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UNDERSTANDING HUMAN COMMUNICATION

FIFTEENTH EDITION

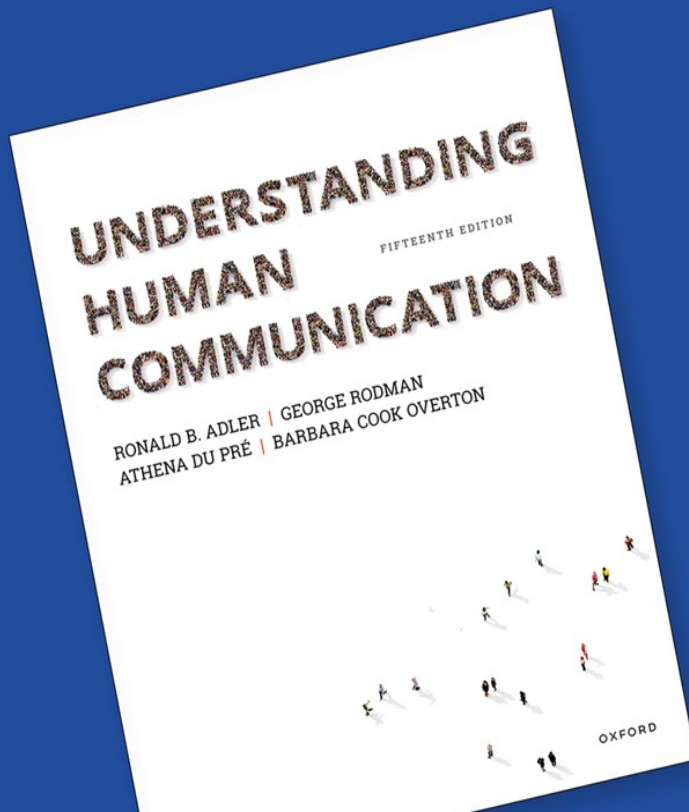
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This image shows the cover of Understanding Human Communication

Understanding Human Communication

Fifteenth Edition

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Preface

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“We are stronger when we listen, and smarter when we share.”

—Rania Al-Abdullah

Effective communication is about sharing ideas and listening to others. It’s a simple concept, but not always as easy as it might seem. Effective communicators appreciate that understanding diverse viewpoints is an important way to build relationships and solve problems—with friends, family, coworkers, and strangers. Understanding others is also the key to presenting yourself effectively and changing hearts and minds.

The conviction that communication can honor differences and inspire collaboration is central to the 15th edition of *Understanding Human Communication*. It features new and expanded coverage of diversity, civil discourse, social media and virtual interactions, and collaborative workplace communication.

This edition builds on the approach that has served more than 1 million students over four decades. Rather than focusing solely on either skills or scholarship, *Understanding Human Communication* embraces the idea that each enhances the other. Content is well researched, up-to-date, and clear without being overly simplistic. Real-life examples and engaging images make concepts interesting and relevant to students’ lives.

Approach

Understanding Human Communication introduces students to the academic study of communication and to skills that will benefit them in a wide array of life experiences. To see how well this edition succeeds, we invite you to flip to any page and ask three questions: *Is the content important? Is the explanation clear? Is it useful?*

New to this Edition

Changes in this edition reflect the changing world that *Understanding Human Communication* seeks to explain. Updated graphics, photos, examples, and research are included throughout. Following is a description of new content in key areas.

Communicating About Race, Gender, Disability, and Culture

[Chapter 4](#) focuses exclusively on culture and communication, with updated explorations of intersectionality theory, diverse gender identities, cultural humility, and ways to talk respectfully about race and disabilities. The discussion of culture extends throughout the book, with topics such as the impact of nonbinary pronouns ([Chapter 5](#)), gender and nonverbal communication ([Chapter 7](#)), intergroup contact hypothesis ([Chapter 8](#)), and cultural influences on conflict communication ([Chapter 9](#)). The public speaking chapters take up these issues in analyses of sample speeches dealing with issues such as students' mental health ([Chapter 12](#)), the impact of hearing disabilities ([Chapter 13](#)), and power dynamics in cultural differences ([Chapter 15](#)).

Emphasis on Civil Discourse

This edition expands upon a longstanding commitment by the authors to help communicators understand and learn from one another. New content includes discussions about how to spot misinformation on social media ([Chapter 2](#)), avoid stereotypical thinking and snap judgments ([Chapters 3](#) and [6](#)), consider the hurtful impact of microaggressions and tactfully engage in microresistance ([Chapter 5](#)), distinguish between facts and opinions ([Chapters 5](#) and [15](#)), befriend a diverse array of people ([Chapter 8](#)), stop sexual harassment and abuse ([Chapter 9](#)), respond to bullies ([Chapter 9](#)), and engage in fair and open-minded debates ([Chapters 6](#), [9](#), and [15](#)).

Expanded Coverage of Social Media and Virtual Communication

[Chapter 2](#) is dedicated entirely to mediated communication, both in close relationships and with a wider audience via social media. In addition, readers will find information about online communication throughout the book, such as how to maintain a healthy relationship with social media ([Chapters 1](#) and [6](#)), avoid unrealistic social comparisons to social media content ([Chapter 3](#)), present a genuine self ([Chapter 3](#)), recognize social media snarks ([Chapter 4](#)), listen online and in person ([Chapter 6](#)), negotiate what constitutes digital infidelity with romantic partners ([Chapter 8](#)), and manage conflict online ([Chapter 9](#)). The public speaking chapters examine the role that online media can serve in terms of in-depth research and inspiration ([Chapter 12](#)), as well as the dangers of plagiarism ([Chapter 13](#)) and misinformation from that form of research ([Chapter 14](#)).

Strategies for Career Success

[Chapters 10](#) and [11](#) focus on communication skills for the workplace. [Chapter 10](#) presents new information on creating a professional portfolio, negotiating a job offer, learning about prospective employers, asking questions during a job interview, practicing workplace etiquette, and working from home. [Chapter 11](#) begins with an expanded segment on the contributions of good followers. It also includes a new unit on participating effectively in virtual team meetings. Career-relevant communication strategies throughout the book also include networking on social media ([Chapter 2](#)), politely bragging during job interviews ([Chapter 3](#)), managing conflict in team meetings ([Chapter 9](#)), listening in virtual meetings ([Chapter 6](#)), making the most of nonverbal communication at work ([Chapter 7](#)), rethinking decisions in the workplace ([Chapter 14](#)), and using persuasion techniques in sales ([Chapter 15](#)).

Chapter Content

Understanding Human Communication reflects an integrated approach to developing communication skills and awareness in a wide variety of situations.

Part One, Fundamentals of Human Communication

The first four chapters establish a foundation for studying communication in today's high-tech, multicultural environment. Real-life examples provide inspiration and guidance, underscoring the relevance of communication in daily life.

- [Chapter 1](#) (Communication: What and Why) defines communication and dispels some common myths about the process, such as the assumption that there is one correct way to interpret a message.
- [Chapter 2](#) (Communicating with Social Media) considers the unique qualities of mediated communication as well as strategies for using social media to enhance understanding and build relationships while avoiding social isolation, deception, and loss of privacy.
- [Chapter 3](#) (The Self, Perception, and Communication) describes how communication influences the way people think about themselves and others. It calls attention to perceptual habits that can lead to unfair stereotypes and distrust, and instead presents ways to enhance emotional intelligence and open-mindedness. The chapter includes new features on helicopter and bulldozer parenting and how to reverse self-defeating thinking.
- [Chapter 4](#) (Communication and Culture) helps readers consider how cultural perspectives shape who they are and how they communicate. It also encourages them to look beyond their own experiences and learn about other cultures. The chapter includes strategies for talking respectfully about race, political differences, gender, and disabilities.

Part Two, Communication Elements

This section explores three key building blocks of communication—language, listening, and nonverbal cues. By the end of [Chapter 7](#), students should be equipped to overcome common barriers to good listening and to appreciate the layers of meaning made possible by language-based and nonverbal cues.

- [Chapter 5](#) (Language) emphasizes the potent and evolving nature of language. It explores the impact of words—including names, pronouns, and slang. Readers will consider how to balance assertive and collaborative language, distinguish between facts and opinions, and respond effectively to microaggressions. The segment on lies and evasions, previously in [Chapter 8](#), now appears in this chapter.
- [Chapter 6](#) (Listening) introduces readers to the concept of social listening and offers tips for listening in high-tech environments. A new feature on active listening invites readers to practice the verbal and nonverbal behaviors associated with person-centered listening.
- [Chapter 7](#) (Nonverbal Communication) contains an expanded and updated discussion of gender influences, with gender nonconforming and nonbinary perspectives included. New research and examples encourage readers to consider what clothing, body art, fidgeting, makeup, and facial expressions communicate to others.

Part Three, Interpersonal Communication

A focus on close relationships reveals the rewards and challenges of sharing personal information, developing friendships and romantic partnerships, and nurturing family ties. An entire chapter on conflict management provides useful skills and reminds readers that, when managed sensitively, conflict can lead to positive outcomes.

- [Chapter 8](#) (Understanding Interpersonal Communication) focuses on how people use communication to form (and sometimes to leave) close relationships. It considers the impact that metacommunication, self-disclosure, and online communication have on relationships of all types. Units are also devoted to the unique qualities of family communication, friendships, and romantic relationships.
- [Chapter 9](#) (Managing Conflict) explores productive ways to address differences and solve problems. It helps readers distinguish between confirming and disconfirming messages and consider whether a relationship is in an upward or downward spiral. The chapter includes new strategies for managing conflict in online classes and virtual teams. It also presents code words and gestures people can use to discreetly call for help if they are in dangerous situations.

Part Four, Communicating in Groups, Teams, and Organizations

Communication is essential to career success, and employers know it. Readers will learn how to use communication to excel as job candidates, new employees, team members, and leaders.

- [Chapter 10](#) (Communicating for Career Success) presents communication strategies for landing a desirable position and adapting to a new job, whether that involves working in person or remotely. The chapter includes new information on sharing professional credentials in an environment that frequently includes online applications and virtual interviews. It includes a sample cover letter and resume and suggestions for responding to common interview questions.
- [Chapter 11](#) (Teamwork and Leadership) honors the contributions of followers and team members and presents communication strategies to excel in those roles. The chapter also considers how to communicate successfully as a leader, with an emphasis on collaborative and transformational approaches. Coverage of power, previously part of [Chapter 10](#), has been moved here within the discussion of leadership.

Part Five, Public Communication

The public speaking section ([Chapters 12](#) through [15](#)) continues to guide students through the traditional time-tested process for developing effective in-person presentations, while incorporating new research, examples, and techniques to update and enhance that process. Sample speeches and excerpts, especially, provide scrutiny into important communication issues.

- [Chapter 12](#) (Preparing and Presenting Your Speech) provides a close reading of a sample speech by a student about her own mental health challenges to encourage students to tell their own stories and tackle their own challenges through public speaking.
- [Chapter 13](#) (Speech Organization and Support) examines one student's journey into the world of diversity as he explores the process of learning American Sign Language.

- [Chapter 14](#) (Informative Speaking) explores a presentation by a super-professor that will encourage students to overcome the problems of communication overload and disinformation.
- [Chapter 15](#) (Persuasive Speaking) explores one student's awakening as to how to help heal a politically toxic environment.

Learning Tools

Understanding Human Communication stimulates critical thinking and high-impact learning experiences.

- **Learning objectives** provide a clear map of what students should learn and where to find that material. Objectives correspond to major headings in each chapter and coordinate with end-of-chapter summaries and activities.
- **“Communication Strategies”** features throughout the book provide handy information and tips to help students build their communication skills. Topics include how to maintain a healthy relationship with social media ([Chapter 1](#)), identify misinformation online ([Chapter 2](#)), cope with culture shock ([Chapter 4](#)), practice active listening ([Chapter 6](#)), detect deception ([Chapter 7](#)), manage dialectical tensions ([Chapter 8](#)), fight fair in an argument ([Chapter 9](#)), build a career-enhancing network ([Chapter 10](#)), get slackers to do their share ([Chapter 11](#)), adapt a message with integrity ([Chapter 12](#)), organize a message for maximum impact ([Chapter 13](#)), use presentation software effectively ([Chapter 14](#)), and recognize the impact of culture in persuasive messages ([Chapter 14](#)).
- **“Understanding Your Communication”** features are introspective quizzes that invite students to evaluate and improve their communication skills. Topics include communication style ([Chapter 1](#)), communicating with social media ([Chapter 2](#)), emotional intelligence ([Chapter 3](#)), intercultural sensitivity ([Chapter 4](#)), listening styles ([Chapter 6](#)), nonverbal communication ([Chapter 7](#)), friendship types ([Chapter 8](#)), interpersonal communication climates ([Chapter 9](#)), follower and leadership styles ([Chapter 11](#)), communication anxiety ([Chapter 12](#)), and message organization ([Chapter 13](#)).
- **Photo captions** highlight the relevance of content in the book and end with critical-thinking questions that invite readers to apply the information.
- **Key terms** are boldfaced on first use and highlighted in the margins.
- **Information and activities** at the end of every chapter help students review and apply the information they have learned.
 - A **Making the Grade** section helps students test and deepen their mastery of the material. Organized by learning objective, this section summarizes key points from the text and presents questions and prompts to help students understand and apply the material.
 - **Public Speaking Practice** prompts provide confidence-building opportunities to get students speaking in class before undertaking formal presentations.
 - **Activities** help students apply the material to their everyday lives. Additional activities are available in the Instructor's Manual (*The Complete Guide to Teaching Communication*) at www.oup.com/he/adler-uhc15e.

Oxford Insight

Understanding Human Communication is available in **Oxford Insight**, which delivers the book's trusted and student-friendly content within a powerful, data-driven learning experience. Oxford Insight provides access to the e-book, multimedia resources, assignable/gradable activities and exercises, and analytics on student

achievement and progress. As students work through the course material, Oxford Insight automatically sets personalized learning paths for them, based on their specific performance.

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Oxford Learning Link

Oxford Learning Link (OLL) www.oup.com/he/adler-uhc15e is a convenient, instructor-focused website that provides access to up-to-date teaching resources for this text, while guaranteeing the security of grade-significant resources. In addition, it allows OUP to keep instructors informed when new content becomes available. The following items are available on the OLL:

- ***The Complete Guide to Teaching Communication***, written by coauthors Athena du Pré and Barbara Cook Overton, provides a complete syllabus, teaching tips, preparation checklists, grab-and-go lesson plans, high-impact learning activities, handouts, links to relevant video clips, and coordinating PowerPoint lecture slides.
- A comprehensive **Test Bank** includes 60 exam questions per chapter in multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay formats. The questions have been revised for this edition, are labeled according to difficulty, and include the page reference and chapter section where the answers may be found.
- **PowerPoint slides** include key concepts, video clips, discussion questions, and other elements to engage students. They correspond to content in the lesson plans, making them ready to use and fully editable so that preparing for class is faster and easier than ever.

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1

Communication: What and Why

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- [1.1 Define communication and explain its essential characteristics.](#)
- [1.2 Distinguish between types of communication in a variety of contexts.](#)
- [1.3 Analyze elements of effective versus ineffective communication.](#)
- [1.4 Explain how misconceptions about communication can create problems.](#)

“Communication is like a dance,” says Oprah Winfrey. When people are in sync, things flow smoothly. But not everyone hears the same song. The best communicators, Winfrey says, embrace those differences and keep dancing together, even when missteps occur.¹

Winfrey, who has a degree in communication, is famous for her talk show, acting career, production studio, broadcast network, books, and philanthropic efforts. She is one of the richest women in the United States. Nevertheless, what makes her a good communicator, she says, is the recognition that, at her core, she is no different from anyone else. “All of us are seeking the same thing,” she says, “Everybody wants to fulfill the highest, truest expression of yourself My understanding of that has allowed me to ... reach everyone,” she says.²

After interviewing more than 37,000 people during her career, Winfrey says she has learned something from every one of them. “I know one thing for sure,” she says, “Great communication begins with connection.”³

You may take a different path than Winfrey, but regardless of what you do, communication is sure to play a central role in your life. The average person spends about 70 percent of their waking hours communicating.⁴ Effective communication can help you present a positive identity to others, establish and maintain healthy relationships, gain support for your ideas, work well with others, and attain career success.

This book explores the many ways you can use communication to be more successful in your personal and professional life. The emphasis is on respectful discourse that can help people honor diversity and consider different perspectives with an open mind. This foundational chapter explains what communication is, the forms it takes, what qualifies as effective communication, and some common myths about the process.

1.1 Characteristics of Communication

What does it mean to communicate? This section explores defining characteristics and the transactional model of communication.

Defining Communication

Communication is the process of creating meaning through symbolic interaction. This definition highlights five fundamental qualities.

Communication Is a Process

People often think about communication as if it occurs in discrete, individual acts. They might say, “I told them the news” or “We had a talk.” But what seems to be an isolated experience is actually part of a larger process. Imagine that a friend says you look “fabulous.” Your interpretation of that will depend on a range of factors: What have others said about your appearance in the past? How do you feel about the way you look? Is your friend prone to sarcasm? Metaphorically speaking, communication isn’t a series of episodes pasted together like photographs in a scrapbook. Instead, it’s more like an ongoing movie in which meaning emerges based on interrelated experiences from the past and present.

Communication Is Symbolic

Words are **symbols** in that they represent people, things, ideas, and events—making it possible for people to communicate about them. One feature of symbols is their arbitrary nature. For example, there’s no logical reason why the letters in the word *book* should stand for what you’re reading now. Speakers of Spanish call it a *libro*, and Germans call it a *buch*. Even in English, another term would work just as well. The same applies to nonverbal behavior. When you tell a joke, your friend’s eye roll might signify amusement or annoyance. You understand each other to the extent that you interpret it the same way.

Communication Is Collaborative

Communication isn’t something you do *to* others. Rather, it’s collaborative—something you do *with* them. As psychologist Kenneth Gergen points out, “one cannot be ‘attractive’ without others who are attracted, a ‘leader’ without others willing to follow, or a ‘loving person’ without others to affirm with appreciation.”¹ Because communication is collaborative, it’s a mistake to suggest that any one individual is responsible for its success or failure. If a communication episode is disappointing, it’s usually better to ask, “How did *we* handle this situation, and what can *we* do to make it better?”

Messages Are Conveyed via Channels

A communication **channel** is the method by which a message is transmitted. Channels include face-to-face contact and mechanisms such as computers, phones, and other devices. The channel you use can make a big difference in the effect of a message. For example, if you wanted to say “I love you,” a generic e-card probably

wouldn't have the same effect as a handwritten note. Likewise, saying "I love you" for the first time on the phone might be a different experience from saying the words in person.

Digital communication technology—which emerged in the 1990s and continues rapidly to evolve—means that you can use channels beyond the dreams of earlier generations. This presents many advantages. After all, imagine (or remember) how life would be different without a mobile device in the following situations: you become separated from your friends at a large outdoor event, your car stalls on a deserted roadway, or you need to get an urgent message to someone who doesn't have a land line. Thanks to technology, those situations probably don't present dilemmas for you. You can reach most people at any time regardless of where they are.

Your dilemma may be that almost anyone can reach out to *you*. "I just can't keep up!!" laments one social media enthusiast, who explains, "Between my instagram messages, facebook messages, patreon messages, and emails ... I just literally do not have the time to respond to every message that comes my way." We'll talk more about the advantages and challenges of today's abundant communication networks in [Chapter 2](#) and throughout the book.

Communication Is Irreversible

John E. Gardner once said that "life is art without an eraser." The same can be said of communication. At times, you've probably wished you could take back words you've said or actions you've taken. But once it's out there, you typically can't unsend or unreceive a message. This is especially true on social media, where a careless comment, photo, or video can haunt you forever. It's always wise to think before you speak, write, or post a message.

Transactional Communication Model

Our basic definition of communication and its characteristics are useful, but they only begin to describe the process we will examine throughout this book. One way to deepen your understanding of communication is to look at a model depicting what happens when two or more people interact.

The **transactional communication model** proposes that communicators co-create meaning while simultaneously sending and receiving messages within the context of social, relational, and cultural expectations. A closer look at each component of the model ([Figure 1.1](#)) helps to explain.

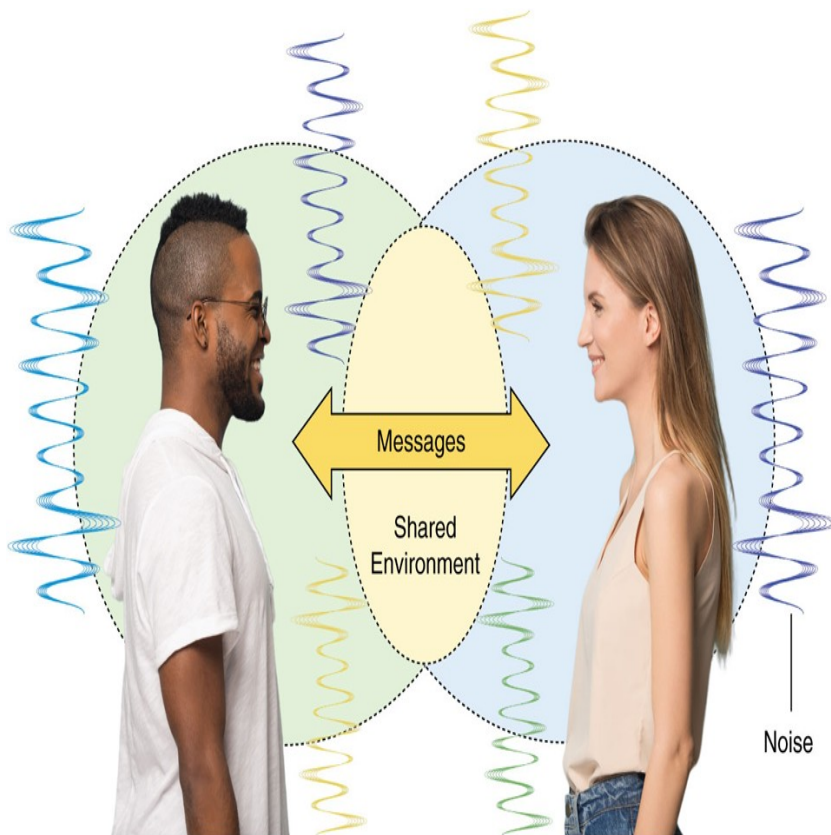


FIGURE 1.1 Transactional Model of Communication [View larger image](#)

VIDEO 1.1 Transactional Communication Model

[Please note: You must be using an online, browser-based eReader in order to view this content.]

Communicators

Imagine making eye contact with a friend walking toward you. From the moment you are aware of each other, the two of you are communicating, even without trying. Perhaps his arms are folded over his chest, leading you to think he's upset or cold. At the same time, your body language suggests how you are feeling. As you get closer, your friend launches into an account of something that just happened to him. You are mostly silent, but you continue to convey information via your facial expressions, posture, and so on. As this example shows, people involved in personal communication continually and simultaneously send and receive messages. For that reason, the transactional model refers to people as *communicators*, rather than labeling one person a sender and the other a receiver.

Messages

In the transactional model, **messages** represent information shared (intentionally or not) between people via words or nonverbal cues. An old adage about communication is that you cannot *not* communicate. For example, your facial expressions, gestures, postures, and vocal tones may offer information to others even when you aren't aware of them. As you have certainly experienced, these messages can be powerful. If you yawn or look

at the ceiling during an important conversation, the other person may assume (rightly or wrongly) that you disagree or aren't paying attention.

Noise

Many factors can get in the way of clear communication. Scholars use the term **noise** to refer to any force that interferes with the accurate reception of a message. Three types of noise can disrupt communication—external, physiological, and psychological.

- *External noise* (also called *physical noise*) includes factors outside of a person that are distracting or make hearing difficult. For example, a text message that catches your eye might divert your attention during a lecture, or a lawnmower might make it difficult to hear a professor's remarks clearly.
- *Physiological noise* involves biological factors that interfere with accurate reception. You might find it difficult to listen well if you are tired, sick, or hungry.
- *Psychological noise* refers to thoughts and feelings that interfere with the ability to express or understand a message accurately. If you come home annoyed or preoccupied, it will probably be harder to give the people you live with the attention they deserve.

An awareness of noise underscores that it's important to choose the right time and place for important conversations—and when you're part of those conversations, to exert the self-discipline necessary to overcome distractions. [Chapter 6](#) focuses on the skills involved in being a good listener.

Co-Created Meaning

A communication episode is co-created in that all participants help to shape it, and the meaning that emerges is a result of their collaborative effort. Here are a few examples:

- You pour your heart out to an attentive listener, and in the process, arrive at a new understanding of your situation.
- Members of a team brainstorm solutions to the parking problem on campus, coming up with ideas none of them had thought of before.
- When you discuss politics with your best friend, the conversation spirals into an argument about what is “right” and “wrong,” even though neither of you intended to frame your position in those terms.

Co-creation is involved any time people engage in personal communication. That helps to explain why talking about a subject with someone is often different than simply *thinking* about it—and why conversations don't always go the way you have planned.

Context

Communicators occupy **environments**—fields of experience that influence how people interpret others' behavior. In communication terminology, *environment* refers not only to a physical location but also to the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds that participants bring to a conversation. It's easy to imagine how your position on economic issues might differ depending on whether you are struggling financially or are well off, and how your thoughts on immigration reform might depend on how long your family has lived in this country.

[Figure 1.1](#) shows that the environments of person A and person B overlap. This area represents the background that the communicators have in common. The overlap may be quite large if they belong to the same groups, have had similar life experiences, and share many of the same opinions. By contrast, communication may be challenging if participants' shared environment is small. That doesn't mean you should avoid it.

Communicating with people who are different from you—perhaps of different ages, socioeconomic status, abilities, or ethnicities—can be rewarding. In [Chapter 4](#), we discuss the advantages and skills involved in intercultural communication, and information throughout this book offers ways to bridge the gaps that separate each of us to a greater or lesser degree.

As you read about the transactional model, it may have occurred to you that it doesn't describe every type of communication. For example, mass communicated messages (such as what you see in the news) may flow in a one-way manner, thus aren't transactional. Swapping texts with a friend may involve noise, environment, and context—but not a simultaneous exchange of information—making the process transactional in some ways but not in others. Although the model doesn't apply perfectly to every situation, understanding it will help you appreciate key elements of communication.

1.2 Types of Communication

Della and Honya met via a direct message on Instagram and then communicated for a year online and over the phone before they met in person. During that time, Della wondered, “Will that online friendship be the same in real life?” It’s a good question. Each method of communicating has unique qualities. In this section, we consider seven communication contexts, each with its own characteristics, advantages, and challenges.

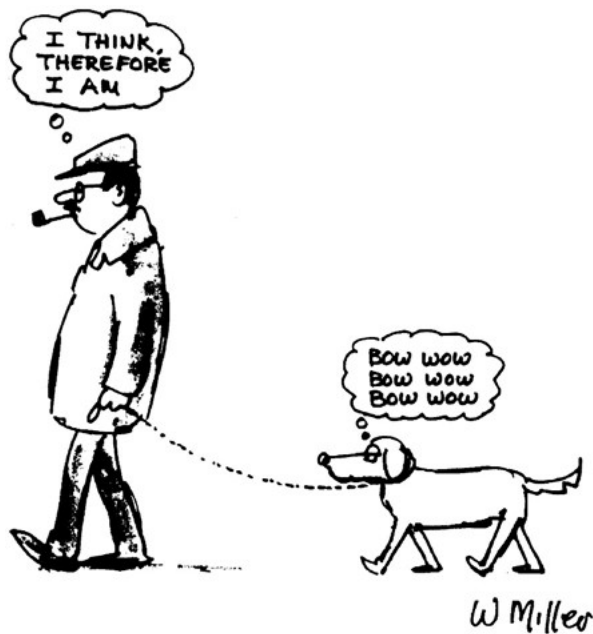
Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication involves “communicating with oneself.” It involves the mental voice that replays conversations, rehearses what you might say to others, and so on. Take a moment and listen to your own self-talk before reading on. It may have said something like, “What inner voice? I don’t have any inner voice!” That’s the “sound” of your thinking.

Intrapersonal communication affects almost every type of interaction. A conversation with a new acquaintance is shaped by your self-talk (“I’m making a fool out of myself” or “She likes me!”). Take this idea further by imagining your thoughts in each of the following situations:

- You’re planning to approach a stranger you would like to get to know better.
- You pause for a minute and look at the audience before beginning a 10-minute speech.
- The boss yawns while you’re asking for a raise.
- A friend seems irritated lately, and you’re not sure whether you are responsible.

You’ll read more about self-talk later. Much of [Chapter 3](#) deals with how what you think shapes how you relate to others, and part of [Chapter 14](#) explains how the right kind of intrapersonal communication can minimize anxiety when delivering a speech.



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Dyadic Communication

Social scientists use the term **dyadic communication** to describe two-person interactions. They can occur when people talk in person or via electronic means (text, DM, or phone call). Dyadic conversations are the most common type of personal communication. Even communication within larger groups (such as classrooms, parties, and work environments) often consists of multiple dyadic encounters. Some people assume that dyadic communication is identical to interpersonal communication, but that's not always true.

Interpersonal Communication

Communication qualifies as **interpersonal** when the people involved treat each other as unique individuals. This helps to explain why dyadic communication isn't always interpersonal. You probably communicate one on one with many people (e.g., new acquaintances, strangers, salespeople) in ways that are informational, but not personal in any sense. And interpersonal communication can involve several people at a time, as when you engage in conversation with a group of close friends. [Chapters 7](#) through [9](#) explore interpersonal communication in detail.

Small-Group Communication

Small-group communication occurs when the number of individuals is small enough that each person can interact with all of the other members. Small groups are a fixture of everyday life. Your family is an example. So are an athletic team, several students working on a project, and colleagues in different locations who work closely together online.

In a small group, the majority of members can overrule or put pressure (either deliberately or unconsciously) on the rest of the members. And for better and worse, groups often take risks that members wouldn't take if they were alone or in a dyad. On the plus side, groups can be effective at generating creative solutions since there are more people from whom to draw ideas. Groups are so important to career success that [Chapter 11](#) focuses extensively on them.

Organizational Communication

Compared to small groups, organizations are larger and more permanent. **Organizational communication** occurs when their members work collectively to achieve goals. Organizations come in many forms, such as business (a corporation), nonprofit (the Humane Society or Habitat for Humanity), political (a government or political action group), health (a hospital or medical office), and recreational (a YMCA or sports league).

In organizations, members usually occupy specific roles (such as sales associate, general manager, corporate trainer) that influence who communicates with whom and how. Culture also plays a role. Each organization develops its own culture, which can be useful to consider when you apply for jobs and communicate in the workplace, the focus of [Chapters 10](#) and [11](#).

Public Communication

Public communication occurs when one or more people deliver remarks to others who act as an audience. Even when audience members have the chance to ask questions and post comments (in person or online), the speakers are still mostly in control of the message. Public speakers usually have more opportunity to plan and structure their remarks than do communicators in smaller settings. The last four chapters of this book describe the steps you can take to prepare and deliver effective speeches.



The television series *The Morning Show* depicts characters navigating organizational communication issues, such as teamwork and interpersonal rivalries, while simultaneously creating messages to be mass communicated to the fictional audience of their daybreak news program.

In what circumstances are you involved with more than one type of communication at the same time?

[View larger image](#)

Mass Communication

Mass communication consists of messages that are transmitted to large, widespread audiences via electronic and print media such as websites, magazines, television, radio, and some blogs. Many messages sent via mass communication channels are developed, or at least financed, by large organizations such as advertisers and movie studios.

Social Media Communication

Social media use doesn't fit neatly within the groupings we've just described. A tweet or post might reach your closest friends *and* thousands of people you don't know. This can be inspiring, as when a grocery clerk's kindness to a teenager with autism became a viral video.¹⁰ The clip was viewed by tens of thousands of people and became the focus of stories carried by CNN, ABC News, *The Washington Post*, and other news outlets. More attention isn't always better, however. UC Berkeley graduate student Connor Riley learned this the hard way when she tweeted "Cisco just offered me a job! Now I have to weigh the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work." Company officials saw the tweet and withdrew their offer.¹¹

Social media plays such an important role in today's communication environment that [Chapter 2](#) is devoted entirely to the subject. Throughout the book, you'll also find guidance on discussing politics respectfully on social media ([Chapter 4](#)), distinguishing between facts and opinions ([Chapter 5](#)), avoiding social media distractions to be a better listener ([Chapter 6](#)), using your online identity to help with a job search ([Chapter 10](#)), and more.

As useful as social media is, it can inspire a love-hate relationship. The feature "Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with Social Media" offers some tips to maximize its positive aspects and minimize the negative.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Maintaining a Healthy Relationship with Social Media

There's a lot to adore about social media. It offers opportunities to connect with people all over the world.¹² The content can entertain, inspire, and educate. But the love affair isn't without a few rough spots. Screen time can be distracting and addictive. All in all, the best way to describe the public's love affair with social media might be "It's complicated." Here are some tips from the experts on keeping the relationship healthy.

Focus on the Positive

You probably wouldn't choose to befriend someone who's negative and hypercritical. Don't tolerate that on social media either. Instead, "follow inspiring, uplifting and empowering accounts that make you feel fabulous," advises tech writer Lucy Greenwell.¹³ At the same time, make sure your own posts and comments are respectful toward others.

Decide When to Scroll and When to Stop

Social media is often called a time suck. You intend to check in for a moment, "but all of a sudden that 30 seconds became 30 minutes," reflects writer Bo Manry.¹⁴ It adds up. On average, teenagers in the United States spend more than 7 hours a day on their phones, compared to 1 hour a day doing homework.^{15,16,17} To achieve a balance between screen time and other activities, set your phone aside during particular

occasions. For example, you might declare classes, meetings, and meals to be device-free times. It's also a good idea to turn off notifications and to activate the "do not disturb" mode when you go to bed.

Be Present in the Moment

"Have you ever been in a room full of people but felt that no one was paying attention to anyone?" asks writer Julie Hambleton.¹⁸ Social media allows you to attend a meeting or party at the same time you're scanning the news, catching up with friends, and posting thoughts about your latest find on Amazon. Multitasking has never been so easy. But never forget: Some of life's greatest pleasures involve pausing to look around, smell the air, enjoy a friend's laugh, be fully present with others, and simply enjoy a calmness of mind.¹⁹ That beautiful rose you almost passed up? Stop and smell it. (You can post a photo of it later.)

1.3 Communication Competence

Most scholars agree that **communication competence** involves achieving one's goals in a manner that, ideally, maintains or enhances the relationship in which it occurs.²⁰⁻²¹ Is it effective communication if you win an argument but damage a valued relationship in the process? Probably not. Here are eight other maxims about communication competence.

VIDEO 2 Ten Ways to Have a Better Conversation

[Please note: You must be using an online, browser-based eReader in order to view this content.]

There's No "Ideal" Way to Communicate

Some successful communicators are serious, while others are lighthearted. Some are talkative, while others are quiet. Some are straightforward, while others are subtle. Just as beautiful art takes many forms, there are many kinds of competent communicators. Others may inspire you to improve your communication skills, but ultimately, it's important to find approaches that suit you.

Many less-than-competent communicators are easy to spot by their limited approaches. Perhaps they are chronic jokers, relentlessly argumentative, or nearly always quiet. Like a piano player who knows only one tune or a chef who can prepare only a few dishes, these people rely on a small range of communication strategies again and again, whether or not they are successful. By contrast, competent communicators have a wide repertoire from which to draw, and they choose the most appropriate behavior for a given situation.

Competence Is Situational

It's a mistake to think that anyone either is or isn't a competent communicator. Individuals are better at communicating in some situations than in others, and competence is always a matter of degree. You might be quite skillful socializing at a party but less successful talking with professors during office hours. And no matter how good a communicator is, there's always more to learn. It's an overgeneralization to say, in a moment of distress, "I'm a terrible communicator!" It would be more accurate to say, "I didn't handle this situation very well, even though I'm better in others."



Oprah Winfrey, who is often in the public eye, says she can relax and vent with her longtime best friend Gayle King.

How are you different with your best friends than you are in other situations?

[View larger image](#)

Competence Is Relational

Because communication is something we do *with* others, behavior that's competent in one relationship or culture isn't necessarily effective or appropriate in others. For example, your friends might consider it fun to tease each other by trading insults, but the same comments directed at coworkers or classmates might offend. The challenge can be even greater when people are from different cultures and use words differently. If you tell someone from the United Kingdom that you packed two pairs of pants, they may think you odd. To them, *trousers* are what you wear on the outside and *pants* are what's underneath.² To their way of thinking, you just told them how many pairs of underwear are in your suitcase.

Competent Communicators Are Empathic

You have the best chance of developing an effective message when you understand the other person's point of view. And because people don't always express their thoughts and feelings clearly, the ability to *imagine* how an issue might look to someone else is an important skill.

Cognitive complexity is the ability to understand issues from a variety of perspectives. For instance, imagine that your longtime friend seems angry with you. Rather than jumping to a conclusion, you might consider a range of possibilities: Is your friend offended by something you have done? Did something upsetting happen earlier in the day? Or perhaps nothing is wrong, and you're just being overly sensitive. Listening is also important in such situations. It helps you understand others and judge how they are responding to your messages. Because empathy is such an important element of communicative competence, parts of [Chapters 3](#) and [6](#) are devoted to the topic. Throughout the book, you will learn strategies for communicating about sex and

gender, race, and disabilities ([Chapter 4](#)), as well as ways to avoid and respond to microaggressions ([Chapter 5](#)).

Competence Can Be Learned

There are numerous ways to build communication competence. You can boost your skills by taking classes such as the one you are in now, trying out new communication strategies, and observing what works well (and not so well) for you and the people around you.

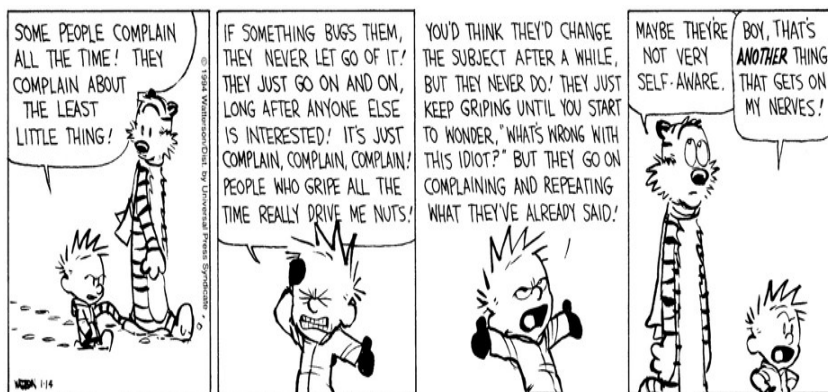
Competence Requires Effort

Knowing *how* to communicate effectively is necessary, but it takes more than knowledge to be competent. Hard work is also an ingredient. For example, one study revealed that, even when college students were capable of paying attention to important conversational cues, they often didn't put in the effort to do so, perhaps because they were preoccupied or distracted.²³

Developing competence takes time. Simply reading about communication skills in the following chapters doesn't guarantee that you'll put those skills to use right off the bat. As with any other skill—playing a musical instrument or learning a sport, for example—the road to competence in communication can be a long one. You can expect that your first efforts at communicating differently will be awkward. After some practice you should become more skillful, although you will still have to think about new ways of speaking or listening. Finally, after repeating new skills again and again, you may find you can perform them without much conscious thought.

Competent Communicators Self-Monitor

Self-monitoring involves paying close attention to situational cues and adapting your behavior accordingly. High self-monitors ask themselves questions such as “What's expected in this situation?” and “What's likely to please (or offend) the people around me?” Low self-monitors are driven by internal rather than external cues. For example, if a low self-monitor feels upset, they are more likely to raise their voice than to grin and bear it, whatever the situation may be.



Source: CALVIN and HOBBS © 1994 Watterson. Distributed by UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

High self-monitors are more likely than low self-monitors to develop relationships with many types of people.²⁴ Being highly adaptive can lead to problems, however. High self-monitors may be inclined to overuse social media, perhaps because they're concerned with how they appear to others.²⁵ And people may wonder how high self-monitors really feel, since their behavior tends to vary by situation. You'll read more about self-monitoring in [Chapter 3](#).

Competent Communicators Are Committed

One feature that distinguishes effective communication in almost any context is commitment. People who are emotionally committed to a relationship are more likely than others to talk about difficult subjects and to share personal information about themselves, which can strengthen relationships and contribute to a heightened sense of wellbeing.²⁶ Take the self-assessment quiz “What Type of Communicator Are You?” for insight about your communication strengths and challenges.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNICATION What Type of Communicator Are You?

[Please note: You must be using an online, browser-based eReader in order to view this content.]

1.4 Misconceptions About Communication

Having spent time talking about what communication is, we should identify some things it is not.



Source: Cartoonbank.com

Myth: Communication Requires Complete Understanding

Most people operate on the flawed assumption that the goal of all communication is to maximize understanding between communicators. In fact, there are times when complete comprehension isn't the primary goal. For example, when people in the United States ask social questions such as "How's it going?" they typically aren't asking for genuine details about how the other person is doing. Beyond formalities, competent communicators may also deliberately create ambiguous messages. For example, consider what you might say if someone you care about asks a personal question that you don't want to answer such as "Do you think I'm attractive?" or "Is anything bothering you?"

Myth: Communication Can Solve All Problems

"If I could just communicate better ..." is the sad refrain of many unhappy people who believe that, if they could express themselves more effectively, their relationships would improve. This is sometimes true, but it's an exaggeration to say that communicating—even communicating clearly—is a guaranteed cure-all.



Communication isn't a cure-all for problems. Sometimes people need time and space to think things through on their own.

In what circumstances would you like a break from communicating with others?

[View larger image](#)

Myth: Communication Is Good

In truth, communication is neither good nor bad in itself. Rather, its value comes from the way it's used. Communication can be a tool for expressing warm feelings and useful facts, but under different circumstances words and actions can cause both physical and emotional pain.

Myth: Meanings Are in Words

People often interpret the same words differently. You may have learned the hard way that words such as *freedom* and *control* can mean different things to different people. And new words continually emerge. If *periodt* appears at the end of a written comment, some people may think it's a misspelling, whereas others will assume that the writer feels strongly about the topic, as in, "I am staying home, periodt."

Myth: Communication Is Simple

Most people assume that communication is an aptitude that people develop without the need for training. After all, you've been swapping ideas with others since early childhood, and some people communicate well without ever taking a class on the subject. However, it's a mistake to assume that communication comes easily. Communication skills are a lot like athletic ability: Everyone can learn to be more effective with training and practice, and those who are talented can always become better.

Myth: More Communication Is Always Better

Although it's true that not communicating enough is a mistake, there are situations when *too much* communication is ill advised. Sometimes people go over the same ground again and again and again. You've probably had the experience of "talking yourself into a hole"—making a bad situation worse by pursuing it too far. There are even times when *no communication* is the best course. Any good salesperson will tell you that it's often best to stop talking and let the customer think about the product. And when two people are angry and hurt, they may say things they don't mean and will later regret. One key to successful communication, then, is to share an adequate amount of information in a skillful manner when the time is right.

This chapter began by describing Oprah Winfrey, who is famous for giving others a voice. "Oprah Winfrey is a world-renowned communicator and talented conversationalist, but her greatest quality is her ability to listen," proclaims media writer Colin Baker.²⁸ That isn't always easy for her or anyone else. As Winfrey puts it, in the dance of communication, people sometimes get tangled up and fall down. When that happens, she encourages, "extend a hand of connection and understanding to help your partner to [their] feet Then once you're face-to-face, offer three of the most important words any of us can ever receive: 'I hear you.'"²⁹

MAKING THE GRADE

OBJECTIVE 1.1 Define communication and explain its essential characteristics.

- *Communication* is the process of creating meaning through symbolic interaction.
- Communication is achieved collaboratively with others by conveying messages through channels.
- The transactional model of communication proposes that communicators co-create meaning while simultaneously sending and receiving messages with the context of social, relational, and cultural expectations.
- Communication is influenced by three types of noise.
 - Describe a real-life example that illustrates how communication is process oriented, relational, and symbolic.
 - Have you ever overreacted to something someone said, only to realize later that you misinterpreted that person's intent? How can the knowledge that communication is an ongoing process help you put things in perspective?
 - Pause for a moment to consider what is on your mind. How might these thoughts create physiological noise that could interfere with your ability to listen closely? Brainstorm some techniques people might use to listen carefully rather than being distracted by their own thoughts.

OBJECTIVE 1.2 Distinguish between communication in a variety of contexts.

- Communication operates in many contexts, including intrapersonal, dyadic, interpersonal, small group, organizational, public, mass media, and social media.
 - Provide examples of communication in three of the contexts just listed.
 - In what way would you most like to improve your communication relevant to interpersonal communication? To small-group communication? To public speaking?
 - Overall, what goals would you most like to set for yourself as a communicator? Which contexts will your goals involve?
 - Imagine you woke up this morning to find that the internet and cell phones no longer worked. In what ways would your daily life be different without them?

OBJECTIVE 1.3 Analyze elements of effective versus ineffective communication.

- Communication competence is situational and relational in nature, and it can be learned.
- Competent communicators are able to choose from and perform appropriately using a wide range of behaviors, taking into account the perspectives of others.
 - Who are the most competent communicators you know? How does their behavior reflect the elements of competence described here?
 - Rate yourself from 1 to 10 in terms of how well your communication reflects each of the following: empathy, self-monitoring, and commitment. Which of these are you good at? Which might you improve and how?

- Imagine that someone you know often tells jokes that you find offensive. Reflect on which of the following are you most likely to do: (a) say nothing, (b) ask a third party to talk to the jokester, (c) hint at your discomfort, (d) use humor to comment on your friend's insensitivity, or (e) express your discomfort in a straightforward way and ask your friend stop. Do you feel the strategies you use would be effective?

OBJECTIVE 1.4 Explain how misconceptions about communication can create problems.

- Communication doesn't always require complete understanding.
- Communication is not always a positive factor that will solve every problem.
- Meanings are in people, not in words.
- Communication is neither simple nor easy.
- More communication is not always better.
 - Describe a time when a misunderstanding led to a mistake or a comical situation. How did interpretations of the initial message(s) differ?
 - Which misconception(s) have been most problematic in your life? Give examples of each.
 - How can you avoid succumbing to the misconceptions listed in this chapter? Give examples of how you could communicate more effectively.