?

6. Are You Like Me?

Goal: To have students better understand the characteristics of communication

Time Required: Fifteen minutes

Materials: One index card for each member of the class with strings attached to both ends (in a necklace style)

Directions:

1. Write out the characteristics and behaviors from Table 1.1, listed on p. 12 of the text, on index cards. Be sure there are enough behaviors and characteristics for each student in the class.

2. Hand these cards out randomly to students.

3. Have students wear the neck cards and walk around the classroom, finding the characteristic or behavior on another person’s card that fits with the card they are wearing. Have students volunteer to explain how they found each other. So, for example, with “Communication is linked to culture,” both individuals might be using accents. For “Communication occurs through various channels,” the individuals might be using a number of hand gestures, and so on.

Debriefing: Ask students if they paid more attention to the various characteristics of communication than they normally do. For example, do they usually really notice gestures? Do they really pay attention to how communication becomes a transaction? Did students find themselves pairing up with the “wrong people”? Explain to them that this shows that these characteristics really can’t be separated (e.g., a person with an accent will still use symbols and hand gestures).

7. Channel Searching

Goal: To discover a number of different channels that communicators might use when communicating

Time Required: Five to ten minutes

Materials: Copy of the Word Search handout (provided at the end of this chapter) for each student or group of students

Directions: Have students, individually or in groups, fill out the word search.

Debriefing: Ask students what other channels of communication they can think of that were not in the word search.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why, in your opinion, is the study of communication often considered common sense?
2. What are the six characteristics of communication?
3. What do the authors of Real Communication mean when they say communication is “culturally bound”?
4. Explain the transactional model.
5. What are the differences between the relational context and the situational context? Define each.
6. What is cultural identity?
7. Why do communicators need to be flexible?
8. Describe an effective communicator.

MEDIA

American Hustle (Sony/Columbia, 2013)
Based on the real-life ABSCAM scandal of the 1970s, this comedy-drama depicts complicated interdependent relationships and provides powerful examples of influence and control. Irving Rosenfeld is a con man recruited by an FBI agent, Richard “Richie” DiMaso, to participate in a sting operation targeting corrupt congressmen. Irving tries to balance interdependent relationships with his high-strung wife, Rosalyn, and his mistress, Sydney. All of these dynamics are complicated by dishonesty and hidden agendas. Ask the students to discuss the role that ethics play in communication.

The Break-Up (Universal Pictures, 2006)
Although this is a comedy, it is also a serious look at the complexities of control and affiliation in a romantic relationship. Romantic partners Brooke and Gary call their relationship quits after a series of disputes, but neither will move out of the condo they have shared. Have students identify the different ways Brooke and Gary exert control throughout the film. What do their efforts illustrate about control?

Erin Brockovich (Universal Studios, 2000)
Based on the true story of a Pacific Gas & Electric cover-up of contaminated water, this movie follows an inexperienced but tenacious woman as she pursues justice for the citizens of Hinkley, California. Discuss with students why effectiveness and appropriateness are important to competent communication.

Hitch (Columbia Pictures, 2005)
This comedy romance features Alex “Hitch” Hitchens, a New York City “date doctor” who helps men woo the women of their dreams. Students should examine the goal orientation in the communication of the actors here. Hitch wants to remain anonymous to continue his work, but his control and affiliation needs can only be fulfilled with the cooperation of others, especially the gossip columnist that he falls in love with.

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (Lionsgate, 2013)
In the second installment of the film series based on Suzanne Collins’s dystopian book trilogy about a futuristic society wherein citizens are forced to endure gladiatorial bouts, heroine Katniss Everdeen demonstrates many important communication principles. Her
character has become a polarizing figure, challenging to the government and inspiring to a burgeoning rebellion, so she engages in public speaking and employs symbols (such as hand gestures) to place messages inside of messages. Her experience also demonstrates the principles of influence and control, particularly in Katniss’ complex relationship with the villainous President Snow. Discuss all of these aspects by asking students to analyze how Katniss uses communication to her advantage and to describe the adverse effects when Katniss miscalculates the impact of her communication.

Legally Blonde (MGM, 2001)
Show a scene near the beginning of the film when Elle is interacting with her sorority sisters, and then contrast that with a scene toward the end of the movie when she is in the courtroom. Ask students to compare the communication styles in the two different situations. This exercise will help students understand how communication is situational.

Rise of the Planet of the Apes (20th Century Fox, 2011)
This movie is a prequel to the Planet of the Apes that shows how experiments with human genetics gave rise to the apes who became involved in a war for supremacy. Have students examine the role that communication plays in the rise of the apes and their formation of a society.

Show at least one speech being delivered by Ronald Reagan and have the students discuss why he was considered the “Great Communicator.”

Sideways (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2004)
Two old friends spend a week before a wedding touring the Santa Barbara, California, wine country. Ask students to examine the ways in which they communicate as friends, considering the situational context and their relational history. Students can also compare the friends’ communication with each other with their communication behavior with the women in their lives.

HANDOUTS
Word Search
Use this handout to complete the classroom activity “Channel Searching.”
handwriting  sign language
chat          smoke signals
e-mail        talking
Facebook      telegraph
facial expressions telephone
hand signals   text messaging