# Communication in a Civil Society

Second Edition

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John Casey Gooch

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Using the concept of "civility" as the major theme, this fully updated second edition offers a unique and alternative way to teach and learn about communication.

The book brings together discrete areas that explore the fundamentals of communication and intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, small group communication, and public speaking. Every chapter includes theories, concepts, and examples that allow students to use civil and ethical communication skills in their personal relationships, in collaboration with colleagues, and in giving public speeches and professional presentations. This new edition highlights advances in and concepts related to mediated and technology-based communication, such as chatbots, technostress, and dating apps, and shows how students can engage in civil face-to-face and mediated interaction. Additionally, each chapter includes a real-world incident that students are asked to analyze in terms of specific chapter information and skills related to civility.

Communication in a Civil Society is an ideal textbook for Introduction to Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Public Speaking courses.

Materials for instructors, including PowerPoint slides, a test bank, and an instructor's manual, are available at www.routledge.com/9781032513263.

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Shelley D. Lane
To Gaia and all who seek to restore her

Ruth Anna Abigail
To my children, Kathryn Guerrero and David Lulofs, who continue to be my inspiration

John Casey Gooch
To all my friends and family who have supported me in my academic endeavors

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Preface

In today's world, where uncivil acts and messages too often color our experiences with others, *Communication in a Civil Society* offers an alternative way to teach and learn about communication. We have written this book as a response to the challenges students face today to communicate competently in a complex society. The content in every chapter is framed in terms of communication based on respect, restraint, responsibility, and ethical choices that can bind people together.

Historically, the study of civil behavior was focused on communication that engaged the democratic process and enabled us to be good citizens. We believe that fostering civil communication across the spectrum of our interactions with others is the key to societal transformation. We need not engage in violent protest or communication that attacks others in the course of working out important issues in both our personal lives and the community. We can foster a civil society and concern for our community by choosing to engage in civil and ethical communication that is trustworthy, responsible, respectful, fair, and caring.

Civility, Technology, and Social Media

The changes in today's communication technology have dramatically altered the way we communicate with each other and have made the challenges of communicating civilly ever more complex. We welcome the ability technology has given us to stay in touch with many more people than we ever could through face-to-face or traditional communication media and to conveniently send messages and respond, even as we go our separate ways in our busy lives. But we pay a price for these conveniences. We may experience misinterpretations and failed messages that result in uncivil messages because we have fewer cues than we would have in a face-to-face communication encounter. Our well-intentioned messages may make their way into the wrong person's hands without our ever knowing it, giving an easy opportunity to misuse the information in an uncivil manner. Our online time may impinge upon the time we spend in our face-to-face encounters, resulting in bad feelings and uncivil responses. As you read and study this book, you will learn research-based strategies for coping with these and other challenges of today's fast-paced life so that you can civilly, ethically, efficiently, and competently send and receive messages.

Civility and the Contexts of Communication

Another challenge is the ability to communicate civilly in the context of today's increasingly diverse world. Because we must communicate on a daily basis with people who are different from us, we must make a special effort to make the choice to communicate on behalf of others, based on the ideas of respect, restraint, and responsibility and a firm foundation in ethics. Every chapter in *Communication in a Civil Society* offers research to help you understand how the culture, gender, and workplace contexts influence communication with people who are different from you. Many introductory communication texts cover the contexts of communication in a separate chapter. We have chosen to cover these contexts in every chapter to reinforce the idea that these factors are a part of our everyday lives.

Unique and Updated Features

Communication in a Civil Society offers a distinctly different approach from the typical "hybrid" communication textbook. We cover all the expected topics that make up the core curriculum of introduction to communication—intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mediated communication—using an integrated approach throughout each chapter, but we also go beyond this core. Although many communication textbooks claim to be based on a theme (for instance, the first chapter may introduce a goals-oriented approach or emphasize uncertainty reduction), the chapters that follow often present the skills and concepts without regard to unifying the content around their stated theme. *Communication in a Civil Society*, in contrast, makes use of a framework of civility and ethics to unite all the content—skills, concepts, and theory—throughout each chapter.

In addition to the unique framework of civility and ethics, *Communication in a Civil Society* includes the following special features that unify the theme:

The second edition of *Communication in a Civil Society* includes an **increased emphasis on civility and updated examples** of civil and uncivil communication. Chapter 1 contains information about how civility relates to power, norms, and privilege. Chapter 2 includes influences on the perception of civility, such as intent and intensity. Furthermore, Chapter 3 includes new information about how to civilly begin, maintain, and end a conversation. Every chapter has updated examples of civil and uncivil communication to clarify theory, concept, and skill.

Each chapter opens with a **current cultural reference** in a vignette that illustrates civil communication, uncivil communication, or a combination of both. Students are asked questions about the vignette at the beginning of each chapter, and each vignette is analyzed based on chapter information. The opening examples include the feud between actor James Cordon and restaurant owner Keith McNally; how violent rhetoric may have contributed to the attack on Paul Pelosi, husband of the Speaker of the House; Taylor Swift and the use of the word "FAT" in a music video;

Sherlock Holmes and his use of nonverbal communication; actor and talk show host Drew Barrymore's ability to engage in empathic listening; and the marriage between rappers Cardi B and Offset.

Updated information about current factors that have affected and continue to affect communication, both positively and negatively, are included in the textbook. Such topics include COVID-19-related social isolation and its effect on communication, political polarization, how college students can improve their self-esteem and mental health after a failure, dangerous speech versus hate speech, parasocial relationships, setting boundaries, and ghosting.

Select chapters in the second edition of *Communication in a Civil Society* include a "Set-to-Speak" feature, which **prepares students to present material** and enables them to see the relationship between chapter information and public speaking. This feature allows instructors the flexibility to assign any number of speaking assignments during the academic term. Speech topics include "my first speech: a story with a beginning, body, and conclusion; perception and stage fright; avoiding jargon and specialized terms; public speaking and nonverbal communication; listening to your audience; interpersonal attraction and first impressions of speakers; self-disclosure and public speaking; group communication" and "How am I creative?" Each "Set-to-Speak" feature includes guidelines for public speaking in addition to a specific assignment (instructors can provide their own topics for these speeches or choose topics from a list provided by the authors). The "Set-to-Speak" features can be used for one-on-one practice speeches or speeches in small groups. Similarly, the "Set-to-Speak" features can be assigned as major classroom speeches.

This edition of *Communication in a Civil Society* offers **cutting-edge information about how emerging media and technology** affect communication. Topics include technostress; social media use and mental health; "algospeak"; online learning, Zoom, and nonverbal communication; phubbing; chatbots and friendship; dating apps versus in-person dating; social media and incivility; YouTube; and VRT research.

Chapters include an "A Case Study of (In)civility," which presents a real-life situation that illustrates civil communication, uncivil communication, or both. Students are asked to analyze the case studies in terms of civil communication and specific chapter information. **Students are asked to engage in critical thinking** with end-of-feature questions that require them to apply abstract concepts to concrete situations. Students will also learn that communication can't always be defined clearly as civil or uncivil. This feature can be used as a group exercise or a written assignment. Most of the real-life incidents are taken from the Reddit app, and carefully reviewed poster comments are included in the instructor's manual.

Selected chapters include a **self-assessment activity** that students can take online. By better understanding their own communication preferences, these "Tech Check" features will give students tools they can use to become more effective civil communicators. Assessments include "Listening Preference Profile, Styles of Conflict Profile" and "Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety."

The last section of the book focuses students on public speaking skills, specifically with regard to **engaging audiences with civility**, **organizing public speeches that reflect civility**, and **civil delivery in public speaking**. These final chapters also help students learn to give **civil informative and special occasion speeches** as well as to give **persuasive speeches with civility**. Each of these chapters provides instruction related to effective—and civil—public speaking skills such as effective strategies for gaining attention, choosing the best organizational pattern for the speech, and constructing good speech introductions and conclusions.

A First Look at Civil Communication

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1.1 Describe the benefits that result from skillful communication, the harms that result from poor communication, and the cost of social isolation that resulted from the COVID-19 virus.

1.2 Define *communication*.

1.3 Identify five types of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mediated and technology-based communication.

1.4 Explain the five principles of communication: communication is not a panacea, communication is irreversible, communication is a process, one cannot *not* communicate, and communication is strategic.

1.5 Describe the components of a transactional model of communication.

1.6 Recognize the relationship between civil and ethical communication.

1.7 Illustrate how civility can be used to harm less powerful groups.

1.8 Explain how effectiveness and appropriateness (i.e., norms) contribute to the perception of communication competence.

1.9 Describe three contexts of communication: the culture, gender, and workplace contexts.

Comedian James Corden, famous for his *Carpool Karaoke* and host of the *Late Late Show*, often had dinner at the upscale Balthazar restaurant in New York. However, owner Keith McNally posted on Instagram that Corden was a "tiny cretin of a man." The post referred to past instances of rude behavior and a recent situation when Cordon berated a server for finding a little bit of egg white in his wife's egg yolk omelet. The kitchen remade the dish but instead of a salad, sent it back to Corden's table with home fries. Corden yelled at the server, "You can't do your job! You can't do your job! Maybe I should go into the kitchen and cook the omelet myself!" The server was apologetic and brought the manager to Corden's table. After receiving a new dish, the manager reported that Corden was pleasant to him but nasty to the server, who was very shaken.[1]

In response to Corden's behavior, McNally banned him from his restaurant, but "un-banned" him when Corden phoned him and apologized profusely. However, McNally became upset after the *New York Times* published an interview in which Corden downplayed the incident and said he hadn't "done anything wrong, on any level."[2] McNally responded to the article by posting "Corden flip-flopped and told a massive lie AGAIN."[3]

Subsequently, Corden appeared to take back his "I didn't do anything wrong" statement. During a monologue on *The Late Late Show*, Corden asserted that "when you make a mistake, you've got to take responsibility" and apologized for being rude to the server at Balthazar. He explained that his reaction occurred because his wife is allergic to egg whites.[4] He further commented, "I didn't shout or scream. I didn't get up out of my seat. I didn't call anyone names or use derogatory language. I have been walking around thinking that I hadn't done anything wrong, right? But the truth is I have. I made a rude comment, and it was wrong. It was an unnecessary comment. It was ungracious to the server."[5] Cordon also said, "In the heat of the moment, I made a sarcastic, rude comment about cooking it myself and it is a comment I deeply regret. I understand the difficulties of being a server. I worked shifts at restaurants for years. I have such respect and I value anyone that does such a job."[6]

McNally didn't accept Corden's televised apology and posted, "On second viewing, I found his TV 'confessional' contrived and phony. The actor will say anything to save his bacon."[7]

Why It Matters

The different communication styles exhibited by James Cordon and Keith McNally demonstrate how uncivil communication can affect our and others' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. You most likely have never eaten at a celebrity-filled restaurant in Manhattan, but you have probably experienced a situation during which someone communicated to you in an uncivil manner. When communicators fail to engage in civil communication, it creates more than hurt feelings or communication problems. Civil and uncivil communication can also influence how others perceive us and our behavior. The importance of civil communication was noted by the chief justice of Canada, Richard Wagner, when he presented a speech associated with *The Cambridge Lectures 2019* series. Chief Justice Wagner remarked:

Incivility is a troubling trend. The discourse we hear in our society can't help but influence how we work, what we're used to, what we begin to consider acceptable. . . . And I fear we live in a world of superficial knowledge, where objectively minor variances are presented as completely incompatible, leveraged for different purposes and creating divisions, which drives down civility and collegiality in all areas of life. . . . I sincerely believe that clear communication can help inoculate us against some of the lower kinds of discourse we see.[8]

This book is designed to provide you with the skills to engage in civil communication that is effective, appropriate, and ethical. The knowledge and skill practice you will gain from your textbook and communication course will help you engage in "clear communication" that will positively influence how you relate to others and how others will relate to you.

SET-TO-SPEAK

My First Speech: A Story With A Beginning, Body, and Conclusion

You will learn about ways to include aspects of civil communication in your speeches in the various "Set-to-Speak" features that appear throughout this book. For now, you can begin by thinking of a speech in terms of a story with a beginning, middle, and end. You probably tell stories about yourself, about your day, or about others to one or more listeners. In a similar manner, a speech is a story that you tell to a group of listeners. A good way to start speaking is to tell a story that is important to you. Can you think of a time in your life when an experience taught you an enduring lesson? Perhaps it involved a time when you accomplished something important to you, or even when you failed to accomplish something even though you tried very hard to do so. You may also want to talk about the happiest day in your life, an embarrassing situation, or the antics of a favorite pet. Whichever topic you chose, make sure that you are "into it"; this will help you "forget" that you are presenting a speech and will help reduce your speech anxiety.

Create an introduction to your story that will attract your listeners' attention (the first few words might be a rhetorical question, song lyrics, a quote, a startling statement, or an example). The middle or body of your speech will be the story itself. Wrap up your story by providing your listeners with a sense of completeness so they know that the conclusion is near (the last few words can be a summary of the story's main points and/or a reference to the attention-getter that you used in the beginning of your speech). You will learn more about structuring a speech in Chapter 11.

Remember that just as you can tell stories to a few individuals, you are just as able to tell a story to your classmates.

Let's begin by imagining that you and your classmates are required to design a house in which you want to live. You are also asked to furnish the house and select where it will be built. What style of house will you choose; A cabin? A two-story row house? How about a 1970s-style home? What type of furniture will you choose for your house? Rustic? Colonial? Retro? Where will you build your house? In the woods? In a historic

neighborhood? In a particular city or country? As you can imagine, your classmates will probably design, furnish, and locate a house which is dissimilar to yours. However, each house must have a foundation upon which it is built.

Similar to building a house, the first section of this chapter will provide you with a foundation that will facilitate your understanding of communication. The first section of this chapter contains *general* information about communication, such as the benefits of skillful communication and the harms of poor communication, the definition of communication, types of communication; and the principles of communication. Recall that you and others were required to choose the style, furniture, and location of houses based on specific details. These details can be compared with factors that affect the communication and interpretation of messages as either civil or uncivil. The second section of this chapter includes *specific* information about civility and civil communication, ethics and ethical communication, criticism of civil communication, communication competence, the relationship between communication competence and norms, and the influence of contexts. It is important to remember that the first and second sections are intertwined and both will help you become a better communicator.

Communication Can Be Beneficial and Harmful

Whether you are dining in a fancy restaurant; engaging in conversation or debate; reading tweets, texts, blogs, or websites; watching television; or driving along a highway, it is important to note that how we communicate affects how others communicate with us. This is a compelling reason to study and improve our communication. There are additional reasons we should attempt to improve our ability to communicate well with others.

The Benefits That Result from Skillful Communication

Effective communication can positively affect our physical health. Studies conducted by researchers at Yale, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, and UCLA demonstrate that people whose partners engage in competent communication experience less stress and have less coronary artery blockage than people whose partners communicate in an ineffective and inappropriate manner.[9] Similarly, scientists have discovered that talking with friends and family preserves and enhances mental functioning.[10] Moreover, a Harvard study that started tracking students in 1938, concluded in 2017 that "close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives."[11] Additionally, people who are skilled communicators are more likely to establish successful careers. Effective workplace communication can also facilitate feelings of job satisfaction and increase commitment to and trust in an organization.[12] Think about some recent conversations you have had with a friend, family member, roommate, employer, etc. Can you think of any conversations that you believe were beneficial? How did the communication involved in these conversations contribute to your perception that they were beneficial?

The Harms That Result from Poor Communication

On the other hand, there are a variety of disadvantages associated with poor communication skills. For example, poor communication patterns can negatively influence our health, resulting in cardiovascular, neurosensory, and endocrine problems.[13] In terms of relationships, various studies reveal that poor communication is one of the most cited reasons for divorce.[14] Regarding the workplace, ineffective communication can cause employees to fail to complete projects and experience a loss of sales.[15] Additionally, poor communication can cause stress, lead to thoughts about being overworked, and cause conflict at home.[16] Again, think about some recent conversations you have had with a friend, family member, roommate, employer, etc. Can you think of any conversations that you believe were harmful? How did the communication involved in these conversations contribute to your perception that they were beneficial?

The Harms That Result from No Communication: COVID-19-Related Social Isolation

How old were you when the COVID-19 virus appeared in the US? Did you, along with family and friends, have to isolate yourself? Various studies link the pandemic to loneliness, depression, and stress. One study discovered that approximately 35% of Americans reported that they experienced "serious loneliness" during the pandemic. Among the Americans in this survey, 61% were 18-to-25-year-olds and 43% of these respondents reported increased levels of loneliness.[17] The social isolation caused by the pandemic also caused a 25% increase in depression and anxiety around the world.[18] Another study found that one in five college students believe that their mental health significantly worsened during the pandemic because of their isolation and lack of support.[19] Research has also focused on how social isolation is related to social skills. Regarding effective communication, "prolonged periods of isolation leave the basic human need of communication unfulfilled, making our social skills dwindle and regress."[20] This result is demonstrated in post-pandemic research, which reveals that Generation Z employees have trouble communicating effectively. In particular, one study revealed that 64% of Gen Z worders worry about annoying coworkers, and 61% said that they struggle to collaborate effectively.[21]

Defining Communication

Before we learn how to communicate in a civil manner, we must first understand the process of communication. Communication means different things to different people, but most communication scholars agree that it involves people who create and share meaning. Some of their definitions of communication include the words "symbols" (e.g., words that stand for tangible objects or abstract concepts), "nonverbal communication" (messages that often do not depend on the presence of language), "transaction" (meaning that verbal and nonverbal communication occur simultaneously among conversation partners), and "process" (suggesting that communication is ongoing and continuous). Because communication

is so broad and multifaceted, many of its various definitions highlight only a few specific characteristics and/or functions. Therefore, in this book we will broadly define **communication** as "the process of creating and sharing meaning." However, we need to remember that this is just one of many possible definitions of communication.

Suppose a college friend asks you for guidance regarding breaking up with a partner. Your friend asks you if they should mention their partner's bad behavior or take the "it's me, not you" approach. Your friend also asks if they should break up by sending a text or by meeting their partner in person. Before providing your friend with your suggestions, you may want to consider the types of communication and the principles of communication that can affect a breakup message.

Types of Communication

One way to make the study of communication manageable and understandable is to categorize the types of communication that can occur. Types of communication include intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mediated or technology-based communication.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is communication that takes place within us. One kind of intrapersonal communication is **self-talk,** or communication within us that is specifically about ourselves. Positive self-talk offers us encouragement, support, reassurance, and sometimes a pat on the back. As a student, you've probably used positive self-talk when you've performed well on a test, written a thoughtful essay, or solved a difficult problem. An example of positive self-talk is "I didn't do as well as I would have liked on that test, but now I know what the instructor wants and I'll do better next time." On the other hand, negative self-talk is critical, evaluative, and devaluing. This form of self-talk occurs when we end a relationship, fail to master a skill, or feel we are unworthy of friendship or love. An example of negative self-talk is "I knew I'd be dumped; no one wants to spend time with me," "I'm so stupid I'll never find a romantic partner," and "There must be something wrong with me." Negative self-talk can be extremely destructive, and we will learn that it can affect our self-concept and our relationships.

Interpersonal Communication

Whereas intrapersonal communication is communication within us, **interpersonal communication** involves at least two people who establish a communicative relationship. Interpersonal communication involves partners who have the power to simultaneously affect each other through their behavior, either positively or negatively. Interpersonal communication can be further characterized along a continuum from impersonal to personal, depending on how we perceive our conversation partners. **Impersonal communication** occurs when we communicate with others as if they are "objects" or "roles." For example, consider a server who introduces themselves to their customers and asks how they're doing. If

their customers respond with a quick "fine" and immediately begin to order food, the server is being treated as a role. **Personal communication** occurs when we interact with others based on their uniqueness. Suppose your best friend asks, "What's up?" You answer that you feel stupid because you yelled at someone important to you and you don't know what to do about it. Your friend says, "Come on, I know how smart you are. You always figure out what to do." This exchange can be characterized as personal communication because of your friend's acknowledgment of your unique characteristics—that is, being smart and knowing how to improve a situation. Think about your typical interactions and where you might place them on an impersonal communication–personal communication continuum.

Small Group Communication

Small group communication occurs when a small number of people share a common purpose and interact for a reason. Some researchers characterize a small group as five to seven people; others characterize three to twelve people as a small group. Think about some of the occasions in which you've been involved in small group communication. Perhaps you and members of your family once got together for the specific purpose of planning an event such as a family reunion or vacation. You likely engaged in small group communication when working on group projects in some of your college classes. Small group communication has been described as more complex than interpersonal communication because the dynamics of interaction change as the number of people involved increases. You will learn about complexity of small group communication in Chapters 8 and 9. For now, understand that "civil communication skills can help to ease and smooth the interaction that takes place among members in groups and contribute to the success and the effectiveness of a group."[22]

Public Communication

Public communication occurs when a speaker delivers a message to an audience. For many people, public speaking is something that is feared and to be avoided at all costs. However, speaking in front of an audience, whether large or small, is an activity in which you'll most likely participate during your lifetime. You've probably given presentations in your classes and someday may be asked to give a toast at a wedding, nominate a club member for an elected office, or present information to others in your future occupation. In Chapters 10 through 14, you will learn that civil communication with an audience is crucial for a successful public presentation.

Mediated and Technology-Based Communication

Mediated and **technology-based communication** occur when communication is transmitted by some kind of technology, such as television, radio, a mobile device, or the Internet. January 2023 statistics show that 64.4% of the global population use the Internet (this translates to 5.16 billion worldwide users). 4.76 billion of this total, or 59.4% of the world's population, are social media users.[23] In December 2021, Instagram reached

approximately two billion monthly active users, and at the beginning of 2022, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp were the most popular social networks worldwide. Similarly, Facebook had almost three billion monthly active users in 2022, while Snapchat ranked 12th place in terms of audience size worldwide. In the US, Snapchat is the third most popular social media app among Gen Z users, after YouTube and Instagram. In 2022, the app formerly known as Twitter had approximately 450 million active users. In sum, "connecting billions of people worldwide, the internet is a core pillar of the modern information society."[24]

Uncivil communication can occur when using social media. Maybe you've experienced uncivil communication while having a meal with someone who hardly looked at you because they constantly answered their cell phone, tweeted, or engaged in text-messaging. Perhaps you interpreted a message on social media as uncivil because it lacked visual content and other clues that help us frame and interpret messages. Maybe you know someone who was "flamed" or "trolled" while participating in a chat-room discussion or engaged in a MMORPG (massively-multiplayer-online-role-playing game), such as *World of Warcraft* or *Runescape* in a virtual reality environment.

While this book devotes specific chapters to intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, and public communication, information about mediated and technology-related communication is included in all chapters in the text and highlighted in chapter boxes. For example, you will read in Chapter 2 that perception (selecting, organizing, and interpreting stimuli from the environment) is considered a form of intrapersonal communication. One study of computer-mediated communication and perception found that readers can accurately perceive personality characteristics of extroversion and introversion from the text of email messages.[25] In terms of interpersonal communication, personal communication on the Internet has been found to be more sociable, personal, and intimate than what is found in face-to-face interaction.[26] Regarding small group communication, research illustrates that group customs, which vary from group to group, contribute to levels of flaming. In other words, flaming is not found universally across every social media network; flaming occurs if it is accepted among the members of the group in which it happens.[27] In addition, media and technology affect public speaking. For example, speech topics can be easily accessed on library databases and online sites, and we may create, use, and discuss PowerPoint or Prezi slides while presenting a speech. We may also access, display, and talk about web sites during a presentation.

Although we devote entire chapters to topics in intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, small group communication, and public speaking, Figure 1.1 illustrates that the boundaries that distinguish intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public communication, and mediated communication are fluid. This means that it may sometimes be difficult to categorize the type of communication in which we engage. The broken lines that surround the intrapersonal communication circle illustrate that we also engage in mediated communication when we play solitaire on our computer and communicate intrapersonally about our

Mediated and Technology-Related Communication

Public Communication

Intrapersonal Communication

Interpersonal Communication

Small Group Communication
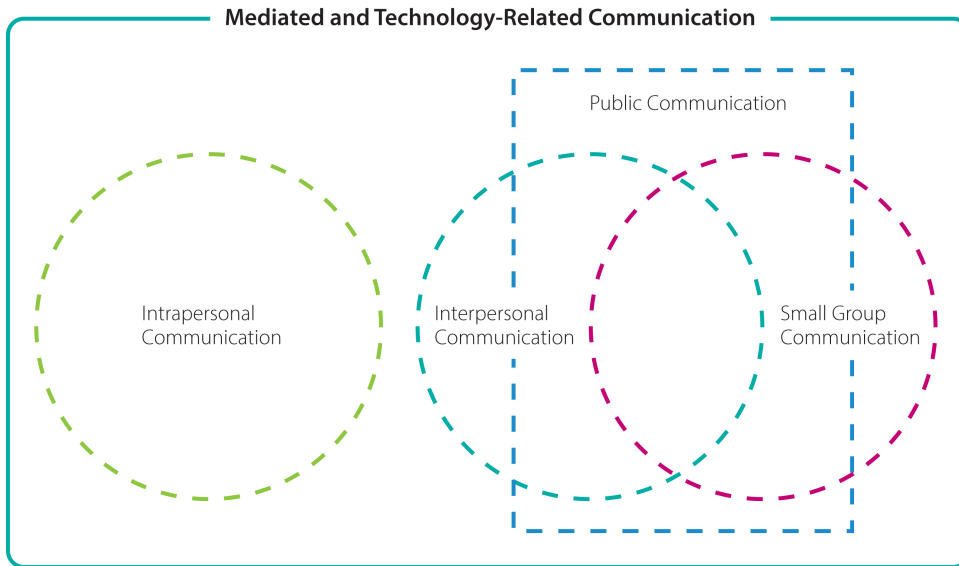
Five Types of Communication

Figure 1.1
There are at least five types of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mediated and technology-based.

next move. The intersecting broken lines between the interpersonal and small group circles and the broken lines that form the public speaking box that surrounds the circles indicate that it may be difficult to pinpoint when interpersonal communication becomes small group communication, when small group communication becomes public communication, and when interpersonal communication becomes public communication. For example, does interpersonal communication become small group communication when a third person joins what had been originally a two-person conversation? Does small group communication become public communication when an employee stands up in a meeting and addresses her coworkers without interruption? Does interpersonal communication become public communication when someone shouts loudly enough to be heard by others when talking on a cell phone in a public area? The boundaries between interpersonal communication and mediated communication are also blurred when we talk in an online space. Although this involves a mass communication audience, the communication the audience members have with each other is also interpersonal.[28] Overall, Rod L. Toester and Cathy Sargent Mester, the directors of the *Janet Neff Sample Center for Manners and Civility* at Penn State University, assert that "civility can and should play a crucial role in shaping the message-related behavior that takes place" regardless of the type of communication in which we engage.[29]

Principles of Communication

Read the following statements and consider whether they are true or false:

- You can resolve an interpersonal problem by "talking it out."
- The statement "Forget what I just said" will cause us to ignore or forget an utterance.

- It is easy to pinpoint when communication begins and ends.
- One cannot *not* communicate.
- We should be tactical when communicating with others.

These statements correspond to principles of communication. The five principles presented here can increase our knowledge of communication and help us improve our ability to communicate effectively. We will learn whether the statements are true or false when we read that communication is not a panacea, is irreversible, is an ongoing process, is inevitable, and is strategic.

Communication Is Not a Panacea

Have you been involved in or witnessed an angry conversation during which people refused to accept another person's opinion and told them they were wrong? The normalcy of anger in our day-to-day lives and increased political competition has been linked to polarization.[30] **Polarization** refers to seeing opposing sides as enemies and the perception that "if you win, I lose."[31] Polarization is increasing in the US for a variety of reasons, which include religious identities and ideologies being associated with the major political parties.[32] In a *Listen First* nationwide survey, 53% of the respondents reported that conversations are stressful and frustrating when discussing issues with whom they disagree. Additionally, 66% of the survey participants said people are "quick to attack them when discussing divisive topics."[33] Moreover, in a poll sponsored by the *Cato Institute*, 62% of the respondents claimed that they keep their opinions to themselves because of the polarized political climate.[34] Furthermore, 32% of the respondents in a *Public Agenda* poll report that polarization makes it difficult to get along with friends or family.[35]

Have you have been asked to refrain from speaking about politics during a family get-together on a special occasion such as Thanksgiving? The request may be based on the political polarization of family members and past political discussions that became increasingly heated. The request is based on the realization that communication can cause more harm than good when conversing about a divisive topic.

Communication Is Irreversible

Recently, Lauren Boebert, a Republican representative from Colorado, was ushered out of a theatre because of her conduct during a performance of the play, *Beetlejuice*. Two videos captured Boebert's uncivil behavior. The first video revealed that she had been vaping, blowing smoke at other people, singing, and taking photos of the performance. The video also showed her being escorted from the theatre and making an obscene gesture. Boebert apologized for her actions by saying that she regretted being a bit too "boisterous." When a second video revealed mutual groping between her and her companion, she apologized for the "unwanted attention" her behavior attracted. Boebert mitigated her apology by trying to excuse the behavior, blaming it on being excited by the performance and on navigating a difficult divorce.[36]

Have you or someone you know apologized by saying, "I'm sorry; please forget that I ever said it!" No matter how sincerely we apologize

for our words and actions, our communication may be forgiven but not forgotten. This is because communication is irreversible; we can't "take it back" once it has been interpreted by a listener. This principle is particularly applicable to computer-mediated communication (CMC). It's impossible to take back our thoughts and feelings when we engage in direct messaging and post on Reddit. Additionally, we may send an email we wish we had never sent but the recipient may remember the message despite an apology. Because Lauren Boebert's behavior was recorded and can be viewed at any time on various media platforms, her behavior, apologies, and excuses will probably be remembered and may be used against her by political opponents.

Communication Is a Process

Communication is an ongoing **process** because communication is not static. Although communication occurs in distinct episodes with various individuals, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine when communication begins and when it ends. We may think communication begins when we initiate interaction by speaking to a conversation partner. However, although we can determine when a verbal interaction begins and ends, communication is more than verbal interaction. It can be argued that communication begins in the intrapersonal domain; that is, with a thought or a feeling. Additionally, it can be said that a communication episode begins on the basis of a previous interaction. For example, have you ever become angry at someone and have taken it out on someone else? Suppose you have an argument with a coworker in the morning and you replay the argument in your mind while driving home in the late afternoon. Preoccupied, you don't respond to your partner's question, "How was your day?" when you arrive at your home. Annoyed, your partner sarcastically asks, "What's the matter with you?" You respond angrily, "Give me a break!" Even though you're mad at your coworker for the morning's argument, you direct your anger at your partner. When did this communication episode with your partner begin? Did it begin when you responded with silence to their "How was your day?" Did it begin with the intrapersonal communication in the car? Did it begin with the argument with your coworker? Or did it begin with your thoughts prior to the argument?

Recall that our definition of communication is "the process of creating and sharing meaning." The idea of "process" is shown in **transactional models of communication** in that we can't tell when communication begins and when it ends. Transactional models also illustrate that conversation partners send and receive messages—that is, create and share meaning, in a processual and concurrent manner. The double-headed arrow pictured in Figure 1.2 shows that communication occurs simultaneously when interacting face-to-face and on a video platform. When you speak with others, you can receive communication nonverbally in terms of eye contact, facial expressions, etc. Note that this model does not describe communication that occurs in a back-and-forth manner, such as when we text or talk on a telephone. How would you alter the double-headed arrow to illustrate communication that depends on turn-taking?
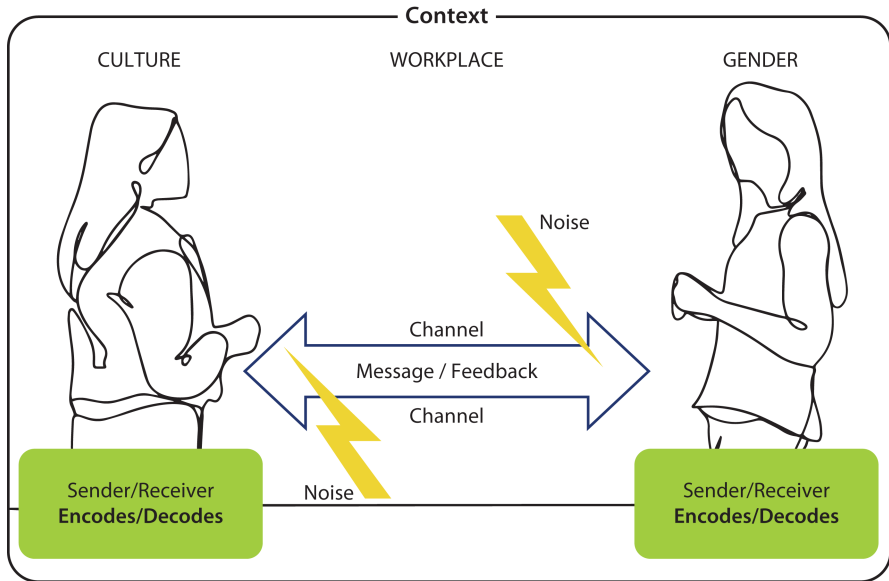
A Transactional Model of Communication

Figure 1.2
Transactional models of communication illustrate that communication is processual and that conversation partners send and receive messages simultaneously.

Figure 1.2 also depicts specific components that are often included in transactional communication models. Transactional models of communication typically include the following:

The **sender** is the person who conveys thoughts, feelings, or ideas to others. The process of translating thoughts, feelings, and ideas into symbols (words and nonverbal cues) is called **encoding**. This is a mental process generated by the sender to convey meaning to the receiver of the communication.

The **receiver** is the person who receives the message conveyed by the sender. The receiver is responsible for interpreting or assigning meaning to the message and for responding to the sender. The mental process of interpreting the message is called **decoding**.

The **message** contains the information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, ideas) the sender wishes to convey to the receiver. We use both verbal (words) and nonverbal (e.g., body language and vocal behavior) communication to convey meaning.

The response to the sender's message is called **feedback**. The response can be verbal, nonverbal, or both. It is through feedback that the sender learns whether or not their message has been received as intended.

A **channel** is the pathway used to convey the message between the sender and the receiver. Usually our five senses assist us in the transfer and interpretation of the message. However, technology such as telephones, intercoms, the instant-messaging function of personal computers, or the text-messaging function of cell phones also provide channels used to convey messages.

Noise is any force that can interfere with the communication process in any communication context or situation. Noise can occur anytime during an interaction and can be external or internal. Distractions such as loud voices at another table in a restaurant, a jet plane flying overhead,

or a student arriving late to class are examples of external noise. Internal noise can be physiological or psychological. Physiological factors include illness, fatigue, pain, and even hunger. Psychological factors are mental or emotional distractions such as daydreaming about upcoming weekend events, feeling bored by the speaker's message, and feeling annoyed while replaying an argument in your mind.

The **context** in which the communication takes place is another factor that can affect how you communicate and how others communicate with you; it refers to the environment surrounding the communication. The context can be as simple as the physical environment—the noise level, aesthetics, familiarity, etc.—in which the communication takes place. The context also goes beyond the physical environment to include many other factors that can affect communication: interpretations of a particular situation (e.g., the formality or informality of an occasion), past experiences, a frame of reference, and the influence of our culture; our family, friends, and coworkers; our gender; and our expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and values. It's easier to communicate with people when our contexts overlap but interaction becomes increasingly difficult as our contexts diverge.

One Cannot *Not* Communicate

All communication has the potential to convey meaning to someone else. Actually, we cannot *not* communicate. Even when we think we are not communicating, we are. As human beings, we are constantly perceiving and interpreting other people's behavior. Whether we are frowning or laughing, speaking or being silent, or expressing joy or anger, we are still communicating. Take a moment and think about a time when you were riding in a car with a friend. Perhaps your friend talked for several miles and then stopped talking. After a few moments, you may have begun to feel uncomfortable since you were not sure why they stopped talking. You may have turned to your friend and asked, "What's wrong?" Surprised, your friend may have answered, "Nothing." They may have merely been "paying attention to the road" while you interpreted the silence quite differently. This example illustrates that it is important for us to consider how our nonverbal behavior may be interpreted; specifically, how a person's silence can convey meaning even though it's not intended to communicate.

Communication Is Strategic

The word "strategic" often has a negative connotation when characterizing communication. This idea arises when we think about "Machiavellianism," a term named after the 15th century Italian diplomat who was known for manipulating people to get what he wanted.[37] However, "strategy" as it applies to communication relates to "choice" and the creation of the most effective and appropriate messages.

Most of us engage in strategic communication without realizing it. For example, would you speak to a good friend in the same manner that you would communicate with your university or college president? What may be the response if you, upon meeting your college president, loudly and enthusiastically shout, "What's up, bro?" We typically use more formal language when we speak with someone who has more authority

and power than we do. A more effective and appropriate greeting to the college president is "I'm pleased to meet you." This example illustrates **code-switching**, which occurs when we adapt our communication based on age, location, ethnicity, social setting, etc. to a particular conversation partner and setting. We can change our accent, dialect, combination of languages, and nonverbal communication to engage in code-switching.[38] "Think about a conversation you might have with your grandmother about chatbots. Would you use the same language as if you were talking with an IT expert? Probably not!"[39] You will read about the importance of adapting to your audience in the public speaking chapters; for now, consider the example you read about earlier about the friend who asks for advice regarding their relationship breakup. This hypothetical example illustrates that communication is strategic. When crafting a breakup message, your friend wants to consider features related to their partner and situation to choose the best way to communicate about the breakup.

The five principles of communication can help improve your ability to communicate in an appropriate and effective manner. Recognizing that communication is not a panacea may cause you to refrain from speaking about a topic that can make a situation worse. Knowing that communication is irreversible may cause you to refrain from uttering a hurtful comment because a subsequent apology will not "erase" the utterance. Understanding that communication is an ongoing process may influence you to communicate calmly (and not take it personally) with an angry customer because you know that they may be reacting to something that occurred earlier in the day. Knowing that communication is inevitable, even when you're not speaking to others, may help you pay more attention to the ways your nonverbal behavior may be interpreted. And knowing that communication is strategic may help you make the best communication choices based on a specific conversation partner and social situation.

Let's again return to the friend who wants to know the best way to break up with their partner. When asked, you can answer, "It depends" (which is actually a good answer when anyone asks for advice about communication). Because so many factors can affect communication, you may want to help your friend engage in strategic communication by asking questions that refer to types and principles of communication. For example, you can ask your friend if they engaged in negative self-talk because you know that negative self-talk can influence a breakup message (intrapersonal communication). You can also discuss whether your friend's partner communicates with your friend as a unique individual or as a role (interpersonal communication). In addition, when it comes to emotional messages, you can discover whether the partner prefers to communicate face-to-face, likes to Facetime, or usually texts your friend (mediated and technology-based communication). Similarly, you can ask your friend if past conversations with their partner usually intensify when they discuss relationship issues (communication is not a panacea). You may also want to present your friend with a scenario in which they want to reunite with their partner; will the partner remember your friend's message as harsh and blaming and therefore refuse to get back together (communication is

irreversible)? Finally, you can ask which components of the context may influence the partner's reaction to the breakup; what are the partner's past experiences with relationships, how might the partner's gender affect their reaction to the breakup message, and does the partner's values play a role in their beliefs about relationships?

Now that you have learned foundational information about communication—that is, the benefits of skillful communication and the harms of poor communication, the definition of communication, types of communication, and the principles of communication—you have a better understanding of communicative behavior. The second section of this chapter is about civility, particularly civil and ethical communication, criticisms of civil communication, communication competence, and the relationship between communication competence and contexts.

Civil and Ethical Communication

Research bears out the importance of civility. Most Americans agree that civility is important to our democracy (89%), but many Americans believe that incivility has worsened.[40] However, both Democrats and Republicans are worried about partisanship. Members of both parties believe that people who hold different political views can work together.[41] According to the Weber-Shandwick *Civility in America 2019 Solutions for Tomorrow* survey, 60% of the respondents expressed hope about the future of civility in the US and approximately 9 in 10 (86%) believed it is possible for people to communicate civilly during a disagreement. About half of the respondents said they choose to ignore people who act in an uncivil manner or they choose to remove themselves from those situations. Additionally, nearly 6 in 10 Americans have had uncivil experiences online. Rather than respond to an uncivil online experience with incivility of their own, survey respondents said that they ignore the uncivil messages. Furthermore, 88% of the *Civility in America* respondents indicated that they are willing to take personal responsibility and various actions to improve civility. These actions include attempting to be civil when treated uncivilly (46%), encouraging family, friends, and coworkers to be civil (45%), and voting for political leaders who behave in a civil way (43%). Overall, "when given the right opportunities, Americans will hash out their . . . differences in respectful and productive ways. . . . It begins with individuals embracing civility by making a choice to engage with those with whom they do not agree and not defaulting to reflexive distrust."[42]

Civility and Civil Communication
Civil communication entails respect, restraint, and responsibility. Imagine that you and a classmate, who hold very different viewpoints, are in front of the class and engaged in a political debate. Civil communication does not call for you to give up your beliefs or remain silent in response to your conversation partner's comments. Instead, civil communication allows you to speak your mind in a way that is respectful (you listen well and acknowledge your partner's points), demonstrate restraint (you refrain from name-calling and insults), and speak responsibly (you remember that your

comments have the potential to affect your community—in this case, your debate partner and classmates).

Although definitions of "civility" vary, most communication scholars agree that civil behavior should be **respectful**.[43] We can communicate respect for others by admitting we may not know an answer, considering that our viewpoints may be wrong, and listening well.[44] In addition, we can communicate respect by leaving enough physical space between us and a conversation partner so they won't feel uncomfortable or intimidated. We can communicate self- respect when we establish communication boundaries and communicate assertively rather than aggressively or submissively.[45]

Restraint is similar to "tact" because it involves strategic communication. We demonstrate restraint when we want to communicate a message but realize that we need not say all we want to say and when we adapt our messages to specific communication partners.[46] It's important to note that restraint does not mean that we should stifle self-expression; instead, restraint involves "verbal editing" or "filtering" a message. In other words, restraint entails selecting effective and appropriate content and delivery for a specific person, purpose, and context. In addition, instead of blurting out anything that comes to mind, we can practice restraint by asking ourselves questions such as "Do I really want to say this? Is anybody going to be hurt by this?" and "Will I like what I have said?" We can also demonstrate restraint by keeping our temper and by showing respect for opinions and people with whom we disagree.[47]

Responsibility refers to our concern for and obligation to the community.[48] "Civility" derives from the Latin *civitas*, which means "city." The historical meaning associated with civility is to be a good citizen.[49] We suggest that responsibility involves being aware that our communication has consequences; that is, it can positively or negatively affect others.[50] Similarly, responsibility entails that we understand and honor our duty to the community. For example, responsible communication occurs when we are careful not to shout so loudly that our voice can be heard in other apartments. Additionally, asking the parent of a scared child crying on a plane if there's anything you can to help is an example of responsibility to the community of passengers.

It's important to note that what's considered civil or uncivil is based on our perception. Perception involves interpretation, which suggests that two people experiencing the same reality can have different reactions to it.[51] Additionally, civil communication alone does not guarantee that the outcomes of cooperative exchanges will be "right" or "good." This is why civil communication should also be ethical.

Ethics and Ethical Communication

Civil communication and ethical communication are overlapping concepts, both of which are necessary to foster accountability in thinking, decision-making, and making communication choices.

Ethics is a system of standards that defines what behaviors are "right" or "good"; it allows us to evaluate situations and then decide among various behavioral options. While civility focuses more on how we communicate, ethics allow us to make good choices about what we communicate.[52] In

general, ethics is a critical component of communication because "questions of right or wrong arise whenever people communicate."[53] This is true whether the communication occurs between two people, in small groups, in public speeches, or via media and technology.[54]

Politeness

Many people think of civility in terms of politeness and good manners, but politeness alone does not define civility; it also needs to be considered in terms of ethical values. Consider the example of a World War II concentration camp guard who commits a horrifically unethical act at the same time as he expresses good manners when he asks, "Excuse me, sir; could you please step into the gas chamber?"[55] As you can see from this example, simply acting in a polite manner is not enough; our communication choices must be linked to ethics.[56]

Six Values That Are the Basis of Ethical Decision-Making

According to the *Josephson Institute of Ethics*, ethical decision-making is based on six values that are related to civility and communication. Two of the three components of civility—respect and responsibility—are included in the list of six values. The remaining four values are as follows:[57]

- Trustworthiness (honesty, integrity, reliability, loyalty)
- Fairness (process, impartiality, equity)
- Caring
- Citizenship

The relationship between civility and ethics is illustrated in Figure 1.3. Both civil and ethical communication involve "choice." Civil communication refers to the choice we make to communicate based on respect, restraint, and responsibility. Ethical communication allows us to make good choices about what and how we communicate. Across all types of communication and communication contexts, civil and ethical behavior facilitates accountability in thinking and decision-making, and in making communication choices.

Let's return to the example of James Corden and Balthazar restaurant owner Keith McNally. Both uncivil and civil communication are evidenced in their interaction. Cordon exhibited respect when he phoned McNally to apologize and when he stated on the *Late Late Show* that that he regretted his actions. However, McNally failed to show restraint when he labeled Cordon a "tiny cretin of a man" and posted that Cordon will "say anything to save his bacon." Similarly, Cordon failed to show restraint when he loudly berated his Balthazar server. Cordon attempted to show responsibility and concern for his community (that is, viewers of the *Late Late Show*) when he stated that we should take responsibility for our mistakes and said that he was wrong to make a rude comment. He also appeared to show concern for the community of restaurant servers when he affirmed that he respected and understood the difficulties of being a server. In addition, Cordon's comment "I have been walking around thinking that I hadn't done anything wrong, right? But the truth is I have" demonstrates that civil and uncivil communication are based on our perceptions (and our

CIVILITY reflects a choice we make to consider others' thoughts and feelings in our communication and general behavior.

CIVIL COMMUNICATION refers to the choice we make to communicate on the basis of:

• Respect (We listen well and acknowledge other's opinions.)
• Restraint (We refrain from insults.)
• Responsibility (We are aware that our communication affects others.)

Civility and ethics share the ideas of "respect" and "responsibility."

"Choice" connects civility and ethics.

ETHICS is a system of standards that defines what behaviors are "right" or "good" and enables us to evaluate and decide among behavioral options.

ETHICAL COMMUNICATION, which allows us to make good choices about how we communicate, is based on:

• Trustworthiness
• Respect
• Responsibility
• Fairness
• Caring
• Concern for the community

Figure 1.3
Both civil and ethical communication involves "choice."

perceptions can change). In terms of ethics, Cordon failed to demonstrate trustworthiness in that he apologized to McNelly but later stated he didn't do "anything wrong on any level" in a *New York Times* interview.

Criticism of Civil Communication

Most research about civil communication focuses positive outcomes. It may surprise you that there are disadvantages associated with civil communication. These disadvantages include silencing disadvantaged groups and maintaining a social order based on inequality.

"Civility" Can Be Used to Silence Disadvantaged Groups

"Historically, dominant groups have repeatedly enacted civilizing strategies to effectively silence and marginalize disadvantaged groups, e.g., labor; women and people of color; the poor; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender LGBT people."[58] "Rude" and "uncivil" are labels that have been applied throughout history to discredit disempowered groups. "At one time, African-Americans who tried to behave with dignity or to achieve success were described as 'uppity.' . . . So efforts to eliminate what is considered to be 'rude' behavior may actually be an attempt of a powerful groups to a silence less powerful group."[59]

Another example of an attempt "to control the voice" of less powerful groups involves the quest for British women to be granted the vote. The suffragette movement was formed in 1903 and adopted the motto "Deeds, Not Words." The suffragettes used militant tactics which "attracted a great deal of attention to the campaign for votes for women."[60] They destroyed letterboxes, smashed store windows, carved slogans in golf courses, slashed paintings in art galleries, and cut telephone wires.[61] These tactics gained the interest of the public at large and the press and put pressure on Parliament.[62] Members of Parliament attempted to silence and ridicule the suffragettes by claiming that "women are affected by gusts of sentiment, are extraordinarily impressionable, and know nothing about commerce and industry."[63] These claims illustrate how those with social and political power can discredit and attempt to silence a disempowered group.

"Civility" Can Be Used to Maintain the Social Order

In addition to marginalizing disadvantaged groups, what is considered "civil behavior" is a way for those in power and who possess privilege to maintain the social order. **Privilege** refers to any advantage that is unearned and socially conferred, such as skin color.[64] What is considered civil and uncivil communication is defined by powerful groups that have privilege.[65] In particular, people who have or have access to resources related to politics, economics, education, media, and the military define what is and isn't "civil."[66]

The quest for women's suffrage in Britain can again be used as an example of how those with power attempt to maintain the social order. A major argument against giving women the vote concerned "uncivil" women who wanted to subvert traditional gender roles. The suffragette "represented a figure outside of the order of society [and] supposedly lacked 'womanliness.'"[67] Postcards of the era illustrate the disastrous consequences to family life if women were given the vote. Some postcards depict dirty children and husbands returning from work to an empty house. Other postcards show an angry suffragette yelling at her cowering husband and still others portray passersby mocking men for not standing up to their wives.[68] These examples demonstrate that the accusation of "incivility" can be used to prevent change in the social order and maintain the status of those who possess power and privilege.

Communication Competence

Communication competence is communication that is perceived as both effective and appropriate. "Effectiveness" denotes achieving our goals and "appropriateness" denotes conforming to the expectations or shared norms associated with a particular situation. **Norms** tell us what we should or shouldn't do or say in certain situations. We sometimes receive a **negative sanction** when we fail to conform to a norm. Unexpected laughter, a dirty look, a poke in the ribs, and verbal rebukes (e.g., "we don't use words like that in our house!") are examples of negative sanctions.

Like civility and incivility, communication competence is based on perception. In fact, perception is characterized as the "crucial feature" in the impression of communication competence. This is because behavior interpreted as inappropriate occurs when we perceive that norms are violated. When this occurs, we interpret behavior as uncivil.[69]

To illustrate effectiveness and appropriateness, consider the following situations. Suppose a friend or family member is hungry and wants to eat some of your food. They walk by your table and grab some food off your plate without asking if they can do so. Your response is to loudly protest about their behavior (negative sanction). This example illustrates that the friend or family member was effective (they achieve achieved their goal) but not appropriate because they violated a norm. In other words, their behavior was uncivil. Suppose on a different occasion, a hungry friend or family member stops by your table and in a barely audible voice and with downcast eyes, nervously stammers, "Uhm . . . er . . . can I have some of what you're eating? Well . . . ahh . . . I understand if you won't let me

because you must be hungry too. So it's OK, I guess, if you say 'no.' "
Your response is "No!" Although the friend or family member was civil
because they didn't violate a norm, they were ineffective because they didn't
achieve their goal of eating some of your food. These situations reveal that
both effectiveness and appropriateness are necessary to be perceived as a
competent communicator.

Communication Competence and Norms

You now know that the perception of appropriateness, civility, and
incivility is based on norms which are shared rules for behavior. Norms
change according to the context or situation. This means that the
perception of civility and incivility is contextual and behavior that is
considered appropriate in one situation may be considered inappropriate in
another.

Can you think of any norms you were taught as a child? Children
typically learn norms that relate to politeness. For example, children who
live in Western cultures are taught that it's impolite to stare, point at
strangers, and/or comment on their physical appearance. When children
don't conform to a norm, a negative sanction may take the form of parental
criticism or even punishment.[70] Some norms that guide adult behavior in
Western culture include "we should return a greeting, knock on someone's
office door before entering" and "we should apologize if we arrive late
for an appointment."[71] Failure to conform to these norms will most
likely result in the perception that we are rude or uncivil. In terms of the
communication competence, this behavior is characterized as inappropriate.

Norm shifting occurs during periods of social change. This means
that "behavior that was once thought of as undoubtedly uncivil can be
thought of as unmistakably civil (and vice versa)."[72] One study of norm
shifting focused on the landmark 2015 Supreme Court ruling in favor of
same-sex marriage. The researchers found that in response to the ruling,
"perceived norms shifted towards increased support for gay marriage and
gay people."[73]

Currently, there may no longer be consensus about which norms
to follow.[74] This is especially true when we consider the influence of
technology on the creation of norms.

The Influence of Technology on Norms

Technology consistently creates changing social norms. We may not know
about newly formed norms nor how to follow them.

In other words, confusion over what the rules are, when they apply,
and to whom is inevitable in a period of rapid cultural change. And with
the coming of email, cell phones, iPods, the Internet, Google, Facebook,
and so on, the rate of change in the ways we interact has become positively
bewildering at times. Such confusion naturally leads to more instances of
people violating, or being perceived to violate, social conventions, but the
impression may be misleading.[75]

The creation and use of smartphones caused the development of new
norms. Six common norms that help us regulate the use of cell or mobile
phones include the following:[76]

- Don't peek at someone's screen uninvited (breaking this norm can cause others to perceive you as "creepy" and "disrespectful—in other words, "uncivil").
- Don't swipe if someone shows you something on their phone.
- Take off your earbuds when talking to someone (failing to do so may cause you to unnecessarily raise your voice and be perceived as uncivil).
- Don't unplug a charging device to charge yours without permission.
- Don't play your music loudly in public spaces—doing so can create an unnecessary disturbance to people who surround you and the perception that you are uncivil.
- Don't use your Zoom lens to stalk people (which is an invasion of privacy).

In general, technology can produce rapid cultural and societal change and sometimes it's difficult to perceive whether a norm is violated or whether behavior involving technology is uncivil.[77] All told, technology has a big influence on how we interact with each other and it's important that we attempt to follow technology-related social norms to improve our communication and relationships.

TRENDS IN TECHNOLOGY

Technostress

Do you feel incomplete with your cell phone? Are you always available for your friends? Is it no longer fun to follow technological developments? If so, you may be suffering from "technostress."[78] Technostress was first defined in 1984 when psychologist Craig Bond characterized it as "a modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with the new computer technologies in a healthy manner."[79] The updated definition of technostress is multidimensional: "a negative psychological state associated with the use or the 'threat' to use new technologies," which leads to "anxiety, mental fatigue, skepticism, and sense of ineffectiveness."[80]

Because technology touches just about every aspect of our lives, "the pressure to be available and accessible has a severe impact on our health. People are either over-stimulated and trying to screen out or they have developed a tech hyper-focus and are unable to disconnect." Technostress can cause muscle tension, depression, focus and concentration problems, insomnia, and burnout.[81] Unfortunately, a study conducted by the *American Psychological Association* revealed that over 70% of adults in the US say that they experience significant stress associated with their use of technology.[82]

Current scientific research about technostress reveals that it presents itself in two ways, techno-anxiety and techno-addiction. Specifically, people who have a hard time understanding new technology may suffer from techno-anxiety and experience apprehension, agitation, and feelings of uncertainty. Techno-addiction occurs when we identify excessively with technology. Techno-addiction is evidenced when you are unable to disconnect from your phone, computer, etc. and also appears as FOMO, or the "fear of missing out," which can cause disconnection anxiety.[83]

Technostress can be caused by several factors:[84]

- Information overload—The number of apps continue to increase and they create massive amounts of information that our brains feel compelled to ingest, interpret, and respond.

Similarly, changes in technology can create too much information for the brain to process. "Trying to keep pace with the latest updates and features across all our applications is next to impossible."

- Techno-invasion—This occurs when the distinction between homelife and school/work-life are blurred. You may be expected to be constantly "connected" and to acknowledge a notification immediately after you receive it. "Our 'always on' culture means that we're more available, to more people, more of the time."
- Techno-complexity—It may be that you feel the need to know the skills required to understand and use the latest advancement in technology. Perhaps you were once overwhelmed when faced with a new piece of technology with what seemed like an endless number of features. The amount of time and effort needed to learn and adapt to updated or new types of technologies can be intimidating.
- Techno-uncertainty—This occurs when you feel disoriented by the fast pace of technological advancements. We tend to feel pressured because we must "learn and adapt to new tools and features at a faster pace than ever before." If your college or university adopts new software that updates often, you may develop techno-uncertainty.

If you believe you are experiencing technostress, there are a number of ways you can minimize it:[85]

- Set time for technology breaks and stick with them.
- Block notifications on your phone.
- Turn off your phone several times during the day.
- Set aside non-urgent messages and respond to them when you have the time to do so.
- Focus on one task at a time and close the multiple windows on your screen.

In all, "digital technology is a key source of change. Much of this is positive. For example, online communication has kept people connected while being physically apart during the pandemic. Technology is on our side. However, it can have adverse effects on people using it in an unhealthy way. In a world supported by technology, technostress will continue to affect people."[86]

The Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Norms

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the creation of new norms that replaced many that we followed prior to the pandemic. Specifically, in America we were instructed to stay at home, wash our hands for at least 30 seconds, use hand sanitizer frequently, and wear a mask if we had to go out in public. The new norms also caused us to perceive social gatherings as dangerous and changed how we interacted with others.[87] As the world learned new norms, what was once considered "polite," such as keeping an 18-inch distance from a conversation partner, was considered "rude."[88]

A study of the use of physical space in the UK found that norms changed regarding the distance between people walking on sidewalks. People who lived in the UK during the lockdown were instructed to stand two meters apart, and most of the British public followed this norm. Some people followed this norm by maintaining the distance while walking in public but acknowledging other walkers by pausing and smiling. Even when individuals couldn't avoid a close proximity to others, they torqued their bodies away. However, when the lockdown began to ease, many people

no longer followed the norm about the use of physical space. In fact, when some people requested another person to maintain the two-meter distance, they responded aggressively. Similarly, some people acted surprised as if they hadn't known about the two-meter norm. These examples demonstrate that confusion and lack of shared understanding was associated with the physical space norm.[89] As mentioned previously, there may no longer be consensus about which norms to follow during periods of social and cultural change.

Communication Competence and Contexts

Recall that the context refers to the environment surrounding the communication. The contexts in which we communicate influence which norms we should follow. We have chosen three contexts that we will examine throughout this book because they influence and/or are influenced by communication in significant ways: the culture context, the gender context, and the workplace context. On a daily basis, you may communicate with people who differ from you based on country-of-origin and/or race and ethnicity. You also probably spend some time communicating with members of a different gender. Similarly, you may have a full or part-time job that influences how you communicate with coworkers and how coworkers communicate with you. These contexts will be presented throughout this book in terms of (1) why it is important to understand how they affect specific types of communication (such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mediated/technology-based communication) and (2) why knowing this information is important in your everyday life.

The Culture Context

Culture refers to the "shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people which result in characteristic behaviors."[90] Although the concept of civility is cross-cultural, what is considered civil communication can differ according to the culture in which we find ourselves. Our culture teaches us which verbal and nonverbal behaviors are civil and uncivil and when it is appropriate and inappropriate to communicate verbally and/or display nonverbal behaviors. Because what we are taught may differ cross-culturally, misinterpretations can arise about the civil and ethical use of such behaviors.

The Gender Context

Although many people use the terms interchangeably, gender and sex are not the same thing. While "sex" is based on anatomy and physiological characteristics, **gender** has a socially constructed meaning and refers to how a person identifies.[91] Recent studies demonstrate that there are small differences in men's and women's communication. One review examined 15 studies about the relationship between gender communication in face-to-face interactions. The assessment revealed that "few robust differences between women and men in the use of linguistic variables were observed across contexts." The review also noted the influence of various factors that can influence an interaction, such as gender identity, institutionalized roles, the setting, and conversational goals.[92]

The Workplace Context

Workplace incivility, characterized by on-the-job behaviors that are rude, discourteous, and disrespectful and display a lack of regard for others, is common. Seventy-one percent of more than 1,100 survey respondents experienced uncivil behaviors at work during a five-year period.[93] Examples of workplace incivility include interrupting a conversation, talking loudly in a common area, not introducing a newcomer, failing to return a phone call, and showing little interested in someone's opinion.[94] Currently, many employers struggle with Gen Z workers. For example, Gen Z employees are more likely than workers from other generations to report hostile work environments. However, their employers contend that Gen Z employees have poor communication skills and are easily offended (and may therefore perceive their employers as uncivil). Stacie Haller, chief career advisor at ResumeBuilder.com, suggests that because Gen Z employees entered the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, they didn't learn the skills that most young employees learn from face-to-face contact. Specifically, Gen Z employees didn't learn "how to interact on a team, how to accept positive criticism, how to give positive feedback. This generation didn't get any of that, and they were thrown into a job without any of those skills."[95] This may cause employers to perceive Gen Z employees as uncivil.

All told, it is the people involved in conversation, the topic, and the context in which the communication takes place that influences "the precise meaning, degree, and fittingness of civility."[96] Similarly, there are no fixed rules or standards that guarantee that communication will be interpreted as civil. "In every situation there will be competing and oppositional needs that will influence the communication and interpretation of behavior that can be considered civil or uncivil."[97] However, this doesn't mean that we should abandon our attempts at communicating civilly. It is up to all of us to choose to be civil to reap the rewards of civil communication. "We can reclaim civility; one act at a time."[98]

A Case Study of (In)civility

The following case study is a summary of an original post on the Reddit social media site.[99]

Picture a crowded plane in a three-seat–three-seat configuration. The flight is 90 minutes long and passengers are flying from one major European city to another. One passenger, a 5′10″ man, chose a window seat in the economy class and refrained from purchasing a premium economy seat for $21 (about €20), which would give him extended legroom. The passenger planned to sleep during the flight and thought he didn't need to purchase extra legroom because he had previously fallen asleep in an economy class seat by the window.

The window seat passenger reclined his seat but was told by the 6′8″ passenger in the middle seat behind him that the chair reclined into his legs. In fact, the middle seat passenger had to extend his legs into the empty

window seat space and empty aisle seat spaces next to him. The window seat passenger agreed not to recline his seat but scolded the middle seat passenger behind him for not choosing the seat next to the aisle or paying for a seat with extended leg room. The middle seat passenger replied that he usually is moved to a premium section of the plane but the flight attendants failed to upgrade his seat on the current flight. The window seat passenger responded with three points:

- It's not the airline's or flight attendants' responsibility to give the middle seat passenger a better seat.
- Because he knew he doesn't fit into a middle seat, the middle seat passenger should have chosen an aisle seat.
- The middle seat passenger should have paid $21 (€20) for a premium economy seat with extended legroom.

The middle seat passenger argued that he didn't have the money to spend on a better seat, but the window seat passenger thought he was lying because they were flying to one of the most expensive cities in the world. The middle seat passenger also said that he didn't have the choice to choose an aisle seat, but the window seat passenger knew that aisle seats were available when he obtained his boarding pass the night before the flight. At this point, the middle seat passenger accused the window seat passenger of being "selfish." The window seat passenger responded by saying, "I'm not being selfish. I'm fine with having less space so you can be more comfortable. But I'm pointing out that you're the selfish one for not taking responsibility for others' space and depending on flight attendants to put you in better seats."

Now that you know the characterization of civility and incivility, answer the following questions:

1. Do you think the passengers behaved respectfully towards each other?
2. Do you believe the passengers exhibited restraint as they communicated?
3. Do you think the passengers demonstrated responsibility for their "community" (the other passengers on the plane)?
4. Do you feel that the passengers engaged in communication that was ethical?
5. Is there a norm associated with reclining airplane seats?
6. Which passenger do you think was the more competent communicator (answer in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness)?
7. What would you have said or done if you were the window seat passenger?
8. Overall, do you think the window seat passenger was civil or uncivil? Do you think the middle seat passenger was civil or uncivil?

Chapter Summary

Now that you have read this chapter, you can now know:

- **Explain the benefits that result from skillful communication, the harms that result from poor communication, and the cost of social isolation that resulted from the COVID-19 virus.**

Effective communication can positively affect our physical health, enhance mental functioning, help us establish successful careers, lead to happiness, and facilitate job satisfaction. Poor communication can negatively influence our health, lead to divorce, and cause employee anxiety, which can lead to stress at home. The COVID-19 virus was associated with an increase in loneliness worldwide, which caused people's social skills to decline.

- Define *communication*.

Communication means different things to different people, but most communication scholars agree that it involves people who create and share meaning. Because communication is so broad and multifaceted, many of its various definitions highlight only a few specific characteristics and/or functions. Therefore, in this book we broadly define communication as "the process of creating and sharing meaning."

- **Recognize five types of communication: intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, public, and mediated and technology-based communication.**

Intrapersonal communication is communication that takes place within us. One kind of intrapersonal communication is self-talk, or communication within us that is specifically about ourselves. Interpersonal communication involves at least two people who establish a communicative relationship. Interpersonal communication can be characterized as impersonal when we communicate with others as if they are "objects" or "roles." Interpersonal communication can also be characterized as personal when we interact with others based on their uniqueness. Small group communication occurs when a small number of people share a common purpose and interact for a reason. Public communication occurs when a speaker delivers a message to an audience. Mediated and technology-based communication occurs when communication is transmitted by some kind of technology, such as television, radio, mobile device, or the Internet.

- **Understand the five principles of communication: communication is not a panacea, communication is irreversible, communication is a process, one cannot *not* communicate, and communication is strategic.**

"Communication is not a panacea" means that communication can cause more harm than good (this is especially true in our polarized society in which opposing sides are perceived as enemies). "Communication is irreversible" refers to the inability to "take a message back" once it has been interpreted by a listener. "Communication is a process" denotes that it is impossible to determine when communication begins and when it ends. "One cannot *not* communicate" indicates that even when we think we are not communicating, we are. Whether we are frowning or laughing, speaking or being silent, or expressing joy or anger, we are still communicating. "Communication is strategic" relates to choice and the creation of the most effective and appropriate messages to meet our goals.

- **Identify the components of a transactional model of communication.**

Transactional models of communication illustrate the processual nature of communication and that conversation partners send and receive messages in a concurrent manner. Components that are typically included in transaction models include (1) the sender, who is the person who conveys thoughts, feelings, or ideas to others; (2) encoding, which is the process of translating thoughts, feelings, and ideas into symbols; (3) the receiver, who is the person who receives the message conveyed by the sender; (4) decoding, which is the process of interpreting a message; (5) message, which contains the information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, ideas) the sender wishes to convey to the receiver; (6) feedback, which is the response to the sender's message; (7) channel, the pathway used to convey the message between the sender and the receiver; (8) noise, which is any force that can interfere with the communication process in any context or situation; and (9) context, which refers to the environment surrounding the communication. The context can be as simple as the physical environment or can be complex, such as past experiences, a frame of reference, and the influence of our culture; our family, friends, and coworkers; our gender; and our expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and values.

- **Describe the relationship between civil and ethical communication.**

What is considered civil or uncivil is based on our perceptions. Civil communication entails respect, restraint, and responsibility. We can communicate respect for others by admitting we may not know an answer, considering that our viewpoints may be wrong, and listening well. Restraint is similar to tact because it involves strategic communication. Responsibility refers to our concern for and obligation to the community. Ethics is a system of standards that defines what behaviors are "right" or "good"; it allows us to evaluate situations and then decide among various behavioral options. Many people think of civility in terms of politeness and good manners, but politeness alone does not define civility; it also needs to be considered in terms of ethical values. Civil communication and ethical communication are overlapping concepts, both of which are necessary to foster accountability in thinking, decision-making, and making communication choices.

- **Understand how civility can be used to harm less powerful groups.**

"Rude" and' "uncivil" are labels that have been applied throughout history to discredit disempowered groups. Efforts to eliminate what is "rude" behavior may actually be an attempt by a powerful and privileged group to a silence less powerful group. "Privilege" refers to any advantage that is unearned and socially conferred, such as skin color. Additionally, what is considered "civil behavior" is a way for those in power and who possess privilege to maintain the social order.