



**Pearson New International Edition**

Interpersonal Communication  
Relating to Others  
Beebe Beebe Redmond  
Seventh Edition

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Beebe Beebe Redmond  
Seventh Edition

PEARSON®

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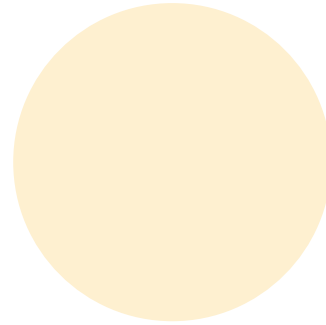
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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction to Interpersonal Communication</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Interpersonal Communication and Perception</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>35</b>
<b>3. Listening and Responding Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>63</b>
<b>4. Verbal Communication Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>103</b>
<b>5. Nonverbal Communication Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>139</b>
<b>6. Conflict Management Skills</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>177</b>
<b>7. Understanding Interpersonal Relationships</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>217</b>
<b>8. Managing Relationship Challenges</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>247</b>
<b>9. Interpersonal Relationships: Friendship and Romance</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>285</b>
<b>10. Interpersonal Relationships: Family and Workplace</b> Steven A. Beebe/Susan J. Beebe/Mark V. Redmond	<b>323</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>359</b>

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# Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

“Communication is to a relationship what breathing is to maintaining life.” —Virginia Satir

## OBJECTIVES

- 1 Compare and contrast definitions of communication, human communication, and interpersonal communication.
- 2 Explain why it is useful to study interpersonal communication.
- 3 Describe the key components of the communication process, including communication as action, interaction, and transaction.
- 4 Discuss five principles of interpersonal communication.
- 5 Discuss electronically mediated communication's role in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
- 6 Identify strategies that can improve your communication competence.

## OUTLINE

- Interpersonal Communication Defined
- Interpersonal Communication's Importance to Your Life
- Interpersonal Communication and the Communication Process
- Interpersonal Communication Principles
- Interpersonal Communication and Technology
- Interpersonal Communication Competence

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Audio Chapter at  
MyCommunicationLab

Interpersonal communication is like breathing; it is a requirement for life. And, like breathing, interpersonal communication is inescapable. Unless you live in isolation, you communicate interpersonally every day. Listening to your roommate, talking to a teacher, meeting for lunch with a friend, and talking to your parents or your spouse are all examples of interpersonal communication.

It is impossible *not* to communicate with others.<sup>1</sup> Even before we are born, we respond to movement and sound. With our first cry, we announce to others that we are here. Once we make contact with others, we communicate, and we continue to do so until we draw our last breath. Even though many of our messages are not verbalized, we nonetheless send messages to others—intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Whatever our intentions, people draw conclusions from our behavior. Without interpersonal communication, a special form of human communication that occurs as we manage our relationships, people suffer and even die. Recluses, hermits, and people isolated in solitary confinement dream and hallucinate about talking with others face to face.

Human communication is at the core of our existence. Think of the number of times you communicated with someone today, as you worked, ate, studied, shopped, or went about your other daily activities. Most people spend between 80 and 90 percent of their waking hours communicating with others.<sup>2</sup> It is through these interactions with others that we develop interpersonal relationships.<sup>3</sup>

Because these relationships are so important to our lives, we will focus on the communication skills and principles that explain and predict how we develop, sustain, and sometimes end relationships. We'll explore such questions as the following:

- Why do we like some people and not others?
- How can we interpret other people's unspoken messages with greater accuracy?
- Why do some relationships blossom and others deteriorate?
- How can we better manage disagreements with others?
- How can we better understand our relationships with our family, friends, and coworkers?

As we address essential questions about how you relate to others, we will emphasize the importance of being **other-oriented**. Being other-oriented results in awareness of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners while still maintaining your own integrity. Becoming other-oriented is not a single skill, but a collection of skills and principles that are designed to increase your sensitivity to and understanding of others. Next, we chart the course ahead, addressing key questions about what interpersonal communication is and why it is important. We will begin by seeing how our understanding of the interpersonal communication process has evolved. And we will conclude by examining how we initiate and sustain relationships through interpersonal communication.

## Interpersonal Communication Defined

**other-oriented** To be aware of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners while still maintaining your own integrity.

**communication** Process of acting on information.

To understand interpersonal communication, we must begin by understanding how it relates to two broader categories: communication in general and human communication. Scholars have attempted to arrive at a general definition of communication for decades, yet experts cannot agree on a single one. One research team counted more than 126 published definitions.<sup>4</sup> In the broadest sense, **communication** is the process of acting on information.<sup>5</sup> Someone does or says something, and others think or do something in response to the action or the words as they understand them.

To refine our broad definition, we can say that **human communication** is the process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages.<sup>6</sup> We learn about the world by listening, observing, tasting, touching, and smelling; then we share our conclusions with others. Human communication encompasses many media: speeches, e-mail, songs, radio and television broadcasts, online discussion groups, letters, books, articles, poems, and advertisements.

**Interpersonal communication** is a distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships. The three essential elements of this definition differentiate the unique nature of interpersonal communication from other forms of human communication.<sup>7</sup>

## Interpersonal Communication Is a Distinctive Form of Communication

For years, many scholars defined interpersonal communication simply as communication that occurs when two people interact face to face. This limited definition suggests that if two people are interacting, they are engaging in interpersonal communication. Today, interpersonal communication is defined not just by the number of people who communicate, but also by the quality of the communication. Interpersonal communication occurs when you treat the other person as a unique human being.<sup>8</sup>

Increasingly, people are relating more and more via smartphones, Twitter, Facebook, and Skype. Research is confirming that many of us think of the various electronic means we use to connect to others as natural ways to establish and maintain relationships.<sup>9</sup> With a smartphone in our pocket, we are within reach of our friends, family, and colleagues.

**Interpersonal versus Impersonal Communication.** Think of all human communication, whether mediated or face-to-face, as ranging on a continuum from impersonal to interpersonal communication. **Impersonal communication** occurs when you treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons. When you ask a server in a restaurant for a glass of water, you are interacting with the role, not necessarily with the individual. You're having an impersonal conversation rather than an interpersonal one.

**I-It and I-Thou Relationships.** Philosopher Martin Buber influenced our thinking about the distinctiveness of interpersonal communication when he described communication as consisting of two different qualities of relationships: an "I-It" relationship or an "I-Thou" relationship.<sup>10</sup> He described an "I-It" relationship as an impersonal one, in which the other person is viewed as an "It" rather than as an authentic, genuine person. For every communication transaction to be a personal, intimate dialogue would be unrealistic and inappropriate. It's possible to go through an entire day communicating with others but not be involved in interpersonal communication.

An "I-Thou" relationship, on the other hand, occurs when you interact with another person as a unique, authentic individual rather than as an object or an "It." In this kind of relationship, true, honest dialogue results in authentic communication. An "I-Thou" relationship is not self-centered. The communicators are patient, kind, and forgiving. They have developed an attitude toward each other that is honest, open, spontaneous, nonjudgmental, and based on equality rather than superiority.<sup>11</sup> However, although interpersonal communication is more intimate and reveals more about the people involved than does impersonal communication, not all interpersonal communication involves sharing closely guarded personal information.

### human communication

Process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages.

### interpersonal communication

A distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships.

### impersonal communication

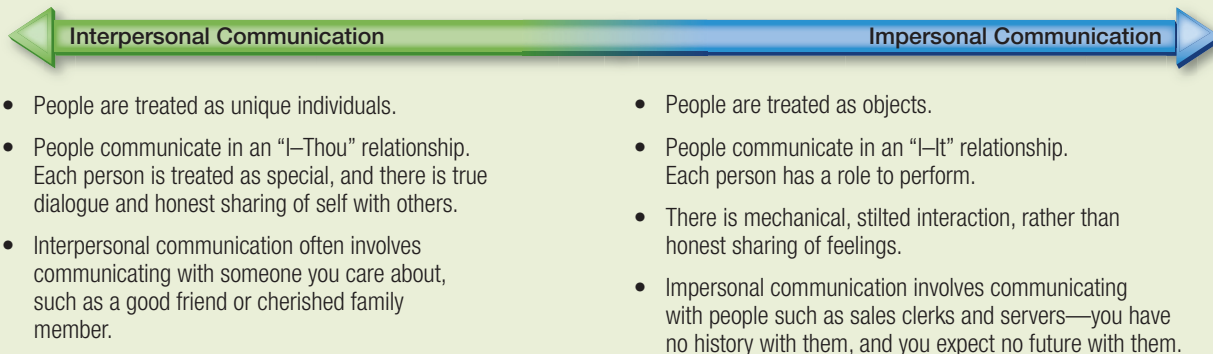
Process that occurs when we treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons.

**Interpersonal Versus Other Forms of Communication.** We define interpersonal communication as a unique form of human communication. There are other forms of communication, as well.

- **Mass communication** occurs when one person communicates the same message to many people at once, but the creator of the message is usually not physically present, and listeners have virtually no opportunity to respond immediately to the speaker. Messages communicated via radio and TV are examples of mass communication.
- **Public communication** occurs when a speaker addresses an audience in person.
- **Small group communication** occurs when a group of from three to fifteen people meet to interact with a common purpose and mutually influence one another. The purpose of the gathering can be to solve a problem, make a decision, learn, or just have fun. While communicating with others in a small group, it is also possible to communicate interpersonally with one or more individuals in the group.
- **Intrapersonal communication** is communication with yourself. Thinking is perhaps the best example of intrapersonal communication.

## RECAP

### The Continuum Between Interpersonal Communication and Impersonal Communication



**mass communication** Process that occurs when one person issues the same message to many people at once; the creator of the message is usually not physically present, and listeners have virtually no opportunity to respond immediately to the speaker.

**public communication** Process that occurs when a speaker addresses an audience in person.

**small group communication** Process that occurs when a group of from three to fifteen people meet to interact with a common purpose and mutually influence one another.

**intrapersonal communication** Communication with yourself; thinking.

### Interpersonal Communication Involves Mutual Influence Between Individuals

Every interpersonal communication transaction influences us. Mutual influence means that *all* partners in the communication are affected by a transaction. Interpersonal communication may or may not involve words. The degree of mutual influence varies a great deal from transaction to transaction. You probably would not be affected a great deal by a brief smile that you received from a traveling companion on a bus, but you would be greatly affected by your lover telling you he or she was leaving you. Sometimes interpersonal communication changes our lives dramatically, sometimes in small ways. Long-lasting interpersonal relationships are sustained not by one person giving and another taking, but by a spirit of mutual equality. Both you and your partner listen and respond with respect for each other. There is no attempt to manipulate others.

Buber’s concept of an “I–Thou” relationship includes the quality of being fully “present” when communicating with another person.<sup>12</sup> To be present is to give your full attention

to the other person. The quality of interpersonal communication is enhanced when both you and your partner are simultaneously present and focused on each other.

### Interpersonal Communication Helps Individuals Manage Their Relationships

Question: What is neither you nor I, but always you and I? Answer: a relationship.<sup>13</sup> A **relationship** is a connection established when you communicate with another person. When two individuals are in a relationship, what one person says or does influences the other person. As in dancing, people in relationships are affected by the beat of the music (that is, the situation in which they are communicating), their ability to interpret the music and move accordingly (the personal skills they possess), and the moves and counter-moves of their partner.

You initiate and form relationships by communicating with others whom you find attractive in some way. You seek to increase your interactions with people with whom you wish to develop relationships, and you continually communicate interpersonally to maintain the relationship. You also use interpersonal communication to end or redefine relationships that you have decided are no longer viable or need to be changed. In summary, to relate to someone is to “dance” with them. You dance with them in a specific time and place, with certain perceptions and expectations. Over time, this dance becomes an ongoing interpersonal relationship.

You are increasingly likely to use social media to connect with friends and manage your relationships. Research has found that instant messages (including text messages) have an overall positive effect on your relationships. E-mail, texting, and other forms of instant messages appear to be primarily used to maintain *existing* relationships, although they certainly play a role in establishing initial contact with others. Additional research has found that online and instant messages at first are perceived as lower quality than face-to-face interactions, but over time are judged just as positively.<sup>14</sup> So whether it occurs online or offline, interpersonal communication helps you manage your relationships.



In face-to-face encounters, we simultaneously exchange both verbal and nonverbal messages that result in shared meanings. Through this kind of interrelation, we build relationships with others.

## Interpersonal Communication's Importance to Your Life

Why learn about interpersonal communication? Because it touches every aspect of our lives. It is not only pleasant or desirable to develop quality interpersonal relationships with others, it is vital for our well-being. We have a strong need to communicate interpersonally with others. Learning how to understand and improve interpersonal communication can improve relationships with family, loved ones, friends, and colleagues and can enhance the quality of physical and emotional health.

### Improved Relationships with Family

Relating to family members can be a challenge. The divorce statistics in the United States document the difficulties that can occur when people live in relationships with others: About half of all marriages end in divorce. We don't claim that you will avoid all family

**relationship** Connection established when we communicate with another person.

conflicts or that your family relationships will always be harmonious if you learn principles and skills of interpersonal communication. You can, however, develop more options for responding when family communication challenges come your way. You will be more likely to develop creative, constructive solutions to family conflict if you understand what's happening and can promote true dialogue with your spouse, partner, child, parent, brother, or sister. Furthermore, family relationships play a major role in determining how you interact with others. Family communication author Virginia Satir calls family communication “the largest single factor determining the kinds of relationships [people make] with others.”<sup>15</sup> Being able to have conversations with family members and loved ones is the fundamental way of establishing close, personal relationships with them.

### Improved Relationships with Friends and Lovers

For unmarried people, developing friendships and falling in love are the top-rated sources of satisfaction and happiness in life.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, losing a relationship is among life's most stressful events. Most people between the ages of 19 and 24 report that they have had from five to six romantic relationships and have been “in love” once or twice.<sup>17</sup> Studying interpersonal communication may not unravel all the mysteries of romantic love and friendship, but it can offer insight into behaviors.<sup>18</sup>

### Improved Relationships with Colleagues

In many ways, colleagues at work are like family members. Although you choose your friends and lovers, you don't always have the same flexibility in choosing those with whom or for whom you work. Understanding how relationships develop on the job can help you avoid conflict and stress and increase your sense of satisfaction. In addition, your success or failure in a job often hinges on how well you get along with supervisors and peers.

Several surveys document the importance of quality interpersonal relationships in contributing to success at work.<sup>19</sup> The abilities to listen to others, manage conflict, and develop quality interpersonal relationships with others are usually at the top of the list of the skills employers seek in today's job applicants.<sup>20</sup>

### Improved Physical and Emotional Health

Positive interpersonal relationships with others have direct benefits for your overall health and happiness. Research has shown that the lack or loss of a close relationship can lead to ill health and even death. Physicians have long observed that patients who are widowed or divorced experience more medical problems such as heart disease, cancer, pneumonia, and diabetes than do married people.<sup>21</sup> Grief-stricken spouses are more likely than others to die prematurely, especially around the time of the departed spouse's birthday or near their wedding anniversary.<sup>22</sup> Being childless can also shorten one's life. One study found that middle-aged, childless wives were almost two-and-one-half times more likely to die in a given year than those who had at least one child.<sup>23</sup> Terminally ill patients with a limited number of friends or no social support die sooner than those with stronger ties.<sup>24</sup> Without companions and close friends, opportunities for intimacy and stress-minimizing interpersonal communication are diminished. Although being involved in intimate interpersonal relationships can lead to conflict and feelings of anger and frustration, researchers suggest that when all is said and done, having close relationships with others is a major source of personal happiness.<sup>25</sup> Studying how to enhance the quality of your communication with others can make life more enjoyable and enhance your overall well-being.<sup>26</sup>



Explore the  
**Exercise** “Principles  
of Communication” at  
**MyCommunicationLab**

## Interpersonal Communication and the Communication Process

Interpersonal communication is a complex process of creating meaning in the context of an interpersonal relationship. To better understand interpersonal communication as a distinct form of communication, it is useful to examine the basic communication process.<sup>27</sup>

### Elements of the Communication Process

The most basic components of communication include these elements: source, message, channel, receiver, noise, feedback, and context. Understanding each of these elements can help you analyze your own communication with others as you relate to them in interpersonal situations as well as other communication contexts. Let's explore these elements in greater detail.

- *Source.* The **source** of a message is the originator of the ideas and feelings expressed. The source puts a message into a code, a process called **encoding**. The opposite of encoding is the process of **decoding**; this occurs when the receiver interprets the words or nonverbal cues.
- *Message.* **Messages** are the written, spoken, and unspoken elements of communication to which people assign meaning. You can send a message intentionally (talking to a professor before class) or unintentionally (falling asleep during class); verbally (“Hi. How are you?”), nonverbally (a smile and a handshake), or in written form (a book).
- *Channel.* The **channel** is the means by which the message is expressed to the receiver. If you're typical, you receive messages through a variety of channels that include mediated channels such as text messaging, e-mail, phone, video conference, Facebook, or Twitter.
- *Receiver.* The **receiver** of the message is the person or persons who interpret the message and ultimately determine whether your message was understood and appropriate. Effective communicators are other-oriented; they understand that the listener ultimately makes sense of the message they express.
- *Noise.* **Noise** is anything that interferes with the message being interpreted as it was intended. Noise happens. If there were no noise, all of our messages would be interpreted accurately. But noise is always present. It can be literal—such as beeps coming from an iPad or iPhone that signal incoming e-mail—or it can be psychological—such as competing thoughts, worries, and feelings that capture our attention.
- *Feedback.* **Feedback** is response to the message. Think of a Ping-Pong game. Like a Ping-Pong ball, messages bounce back and forth. We talk; someone listens and responds; we listen and respond to this response. This perspective can be summarized using a physical principle: For every action, there is a reaction.

Without feedback, communication is rarely effective. When your roommate says, “Would you please pick up some milk at the store?”, you may say, “What kind—1 percent, 2 percent, organic, or chocolate?” Your quest for clarification is feedback. Further feedback may seek additional information, or simply confirm that the message has been interpreted: “Oh, some 1 percent organic milk would be good.” Like other messages, feedback can be intentional (your mother gives you a hug when you announce your engagement) or unintentional (you yawn as you listen to your uncle tell his story about bears again); verbal (“That’s a pepperoni pizza, right?”) or nonverbal (blushing after being asked to dance).

**source** Originator of a thought or emotion, who puts it into a code that can be understood by a receiver.

**encode** To translate ideas, feelings, and thoughts into code.

**decode** To interpret ideas, feelings, and thoughts that have been translated into a code.

**message** Written, spoken, and unspoken elements of communication to which people assign meaning.

**channel** Pathway through which messages are sent.

**receiver** Person who decodes a message and attempts to make sense of what the source has encoded.

**noise** Anything literal or psychological that interferes with accurate reception of a message.

**feedback** Response to a message.

- **Context.** **Context** is the physical and psychological environment for communication. All communication takes place in some context. As the cliché goes, “Everyone has to be somewhere.” A conversation on the beach with your good friend would likely differ from a conversation the two of you might have in a funeral home. Context encompasses not only the physical environment but also the people present and their relationships with the communicators, the communication goal, and the culture of which the communicators are a part.<sup>28</sup>

## Models of the Communication Process

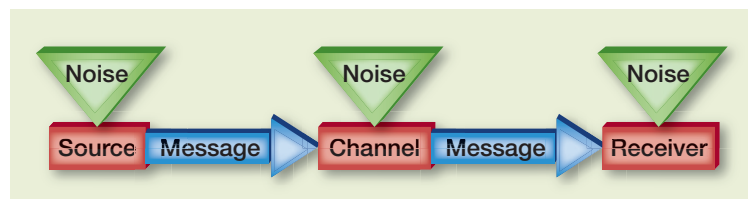
The elements of the communication process are typically arranged in one of three communication models, showing communication as action, as interaction, or as transaction. Let’s review each model in more detail to see how expert thinking about human communication has evolved.

**Communication as Action: Message Transfer.** The oldest and simplest model, shown in Figure 1, is *communication as action*—a transferring of meaning. “Did you get my message?” This sentence reflects the communication-as-action approach to human communication. Communication takes place when a message is sent and received. Period.

**Communication as Interaction: Message Exchange.** The perspective of communication as interaction adds two elements to the action model: feedback and context. As shown in Figure 2, the interaction model is more realistic than the action perspective, but it still has limitations. Although it emphasizes feedback and context, the interaction model does not quite capture the complexity of simultaneous human communication. The interaction model of communication still views communication as a linear, step-by-step process. But in interpersonal situations, both the source and the receiver send and receive messages at the same time.

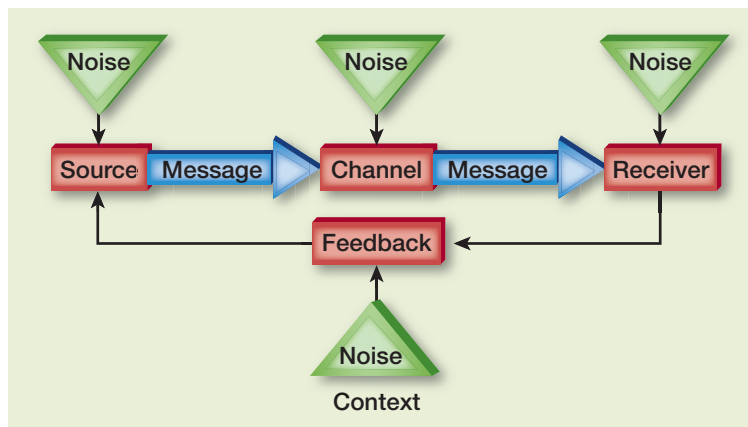
**context** Physical and psychological environment for communication.

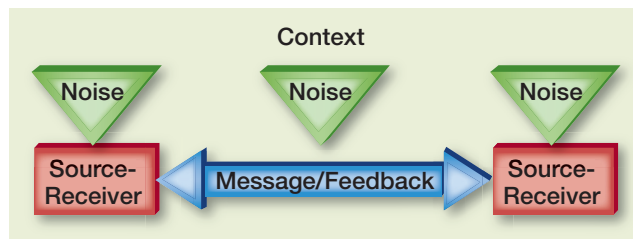
**FIGURE 1**  
A Simple Model of Human Communication as Action



**FIGURE 2**  
A Model for Communication as Interaction

Interaction models of communication include feedback as a response to a message sent by the communication source and context as the environment for communication.



**FIGURE 3****A Model for Communication as Transaction**

The source and receiver of a message experience communication simultaneously.

**Communication as Transaction: Message Creation.** Today, the most sophisticated and realistic model views communication as transaction, in which each element influences all of the other elements in the process at the same time. This perspective acknowledges that when you talk to another person face to face, you are constantly reacting to your partner's responses. In this model, all the components of the communication process are simultaneous. As Figure 3 indicates, even as you talk, you are also interpreting your partner's nonverbal and verbal responses.

The transactional approach to communication is based on **systems theory**. A system is a set of interconnected elements in which a change in one element affects all of the other elements. Key elements of any system include *inputs* (all of the variables that go into the system), *throughputs* (all of the things that make communication a process), and *outputs* (what the system produces). From a transactional communication perspective, a change in any aspect of the communication system (source, message, channel, receiver, noise, context, feedback) potentially influences all the other elements of the system. From a systems theory point of view, each element of communication is connected to all other elements of communication.

**systems theory** Theory that describes the interconnected elements of a system in which a change in one element affects all of the other elements.

## ADAPTING TO DIFFERENCES Understanding Others

### The World Is Here

*One of our most visionary politicians said that he envisioned a time when the United States could become the brain of the world, by which he meant the repository of all the latest advanced information systems. I thought of that remark when an enterprising poet friend of mine called to say that he had just sold a poem to a computer magazine and that the editors were delighted to get it because they didn't carry fiction or poetry. Is that the kind of world we desire? A humdrum homogeneous world of all brains but no heart, no fiction, no poetry; a world of robots with human attendants, bereft of imagination or culture. Or does North America deserve a more exciting destiny—to become a place where the cultures of the world crisscross? This is possible because the United States is unique in the world: The world is here.<sup>29</sup>*

These words from Ishmael Reed's essay "The World Is Here" remind us that America is not a one-dimensional culture. You need not travel to far-off places to develop interpersonal relationships with people from other cultures, races, or ethnic backgrounds. America has long been known as a melting pot—a place where people from a variety of cultures and traditions have come together to seek their fortunes. Others think America is more like a tossed salad than a melting pot—in a salad, each ingredient retains its essential character rather than melting together to form a united whole. Focusing on communication and diversity means much more than focusing on cultural differences. Culture consists of the learned values, behaviors, and expectations shared by a group of people. It takes skill and sensitivity to develop quality interpersonal

relationships with others whose religion, race, ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation differs from your own. We include boxes like this one to help you develop your sensitivity to important issues related to cultural diversity. As you embark on your study of interpersonal communication, consider these questions, either individually or with a group of your classmates:

1. What are the implications of this melting pot or tossed salad culture for your study of interpersonal communication?
2. Is there too much emphasis on being politically correct on college campuses today? Support your answer.
3. What specific interpersonal skills will help you communicate effectively with others from different cultural and ethnic traditions?

A transactional approach to communication suggests that no single cause explains why you interpret messages the way you do. In fact, it is inappropriate to point to a single factor to explain how you are making sense of the messages of others; communication is messier than that. The meaning of messages in interpersonal relationships evolves from the past, is influenced by the present, and is affected by visions of the future.

One researcher says that interpersonal communication is “the coordinated management of meaning” through **episodes**, sequence of interactions between individuals during which the message of one person influences the message of another.<sup>30</sup> Technically, only the sender and receiver of those messages can determine where one episode ends and another begins.

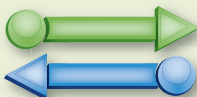
## RECAP An Evolving Model for Interpersonal Communication

### Human Communication as Action



Human communication is linear, with meaning sent or transferred from source to receiver.

### Human Communication as Interaction



Human communication occurs as the receiver of the message responds to the source through feedback. This interactive model views communication as a linear action–reaction sequence of events within a specific context.

### Human Communication as Transaction



Human communication is mutually interactive. Meaning is created based on a concurrent sharing of ideas and feelings. This transaction model most accurately describes human communication.

## Interpersonal Communication Principles

Underlying our current understanding of interpersonal communication are five principles: Interpersonal communication connects us to others, is irreversible, is complicated, is governed by rules, and involves both content and relationship dimensions. Without a clear understanding of interpersonal communication principles, people may rely on untrue characterizations of communication, which can increase communication problems. So in addition to presenting interpersonal communication principles, we also correct some of the misunderstandings people have about interpersonal communication and suggest why these myths persist.

### Interpersonal Communication Connects Us to Others

Unless you are a living in a cave or have become a cloistered monk, you interact with others every day. We agree with author H. D. Duncan, who said, “We do not relate and then talk, but relate in talk.” Fundamental to an understanding of interpersonal communication is the assumption that the quality of interpersonal relationships stems from the quality of communication with others. As we noted earlier, people can’t *not* communicate. Because people often don’t *intend* to express ideas or feelings, this perspective is debated among communication scholars. However, there is no question that interpersonal communication is inescapable and that communication connects us to others.

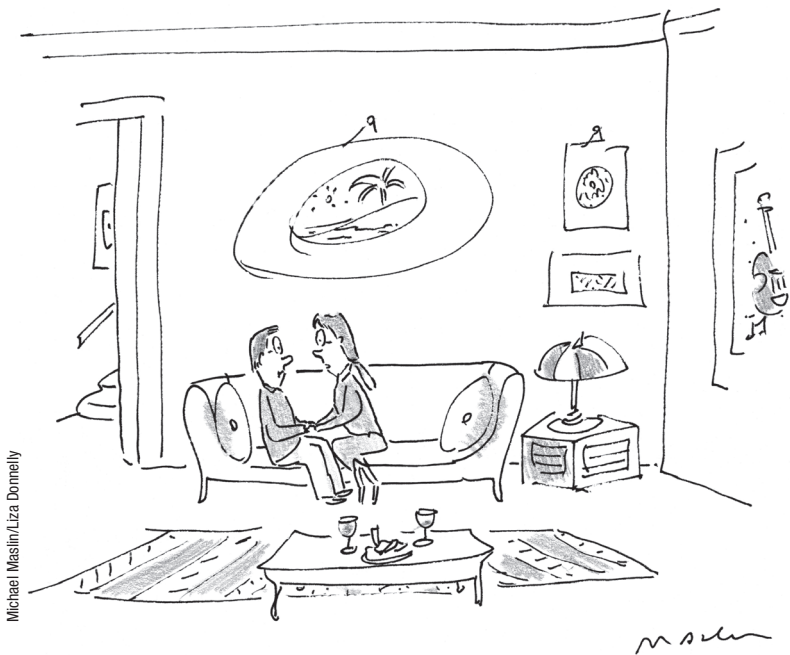
**episode** Sequence of interactions between individuals, during which the message of one person influences the message of another.

As important as communication is in connecting us to others, it's a myth that all interpersonal relationship problems are communication problems. Although communication makes interpersonal relationships possible, sometimes the problem is not that there is a communication problem, but that people simply disagree. "You don't understand me!" shouts Paul to his exasperated partner, Chris. "We just can't communicate anymore!" Paul seems to think that the problem he and Chris are having is a communication problem. But Paul and Chris may understand each other perfectly; they may be self-centered or grumpy, or they may just disagree. The problem in the relationship may not be communication, but a non-other-oriented, self-absorbed communicator.

The ever-present nature of interpersonal communication doesn't mean others will always *accurately* decode your messages; it does mean that others will draw inferences about you and your behavior—conclusions based on available information, which may be right or wrong. Even as you silently stand in a crowded elevator, your lack of eye contact with fellow passengers communicates your unwillingness to interact. Your unspoken messages, even when you are asleep, provide cues that others interpret. Remember: *People judge you by your behavior, not your intent.* Even in well-established interpersonal relationships, you may be evoking an unintended response by your behavior.

### Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

"Disregard that last statement made by the witness," instructs the judge. Yet the clever lawyer knows that once her client has told the jury her husband gave her a black eye during an argument, the client cannot really "take it back," and the jury cannot really disregard it. This principle applies to all forms of communication. We may try to modify the meaning of a spoken message by saying something like "Oh, I really didn't mean it." But in most cases, the damage has been done. Once created, communication has the physical property of matter; it can't be uncreated. As the helical model in Figure 4 suggests, once interpersonal communication begins, it never loops back on itself. Instead, it continues to be shaped by the events, experiences, and thoughts of the communication partners. A Russian proverb nicely summarizes the point: "Once a word goes out of your mouth, you can never swallow it again."



"Gary, we need to not talk."



**FIGURE 4**

#### Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

This helical model shows that interpersonal communication never loops back on itself. Once it begins, it expands infinitely as the communication partners contribute their thoughts and experiences to the exchange.

Copyright © F. E. X. Dance in *Human Communication Theory*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, 294.

*Because interpersonal communication is irreversible, it's a myth to assume that messages can be taken back like erasing information from a page or hitting the delete key on your computer.* “How many times do I have to tell you not to surf the Internet while you're on the job?” “Can't you read? It's in the syllabus.” “Are you deaf? I've already told you that I love you a hundred times!” Each of these exasperated communicators seems to believe that information is the same thing as communication. But information is *not* communication. Presenting information doesn't make people “get” your meaning. Like the proverbial tree that falls silently in the forest because no one is there to hear it, a message is not necessarily communication just because you've expressed it. So you can't take a message back simply because you erased it—the meaning already has been created.

### Interpersonal Communication Is Complicated

No form of communication is simple. If any were, we would know how to reduce the number of misunderstandings and conflicts in our world. One of the purposes of communication, according to communication theorists, is to reduce our uncertainty about what is happening at any given moment.<sup>31</sup> Because of the variables involved in interpersonal exchanges, even simple requests are extremely complex. Additionally, communication theorists have noted that whenever you communicate with another person, at least six “people” are actually involved: (1) who you think you are; (2) who you think the other person is; (3) who you think the other person thinks you are; (4) who the other person thinks he or she is; (5) who the other person thinks you are; and (6) who the other person thinks you think he or she is.<sup>32</sup> Whew! And when you add more people to the interaction, it becomes even more involved.

Moreover, when humans communicate, they interpret information from others as symbols. A **symbol** is a word, sound, or visual image that represents something else, such as a thought, concept, or object; it can have various meanings and interpretations. Language is a system of symbols. In English, for example, the word (symbol) for *cow* does not look at all like a cow; someone, somewhere, decided that *cow* should mean a beast that chews its cud and gives milk. The reliance on symbols to communicate poses a communication challenge; you are often misinterpreted. Sometimes you don't know the code. Only if you are up to date on contemporary slang will you know, for example, that “fo' shizzle” means “certainly,” “wikidemia” is a term paper entirely researched on Wikipedia.org, and “brodown” is a boys' night out.

Messages are not always interpreted as we intend them. Osmo Wiio, a Scandinavian communication scholar, points out the messiness of communicating with others when he suggests the following maxims:

If communication can fail, it will.

If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be understood in just that way which does the most harm.

There is always somebody who knows better than you what you meant by your message.

The more communication there is, the more difficult it is for communication to succeed.<sup>33</sup>

Although we are not as pessimistic as Professor Wiio, we do suggest that the task of understanding each other is challenging.

*Because interpersonal communication is complicated, it's a myth to assume that there are always simple solutions to every interpersonal communication problem.* Yes, sometimes

**symbol** Word, sound, or visual image that represents something else, such as a thought, concept, or object.

simply saying “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you” can melt tension. But because multiple factors result in the creation of meaning in people’s minds, it’s not accurate to assume that there are always simple solutions to communication problems. As we’ve noted, communication is a transactive process anchored in systems theory, in which every element in the process is connected to all the other elements. Taking time to clearly express a message and then having someone listen and accurately respond is a multifaceted, multistep process. Communication is complicated.



Watch the Video  
“Art Appreciation” at  
MyCommunicationLab

## Interpersonal Communication Is Governed by Rules

According to communication researcher Susan Shimanoff, a **rule** is a “followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts.”<sup>34</sup> The rules that help define appropriate and inappropriate communication in any given situation may be *explicit* or *implicit*. For your interpersonal communication class, explicit rules are probably spelled out in your syllabus. But your instructor has other rules that are more implicit. They are not written or verbalized, because you learned them long ago: Only one person speaks at a time, you raise your hand to be called on, you do not send text messages during class.

Interpersonal communication rules are developed by the people involved in the interaction and by the culture in which the individuals are communicating. Many times, we learn communication rules from experience, by observing and interacting with others.

British researcher Michael Argyle and his colleagues asked people to identify general rules for relationship development and maintenance and then rate their importance. The study yielded the following most important rules:<sup>35</sup>

- Respect each other’s privacy.
- Don’t reveal each other’s secrets.
- Look the other person in the eye during conversation.
- Don’t criticize the other person publicly.

*Although communication is governed by rules, it’s a myth that the rules are always clear and that one person determines the rules and can modify the meaning of a relationship.* Although rules are always present, they may not be clear to each person in the relationship. You thought it was OK to bring your dog to a casual pizza date. Your partner thought it was crude and thoughtless. It takes communication to uncover rules and expectations. Few of us learn relationship rules by copying them from a book. Most of us learn these rules from experience, through observing and interacting with family members and friends. Individuals who grow up in environments in which these rules are not observed may not know how to behave in close relationships. In addition, relationships have both implicit and explicit rules that involve more than one person in the relationship. The rules of interpersonal relationships are *mutually* defined and agreed on. Expectations and rules are continually renegotiated as the relationship unfolds. So although rules exist, they may not be clear or shared by the individuals in the relationship.

**rule** Followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts.



For many of us, friendships are vital to our personal well-being. By improving our interpersonal communication skills, we can learn how to improve our friendships.

## Interpersonal Communication Involves Both Content and Relationship Dimensions

What you say (your words) and how you say it (your tone of voice, amount of eye contact, facial expression, and posture) can reveal much about the true meaning of your message. If one of your roommates loudly and abruptly bellows, “HEY, DORK! CLEAN THIS ROOM!” and another roommate uses the same verbal message but more gently and playfully says, “Hey, dork. Clean this room,” both are communicating a message aimed at achieving the same outcome. But the two messages have different relationship cues. The shouted message suggests that roommate number one may be frustrated that the room is still full of leftovers from last night’s pizza party, whereas roommate number two’s teasing request suggests he or she may be fondly amused by your untidiness. What you say and how you say it provide information not only about content but also about the relationship you have with the other person.

**Content Message.** The **content** of a communication message consists of the information, ideas, or suggested action that the speaker wishes to share. You may think that your messages to others are primarily about content, but that’s not the whole story. You also provide clues about your relationship with others.

**Relationship Message.** The **relationship dimension** of a communication message offers cues about the emotions, attitudes, and amount of power and control the speaker feels with regard to the other person. This distinction between the content of a message (what is said) and relationship cues (how the message is expressed) explains why a printed transcript can seem to reveal quite a different meaning from a spoken message.

**Metacommunication Message.** Because messages have both content and relationship dimensions, one dimension can modify or even contradict the other dimension. Communication theorists have a word that describes how we can communicate about our communication: metacommunication. Stated in the simplest way, **metacommunication** is communication about communication, and it can be nonverbal or verbal. Accurately decoding unspoken or verbalized metamessages helps you understand what people really mean and can help you “listen between the lines” of what someone is expressing.<sup>36</sup>

You can express an idea nonverbally (for example, by smiling to communicate that you are pleased), and you can also express your positive feeling verbally (for example, by saying, “I’m happy to be here”). But sometimes your nonverbal communication can contradict your verbal message. You can say “Oh, that’s just great” and use your voice to indicate just the opposite of what the verbal content of the message means. The sarcasm communicated by the tone of your voice (a relationship cue) modifies the meaning of your verbal message (the content of your message).

In addition to nonverbal cues, which provide communication about communication, you can also use words to talk explicitly about your message. For example, when you can ask, “Is what I’m saying bothering you?” You are using a metamessage to check on how your message is being understood. Here’s another example of verbal metacommunication: “I’d like to talk with you about the way we argue.” Again, you are using communication to talk about communication. Talking about the way you talk can help clarify misunderstandings. Being aware of the metamessage, in both its verbal and its nonverbal forms, can help improve the accuracy of your interpretations of the meaning of message content, as well as enhance the quality of your relationships with others.

*Because meaning is created in the heart and mind of the communicator, it’s a myth to think that meaning resides in a word.* Given the potential for miscommunication as the content and relationship dimensions of a message create meaning, it is important to remember that the ultimate meaning for a word or expression is not in the word or gesture but within the person who creates the meaning. Being aware of the metamessage can help you better interpret a

**content** Information, ideas, or suggested actions that a speaker wishes to share.

**relationship dimension**

The implied aspect of a communication message, which conveys information about emotions, attitudes, power, and control.

**metacommunication** Verbal or nonverbal communication about communication.

message and derive meaning from it. Simply because you said something doesn't mean your partner understood you. Your vocal inflection, facial expression, or gesture may have created a different interpretation of what you intended. Meaning is in people, not in words or gestures.

## RECAP Understanding Interpersonal Communication Principles Can Help Overcome Interpersonal Myths

Principle	Myth	Reality
Interpersonal communication connects us to others.	All interpersonal relationship problems are always communication problems.	We may understand what someone means and feel connected to them, but we may still disagree with them.
Interpersonal communication is irreversible.	A message can be taken back because when information has been presented, communication has occurred.	We can't simply hit "delete" and erase communication. Communication is more than the information in a message; it creates meaning for others.
Interpersonal communication is complicated.	There are always simple solutions to all communication problems.	Because of the complicated nature of how meaning is created, there are not always simple ways to untangle communication problems. It often takes time, skill, and patience to enhance human understanding.
Interpersonal communication is governed by rules.	One person can resolve interpersonal communication problems.	The communication rules are developed <i>mutually</i> between all people in the relationship. Understanding how the rules are developed and interpreted can help minimize misunderstandings.
Interpersonal communication involves both content and relationship dimensions.	Meanings are in words and gestures.	Meanings reside within a person based on the interpretation of both the content and the relationship dimensions of a message and how the metamessage is interpreted.

## Interpersonal Communication and Technology

Can you really communicate *interpersonally* with people on a smartphone or the Internet without meeting them face to face (FtF)? Yes, of course. You probably relate to others through such media every day, to both initiate and maintain relationships. When you go on Facebook or Twitter or text friends and family members, you are using **electronically mediated communication (EMC)**. As social media expert Sherry Turkle has noted, "Those little devices in our pockets don't only change what we do, they change who we are."<sup>37</sup>

Mediated communication is not new; people have been communicating for centuries without being face to face; sending letters and other written messages to others is an age-old human way of relating to others. And even before written communication was widespread, humans used smoke signals and drum beats to communicate via long distances. What's new is that there are so many different ways of *immediately* connecting with someone, such as using a smartphone, social networking applications (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), text messages, e-mail, instant messaging, video messages on YouTube or Skype, and a host of other Internet-based ways of communicating that shift in their popularity. E-mail was once the hot new way of connecting; then came instant messaging (IM). Today, as noted in the E-Connections box, texting and connecting via Facebook or Twitter are among the most used EMC technologies.

We frequently use our technology to make and keep friends, to share information, to listen and respond to and confirm and support others.<sup>38</sup> Interpersonal communication is only a click or a keystroke away. Mediated communication relationships can be as satisfying as

### electronically mediated communication (EMC)

Communication that is not face to face, but rather is sent via a medium such as a smartphone or the Internet.

## Communication and Emotion

## The Role of Emotions in Our Relationships with Others

Your emotions and your moods play an important role in how you communicate with others.

What is emotion? How do emotions work? Precisely what causes us to experience emotions? There are various theories, but scholars don't agree on any one specific answer to each of these questions. One researcher described an emotion as a biological, cognitive, behavioral, and subjective affective reaction to an event.<sup>39</sup> A closer look at that definition suggests that an emotional reaction includes four things: biological or physiological reactions (heart rate increases, changes in breathing); cognitive responses (angry thoughts, happy thoughts); behavioral reactions to our thoughts and feelings (frowning, laughing); and subjective affective responses (either mild or strong experiences of joy, panic, anger, pleasure, and the like).<sup>40</sup>

How does an emotion differ from a mood? **Moods** are typically longer lasting than emotions, and a mood often doesn't have a single, specific, identifiable cause. You can be in a bad mood or a good mood and not know precisely why you're

feeling the way you do. Sometimes you can pinpoint what has put you in a particular mood, but it's often several things, not just one, that determine your mood.

To get an idea of the role emotions play in our relationships, consider the following general principles:

**We are more likely to discuss our emotions in an interpersonal relationship than in an impersonal relationship.** Research supports our common intuition: We are more likely to talk about our personal feelings with people we know, care about, and feel a unique relationship with (friends, lovers, and family members) than with people we don't know or don't particularly care about.<sup>41</sup>

**We express our emotions both verbally and nonverbally, yet our nonverbal messages often communicate our emotions more honestly.** We sometimes explicitly tell people how we are feeling ("I'm feeling sad," "I'm angry with you," or "I love you"). But it's often through our nonverbal behavior (facial expression, tone of voice, or body posture) that our true feelings are communicated to others.

**Our culture influences our emotional expression.** It may seem that we express our feelings of happiness, joy, or sadness spontaneously, yet there is evidence that we learn what is and is not an appropriate expression of emotion.<sup>42</sup> The culture in which we are raised has a major influence on how we learn to both express emotions and respond to emotions expressed by others. In Western cultures, for example, males are sometimes encouraged not to express emotions ("Boys don't cry"). One study found that Japanese students express fewer negative emotions than American students.<sup>43</sup>

**Emotions are contagious.** When you watch a funny movie in a crowded theatre, you are more likely to laugh when other people around you laugh. You are also more likely to cry when you see others experiencing sadness or pain. The process called **emotional contagion** occurs when we mimic the emotions of others.<sup>44</sup> So being around positive, upbeat people can have an impact on your emotions. And, in turn, your emotional expression can affect others.

face-to-face relationships; people seamlessly and easily switch from EMC to FtF context.<sup>45</sup> That's why we'll discuss electronically mediated as well as FtF interpersonal communication. Our gadgets and EMC have a major impact on our real-life relationships.

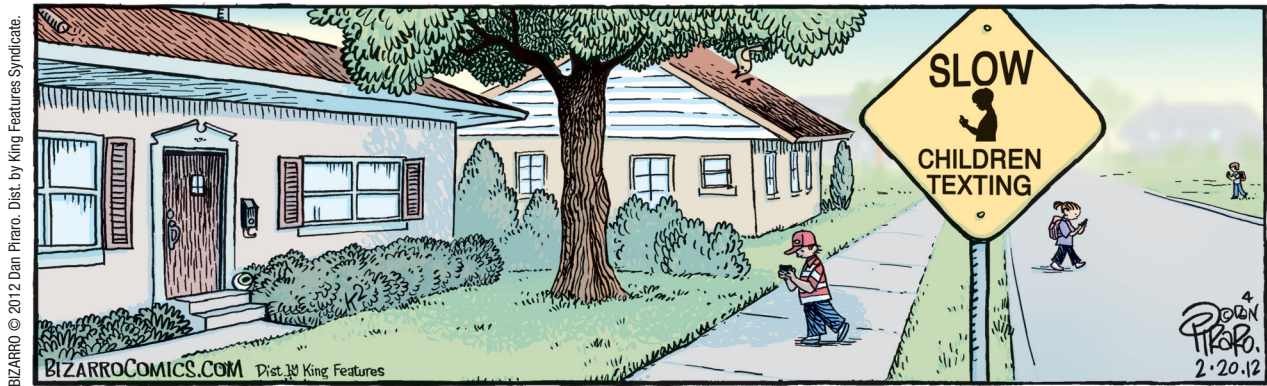
Do people who communicate online ignore other face-to-face relationships? Not according to research by social media researcher Sook Jung Lee, who found support for what he called the "Rich get richer" hypothesis: If you are already "rich" in terms of the quality of face-to-face interpersonal relationships, you will also enrich your online interpersonal relationships. Researchers have found that spending time online with friends does not necessarily result in your avoiding "real time" friends.<sup>46</sup> Another research study found similar results: Spending time on Facebook does not mean that your face-to-face interpersonal relationships suffer. Rather, your Facebook use is merely an extension of relationships, not a substitute for them.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, using EMC messages can result in relationships becoming more intimate *in less time* than they would through FtF interpersonal communication. **Hyperpersonal relationships** are relationships formed primarily through EMC that become even *more personal* than equivalent face-to-face relationships, in part because of the absence of distracting external cues (such as physical qualities), an overdependence on just a few tidbits of personal information (which increases the importance of the information), and idealization of the partner.<sup>48</sup> Hyperpersonal relationships were first identified in a study in which pairs of students who were initially strangers interacted for up to an hour in a simulated instant-messaging situation, while another group of pairs met face to face for up to fifteen minutes. Those in EMC interactions skipped the typical superficial getting-acquainted questions and

**mood** A conscious, subjective state of mind.

**emotional contagion** The process whereby people mimic the emotions of others after watching and hearing their emotional expressions.

**hyperpersonal relationship** A relationship formed primarily through electronically mediated communication that becomes more personal than an equivalent face-to-face relationship because of the absence of distracting external cues, smaller amounts of personal information, and idealization of the communication partner.



used more direct questioning and disclosure with their partners.<sup>49</sup> Online pairs engaged in more intimate probes and responses and reached a similar level of understanding and ability to predict their partners' behaviors as those in FtF interactions.

Researchers have explored questions about the type of person who is more likely to use EMC messages to initiate and maintain relationships. For example, researchers have asked whether people who spend a lot of time online generally have more or less personal contact with other people. A team of researchers led by Robert Kraut and Sara Kiesler made headlines when they published the results of their study, which concluded that the more people use the Internet, the less they will interact with others in person.<sup>50</sup> The researchers also found a correlation between claims of loneliness and Internet use. But other research contradicts this finding: Two follow-up studies found that people who use the Internet are more likely to have a greater number of friends, are more involved with community activities, and overall have greater levels of trust in other people. The most recent research seems to suggest that for some people—those who are already prone to being shy or introverted—there may be a link between Internet use and loneliness or feelings of social isolation. However, their isolation may not be the result of their use of the Internet, but simply because they are naturally less likely to make contact with others.<sup>51</sup> For those who are generally outgoing and who like to interact with others, the Internet is just another tool to reach out and make contact. If you're shy in person, you also may be less likely to tweet or IM; however, there is some evidence that shy or introverted people may be more comfortable using instant messaging.<sup>52</sup>

A comprehensive study that investigated whether instant messages and text messages are more like speech or writing concluded that instant messages contain elements of both, but nonetheless differ from speech in grammar, style, syntax, and other language factors. Text messages are more like writing than they are like spoken messages. There are also gender differences: Women's text and instant messages use more words, longer sentences, and more emoticons, and they discuss and include more social and relational information than men's messages.<sup>53</sup>

## Differences Between EMC and FtF Communication

How is electronically mediated interpersonal communication different from live, face-to-face conversations? There are six key differences, which have to do with (1) time, (2) varying degrees of anonymity, (3) potential for deception, (4) availability of nonverbal cues, (5) role of the written word, and (6) distance.<sup>54</sup>

**Time.** When you interact with others using EMC, you can do so asynchronously. **Asynchronous messages** are not read, heard, or seen at the same time they are sent; there is a time delay between when you send such a message and when someone else receives it. A text message sent to a friend's phone or to someone who is not monitoring Facebook or a voicemail message are examples of asynchronous messages.

**Synchronous messages** are sent and received instantly and simultaneously. Face-to-face conversations are synchronous—there is no time delay between when you send a message

### asynchronous message

A message that is not read, heard, or seen exactly when it is sent; there is a time delay between the sending of the message and its receipt.

### synchronous message

A message that is sent and received simultaneously.

and when the other person receives it. A live video conference or a phone conversation are other examples of synchronous messages. New research is helping us understand phone etiquette. One study has developed a scale to measure what the research calls “mobile communication competence.” Research confirms what you’d expect: We don’t like to overhear loud, personal conversations. And the time and place of phone conversations are important variables that help determine whether we are using the phone competently or annoyingly.<sup>55</sup>

The more synchronous an interaction, the more similar it is to face-to-face interactions. The more a technology simulates a face-to-face conversation, the more social presence it creates. **Social presence** is the feeling we have when we act and think as if we’re involved in an unmediated, FtF conversation. Technically, there is always some delay in sending and receiving messages (even in FtF interactions, sound takes time to travel). The key distinction among different forms of EMC and the degree of social presence we experience is whether we *feel* we are in a synchronous interaction. When we send text messages back and forth, or instant message, we create a shared sense of social or psychological co-presence with our partners. Receiving a tweet from a friend letting us know what he or she is doing at that moment gives us the feeling of being instantly connected to that person.

Another time difference between EMC and FtF messages is that it takes longer to tap out a typewritten message than to speak or to convey a nonverbal message. The amount of delay (which corresponds to silence in FtF interactions) can have an impact on the interpretation of a message’s meaning. When texting, participants may expect to see a response to their message very quickly. This is one reason text messages are often very short and concise. (Another reason is that it can be tricky to type on smaller keyboards with your thumbs—although some people are quite adept at using tiny keyboards.) A rapid succession of short messages fosters a sense of synchronicity and social presence.

Texting someone (as well as sending e-mail, instant messages, and tweets) allows you time to compose your message and craft it more carefully than you might in an FtF interaction. As a sender of text messages, you have more control over what you say and the impression you create; as the receiver of Internet messages, you no doubt realize that the other person has had the chance to shape his or her message carefully for its greatest impact on you.

**Varying Degrees of Anonymity.** Maybe you’ve seen the cartoon of a mutt sitting at a computer and saying to his companion, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” The cartoon canine communicator has a point: You may not always know precisely with whom you are communicating when you receive an e-mail message or are “friended” or “poked” by someone you don’t know. When you are friending someone on Facebook, that person may not know precisely who you are. (One study found seventeen Karl Marxes, seven Kermit the Frogs, four Anne Boleyns, and three people named Socrates of Athens who had Facebook pages.)<sup>56</sup> Because you can be anonymous, you may say things that are bolder, more honest, or even more outrageous than you would if your audience knew who you were. And being anonymous may also tempt you to say things that aren’t true. Yet many of the EMC messages you send and receive are from people you know. So there are varying degrees of anonymity, depending on the technology that you are using and the honesty between you and your communication partners.

**Potential for Deception.** Because with many forms of EMC you can’t see or hear others, it’s easy to lie. Here’s evidence that people are deceptive when using EMC: 81 percent of people lied about their height, weight, or age in a dating profile.<sup>57</sup>

Online deception is almost as easy as typing. We say “almost,” because you *can* assess the content of a written message for clues to deceit. In a study by Katherine Cornetto, college student respondents reported the most common indicator of deception was someone’s making an implausible statement or bragging.<sup>58</sup> As friendships develop over the Internet, to detect deception, people come to depend on personal knowledge and impressions of their

**social presence** The feeling that communicators have of engaging in unmediated, face-to-face interactions even though messages are being sent electronically.

partners acquired over the course of their correspondence.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Cornetto's study found that those who reported lying frequently were most likely to suspect others of lying.<sup>60</sup> The ease with which someone can create a false persona means that you need to be cautious in forming relationships with strangers over the Internet.

One researcher suggests looking for these top lying cues when reading online profiles:<sup>61</sup>

1. Liars often use fewer first-person pronouns (such as *I* or *me*).
2. Liars are more likely to use more negative terms like “not” and “never.”
3. Liars use fewer negative emotions words such as “sad” and “upset.”
4. Liars write briefer online personal essays. The authors of the study suggested that it's easier not to get caught lying if you use fewer words.<sup>62</sup>

**Nonverbal Cues.** Words and graphics become more important in EMC than in FtF interactions, because when communicating electronically, you must rely solely on words to carry nonverbal messages. Of course, a YouTube or Skype video does include nonverbal messages, but even when using video some cues may be limited, such as the surrounding context and reactions from others.

There are some basic things text users do to add emotion to their messages, including CAPITALIZING THE MESSAGE (which is considered “yelling”), making letters **bold**, and inserting emoticons—a smiley face :-), a frowning face with glasses 8-(, and so on. In FtF communication, we laugh and smile in direct response to what we or others are saying. In the EMC context, we use emoticons to provide emotional punctuation in our written messages. There are predictable places where we place a smiley face or a frowning face to underscore something we've just written.<sup>63</sup> The ability to tease or make sarcastic remarks is limited with EMC, because there is no tone of voice in the written message—so emoticons must provide information about the intended emotional tone of what is written. You can also write out an accompanying interpretation—for example, “Boy, am I insulted by that! (just kidding)” to compensate for the limited emotional cues.

There is also typically less emphasis on a person's physical appearance online than in FtF situations, unless you're using Facebook, Skype, or other video messages. In those forums, not only does your appearance as depicted in your photos help determine how others react to you, but one study found that the physical attractiveness or unattractiveness of your “friends” rubs off on you. If you have Facebook friends who are perceived as attractive, you will be perceived as more popular and attractive.<sup>64</sup>

**Role of the Written Word.** The reliance on the written word also affects EMC interactions. One scholar suggests that a person's typing ability and writing skills affect the quality of any relationship that is developed.<sup>65</sup> Not everyone is able to encode thoughts quickly and accurately into written words. Writing skills not only affect your ability to express yourself and manage relationships, they also affect how others perceive you. Your written messages provide insights to others about your personality, skills, sense of humor, and even your values. Consider the following two text messages and think about the impressions you form of the two authors.

Parr: “Hey, babe, whaddup? no what im thinking now we shuld do?”

Chuck: “Hello, Ashley. I have been thinking about some options for our evening's entertainment.”



People use electronically mediated communication (EMC) to share information that ranges from the dramatic to the routine. EMC can create a shared sense of social or psychological presence between two people, giving them the feeling of being instantly connected to each other.

What's your impression of the two texters? What affected your impression? The first example is filled with grammar and spelling shortcuts that might create a negative impression because the author is not particularly skilled at writing—or, just the opposite, you might have a positive reaction because you think the author is cool and contemporary. The second author uses correct grammar and spelling, which may produce a positive impression, yet (because text messages are typically brief and casual) you may think author number two is a nerd, or at least older and more traditional. You communicate a message about the nature of a relationship based on the formality or informality of your language and whether your style reflects what the receiver expects.

**Distance.** Although we certainly can and do send text messages to people who live and work in the same building we're in (or even the same room), there is typically greater physical distance between people who are communicating using EMC. When using the Internet or a smartphone, we can just as easily send a text or a video message to someone on the other side of the globe as we can to someone on the other side of the room.

## Understanding EMC

We've noted that EMC messages have both similarities to and differences from FtF messages. Which theories and models of electronically mediated messages help us understand how relationships are developed and make predictions about how we will use EMC messages?

The communication models that we've presented (communication as action, interaction, and transaction) are certainly applicable to EMC. There are times when EMC is like the action model of communication. You post a message on a message board, blog, or Facebook wall and you get no immediate response from others. The communication is asynchronous—there's a time delay, so you're not really sure you've communicated with anyone. During some e-mail or text-message exchanges, your communication is more like the communication-as-interaction model; you send a text message and you wait for the response. There's a time delay, but sooner or later you get a response. And then there are instances when you can see and hear the other person simultaneously, such as in a live conversation with someone via a webcam—which is a synchronous interaction. In this instance the EMC resembles the transactional communication model, in that communicating this way is almost like being there in person because of the immediacy of the communication. Three theories have been developed to further explain and predict how EMC works.

**Cues-Filtered-Out Theory.** One early theory of communication via the Internet was called **cues-filtered-out theory**. This theory suggested that emotional expression is severely restricted when we communicate using only text messages; nonverbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice are filtered out. The assumption was that text messages were best used for brief, task-oriented communication, such as sharing information or asking questions; text messages were assumed to be less effective in helping people establish meaningful relationships.<sup>66</sup> The cues-filtered-out-theory also suggests that because of the lack of nonverbal cues and other social information, we'll be less likely to use EMC to manage relationships because of its limited ability to carry emotional and relational information. Although a venue like Facebook presents photos and ample personal information, communication through those forums is still not as rich as an FtF conversation.

### cues-filtered-out theory

Theory that suggests that communication of emotions is restricted when people send messages to others via text messages because nonverbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice are filtered out.

**Media Richness Theory.** Another theory helps us make predictions about which form of media we will use to send certain kinds of messages. We use different types of media depending on the richness of a medium—whether it allows us to express emotions and relational

**FIGURE 5****A Continuum of Communication-Rich and Communication-Lean Channels**

Adapted from L. K. Trevino, R. L. Draft, and R. H. Lengel, "Understanding Managers' Media Choices: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective." In *Organizations and Communication Technology*, edited by J. Fulk and C. Steinfield (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990), 71–94. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

messages as well as send information. **Media richness theory** suggests that the richness of a communication channel is based on four criteria: (1) the amount of feedback that the communicator can receive, (2) the number of cues that the channel can convey and that can be interpreted by a receiver, (3) the variety of language that a communicator uses, and (4) the potential for expressing emotions and feelings.<sup>67</sup> Using these four criteria, researchers have developed a continuum of communication channels, from communication-rich to communication-lean. Figure 5 illustrates this continuum.

There is some evidence that those wishing to communicate a negative message, such as a message ending a relationship, may select a less rich communication medium—they may be more likely to send a letter or an e-mail rather than sharing the bad news face to face.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, people usually want to share good news in person, when they can enjoy the positive reaction to the message.

Both the cues-filtered-out theory and media richness theory suggest that the restriction of nonverbal cues, which provide information about the nature of the relationship between communicators, hampers the quality of relationships that can be established using EMC. But a newer perspective suggests that although EMC may communicate fewer relational cues, eventually we are able to discern relational information.

**Social Information-Processing Theory.** **Social information-processing theory** suggests that we *can* communicate relational and emotional messages via the Internet, *but it may take longer* to express messages that are typically communicated with facial expressions and tone of voice. A key difference between face-to-face and electronically mediated communication is the *rate* at which information reaches you. During an in-person conversation,

**media richness theory** Theory that identifies the richness of a communication medium based on the amount of feedback it allows, the number of cues receivers can interpret, the variety of language it allows, and the potential for emotional expression.

**social information-processing theory** Theory that suggests people can communicate relational and emotional messages via the Internet, although such messages take longer to express without nonverbal cues.

you process a lot of information quickly; you process the words you hear as well as the many nonverbal cues you see (facial expression, gestures, and body posture) and hear (tone of voice and the use of pauses). During text-only interactions, there is less information to process (no audio cues or visual nonverbal cues), so it takes a bit longer for the relationship to develop—but it does develop as you learn more about your partner’s likes, dislikes, and feelings.

Social information-processing theory also suggests that if you expect to communicate with your electronic communication partner again, you will likely pay more attention to the relationship cues—expressions of emotions that are communicated directly (as when someone writes “I’m feeling bored today”) or indirectly (as when an e-mail recipient responds to your long, chatty e-mail with only a sentence, which suggests he or she may not want to spend much time “talking” today).

In one study that supported social information-processing theory, communication researchers Joseph Walther and Judee Burgoon found that the kinds of relationships that developed between people who met face to face differed little from those between people who had computer-mediated interactions.<sup>69</sup> The general stages and patterns of communication were evident in both face-to-face and e-mail relationships. But over time, the researchers found that the electronically mediated communication actually developed into *more* socially rich relationships than face-to-face communication did. This finding reinforces the hypothesis that relationship cues *are* present in computer-mediated communication. It also supports the notion that we develop hyperpersonal relationships via EMC. So even though it may take more time for relationships to develop online, they can indeed develop and can be just as satisfying as relationships nurtured through face-to-face conversation.

Research suggests that when using EMC, we ask questions and interact with others to enhance the quality of our relationship with them. A study by W. Scott Sanders found that people who communicated via Facebook enhanced the nature of the relationship and reduced their uncertainty about others by asking questions based on information that was already present on the other person’s Facebook page.<sup>70</sup> Lisa Tidwell and Joseph Walther found that people in computer-mediated conversations asked more direct questions, which resulted in respondents’ revealing more information about themselves when online.<sup>71</sup>

Electronically mediated communication makes it possible for people to develop interpersonal relationships with others, whether they are miles away or in the next room. Walther and Tidwell use the “information superhighway” metaphor to suggest that EMC is not just a road for moving data from one place to another, but also a boulevard where people pass each other, occasionally meet, and decide to travel together. You can’t see very much of other drivers unless you do travel together for some time. There are highway bandits, to be sure, who are not what they appear to be—one must drive defensively—and there are conflicts and disagreements when traveling, just as there are in “off-road,” or face-to-face, interactions.<sup>72</sup>



Listen to “Technology and Interpersonal Communication” at **MyCommunicationLab**

## RECAP Theories of Electronically Mediated Communication

Theory	Description
Cues-Filtered-Out Theory	The communication of emotion and relationship cues is restricted in e-mail or text messages because nonverbal cues, such as facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice, are filtered out.
Media Richness Theory	The richness or amount of information a communication medium has is based on the amount of feedback it permits, the number of cues in the channel, the variety of language used, and the potential for expressing emotions.
Social Information-Processing Theory	Emotional and relationship messages can be expressed via electronic means, although such messages take longer to be communicated without the immediacy of nonverbal cues.

## E-CONNECTIONS Relating to Others

### Always On

The title of a book by Naomi Baron summarizes the impact of EMC on our lives: *Always On*.<sup>73</sup> Most of us are constantly connected to others via some electronic means.

**We're online.** In 2012, almost 80 percent of Americans actively used the Internet (compared to just under 36 percent of people from China).<sup>74</sup>

**We're socially networked.** Also in 2012, a tenth of the world population had a Facebook account.<sup>75</sup> In the Twitterverse, people are increasingly sending more tweets. A survey reported in 2011, for example, found that people ages 12 to 17 doubled the number of tweets the same age group sent just two years earlier. The research found that 16 percent of adolescents tweeted, compared with just 8 percent in the previous two years. Just over 20 percent of people age 29 have tweeted, which also suggests a growing trend.<sup>76</sup>

**We take our phones with us everywhere—and love texting.** More people in the United States have mobile phones than land lines.<sup>77</sup> In fact, more than 85 percent of Americans own a cell phone and almost half of those are smartphones that put the Internet, including streaming video, at our fingertips.<sup>78</sup> Texting may now be the most popular means of one-on-one communication with others who are not physically present. We've dramatically increased our use of text messages. You may even feel anxious if you're not receiving an e-bushel basket full of them, like the author of this poem:

Nobody is txtng me  
Im troubl'd & im stress'd  
Wen no one even thinks of me  
It makes me feel dpress'd<sup>79</sup>

In 2006, Americans sent 158 billion text messages, double the number sent in 2005.<sup>80</sup> By 2008, Americans sent more text messages than phone messages.<sup>81</sup> With only 2.7 percent of people over the age of 67 sending a text message a day, most texts are coming from younger communicators.<sup>82</sup> One study found that

80 percent of people under 25 tended to text rather than phone a friend and leave a short message.<sup>83</sup>

Texting is a worldwide practice, in part because in most countries it's much cheaper to text than to call someone on the phone. According to Cheil Communications, in 2006, over 93 percent of teenagers in Britain between the ages of 17 and 19 sent or received at least one text message per day.<sup>84</sup> That number is even higher today. In Norway, even just a few years ago, more than 85 percent of teens and young adults (up to about age 25) sent text messages every day.<sup>85</sup> Faye Siyangco, a sales representative from the Philippines, said she wasn't surprised to see people bowing their heads at a funeral for a friend's father. But she was shocked when she realized they weren't bowing in prayer, but were texting their friends. According to contemporary Philippine custom, texting while something else important is going on is not a breach of etiquette; it's just what people do now.<sup>86</sup>

Why are so many people, especially young people, communicating via text messages? If you frequently send text messages, you can answer the question yourself: It's fast, cheap, easy, and always available. There's no need to open a laptop or be near a computer. You don't have to worry about playing "telephone tag"—the recipient will read and respond to your message when he or she has time. And there's no need for small talk—text messaging lends itself to getting to the point.

Here's one set of text etiquette rules that have been posted on the Internet.<sup>87</sup>

Don't text when you're with someone else, without apologizing.

Don't text if you've had too much to drink.

Don't text while driving.

Don't say anything in text you wouldn't say in person.

Don't send bad news by text.

Norman Silver wrote ten "txt commandments" that humorously summarize the power and influence of text messages in his life:

U shall luv ur mobil fone with all ur hart.

U & ur fone shall neva b apart.

U shall nt lust afr ur neibr's fone nor thiev.

U shall be prepar'd @ al times 2 tXt & 2 recv.

U shall use LOL & othr acronyms in conversatns.

U shall be zappy with ur ast\*r\*sks & exclmatns!!

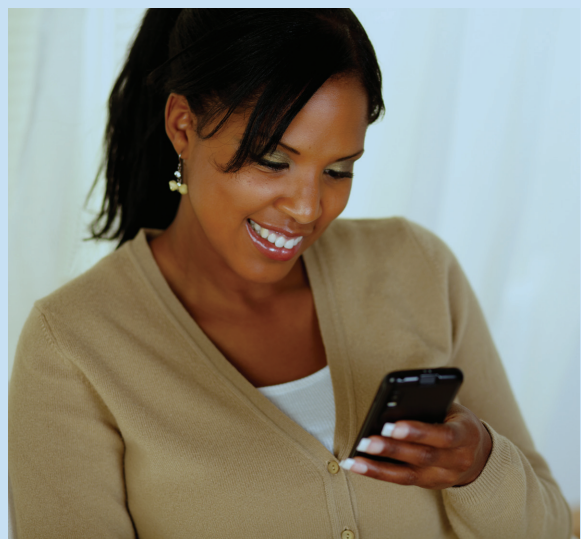
U shall abbrevi8 & rite words like thyr sed.

U shall nt speak 2 sum 1 face2face if u cn msg em insted.

U shall nt shout with capitts XEPT IN DIRE EMERGENCY.

U shall nt consult a nenglish dictnry.<sup>88</sup>

But don't forget the joys of having a good face-to-face conversation with someone now and then.



## Interpersonal Communication Competence



Listen to “Become a More Competent Communicator” at MyCommunicationLab

Now that we have previewed the study of interpersonal communication, you may be saying to yourself, “Well, that’s all well and good, but is it possible to improve my own interpersonal communication? Aren’t some people just born with better interpersonal skills than others?” Just as some people have more musical talent or greater skill at throwing a football, evidence does suggest that some people may have an inborn, biological talent for communicating with others.<sup>89</sup>

To be a competent communicator is to express messages that are perceived to be both *effective* and *appropriate*.<sup>90</sup> You communicate effectively when your message is understood by others and achieves its intended effect. For example, if you want your roommate to stop using your hair dryer, and after you talk to him, he stops using your hair dryer, your message has been effective.

Competent communication should also be appropriate. By *appropriate*, we mean that the communicator should consider the time, place, and overall context of the message and should be sensitive to the feelings and attitudes of the listener. Who determines what is appropriate? Communication scholar Mary Jane Collier suggests that competence is a concept based on privilege; to label someone as competent means that another person has made a judgment as to what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Collier asks the following questions: “. . . competence and acceptance for whom? Who decides the criteria? Who doesn’t? Competent or acceptable on the basis of what social and historical context?”<sup>91</sup> Collier points out that we have to be careful not to insist on one approach (our own approach) to interpersonal communication competence. *There is no single best way to communicate with others.* There are, however, avenues that can help you become both more effective and more appropriate when communicating with others.<sup>92</sup> We suggest a two-part strategy for becoming a more competent communicator. First, competent communicators are knowledgeable, skilled, and motivated.<sup>93</sup> Second, they draw on their knowledge, skill, and motivation to become other-oriented.

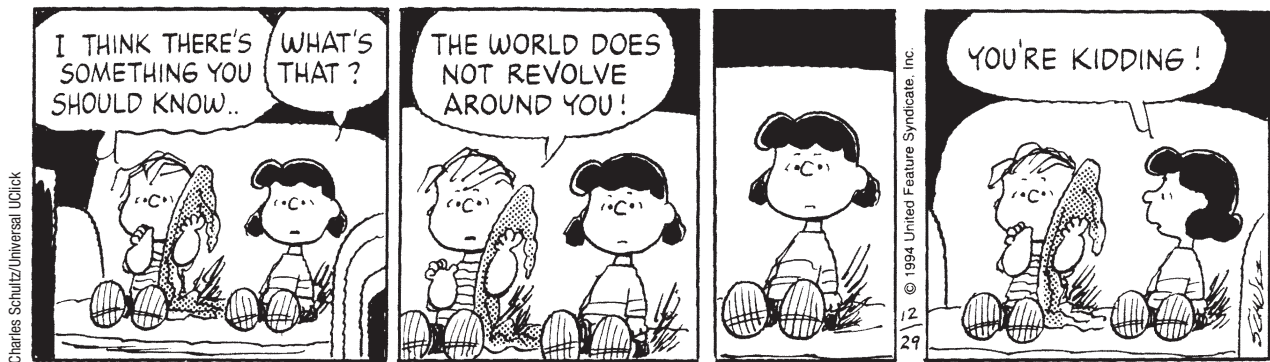
### Become Knowledgeable, Skilled, and Motivated

**Become Knowledgeable.** you have already begun improving your interpersonal communication competence. Effective communicators are knowledgeable. They know how communication works. They understand the components, principles, and rules of the communication process.

Understanding these things is a necessary prerequisite for enhancing your interpersonal effectiveness, but this kind of knowledge alone does not make you an effective communicator. You would not let someone fix your car’s carburetor if he or she had only read a book. Knowledge must be coupled with skill. And we acquire skill through practice.

**Become Skilled.** Effective communicators know how to translate knowledge into action.<sup>94</sup> You can memorize the characteristics of a good listener but still not listen well. To develop skill requires practice and helpful feedback from others who can confirm the appropriateness of your actions.<sup>95</sup>

It has been suggested that learning a social skill is not much different from learning how to drive a car or operate a computer.<sup>96</sup> To learn any skill, you must break it down into subskills that you can learn and practice. “Hear it, see it, do it, correct it” is the formula that seems to work best for learning any new behaviors. We examine the elements of complex skills (such as listening), offer activities that let you practice the skills, and provide opportunities for you to receive feedback and correct your application of the skills.<sup>97</sup>



**Become Motivated.** Practicing skills requires work. You need to be motivated to use your knowledge and skill. You must want to improve, and you must have a genuine desire to connect with others if you wish to become a competent communicator. You may know people who understand how to drive a car and have the skill to drive, yet hesitate to get behind the wheel. Or maybe you know someone who took a course in public speaking but is reluctant to stand in front of a crowd. Similarly, someone may pass a test about interpersonal communication principles with flying colors, but unless that person is motivated to use those newfound skills, his or her interactions with others may not improve.

### Become Other-Oriented

It's not always about you. Lucy Van Pelt, in the Peanuts cartoon above, seems startled to learn that the world does not revolve around her. Perhaps you know someone like Lucy. Sometimes we may need someone like Linus to remind us that we're not the center of the universe. The signature concept for our study of interpersonal communication is the goal of becoming other-oriented in relationships. As noted earlier, to be an other-oriented communicator is to consider the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners, while still maintaining your own integrity. The choices we make in forming our messages, in deciding how best to express those messages, and in deciding when and where to deliver those messages will be made more effectively when we consider the other person's thoughts and feelings.

Being other-oriented involves a conscious effort to consider the world from the point of view of those with whom you interact.<sup>98</sup> This effort occurs almost automatically when you are communicating with those you like or who are similar to you. Thinking about the thoughts and feelings of those you dislike or who are different from you is more difficult and requires more effort and commitment.

Sometimes, we are **egocentric communicators**; we create messages without giving much thought to the person who is listening. To be egocentric is to be self-focused and self-absorbed. Scholars of evolution might argue that our tendency to look out for Number One ensures the continuation of the human species and is therefore a good thing.<sup>99</sup> Yet, it is difficult to communicate effectively when we focus exclusively on ourselves. Research suggests that being egocentric is detrimental to developing healthy relationships with others.<sup>100</sup> If we fail to adapt our message to our listener, we may not be successful in achieving our intended communication goal. Other people can often perceive whether we're self-focused or other-oriented (especially if the person we're talking with is a sensitive, other-oriented communicator).

Are people more self-focused today than in the past? Sociologist Jean Twenge suggests that people today are increasingly more narcissistic (self-focused) than they have been in previous generations—she dubs today's narcissistic generation the “me generation.” Her research

#### BEING Other-ORIENTED

Being other-oriented means focusing on the interests, needs, and goals of another person. Think about a person who is important to you—it could be a family member, close friend, lover, or colleague. Consider the other-oriented nature of the relationship you have with this person. Are there specific things you say, gifts you have given, or activities that you do with this person that demonstrate your focus on *his* or *her* interests, needs, and desires? What things does this person do that reflect his or her other-orientation toward you?

#### egocentric communicator

Person who creates messages without giving much thought to the person who is listening; a communicator who is self-focused and self-absorbed.

## Developing Your Skills

## Practice Being Other-Oriented

At the heart of our study of interpersonal communication is the principle of becoming other-oriented. To be other-oriented means that you are aware of others' thoughts, feelings, goals, and needs and respond appropriately in ways that offer personal support. It does not mean that you abandon your own needs and interests or that you diminish your self-respect. To have integrity is to behave in a thoughtful, integrated way toward others while being true to your core beliefs and values. To be other-oriented is to have integrity; you don't just agree with others or give in to the demands of others in encounters with them.

Do you know a sycophant? A *sycophant* is a person who praises others only to manipulate emotions so that his or her needs are met. Sycophants may look as though they are focused on others, but their behavior is merely self-serving. A sycophant is not other-oriented. A person who is truly other-oriented is aware of the thoughts, feelings, and needs of others and then mindfully and honestly chooses to respond to those needs. To enhance your other-oriented awareness and skill takes practice. Throughout the text, we offer both principles and opportunities to practice the skill and mindset of being other-oriented.

To develop an awareness of being other-oriented with a communication partner, role-play the following interpersonal situations

in two ways. First, role-play the scene as a communicator who is not other-oriented but rather self-focused. Then re-enact the same scene as a communicator who is other-oriented—someone who considers the thoughts and feelings of the other person while maintaining his or her own integrity.

### Suggested situations:

- Return a broken DVD player to a department store salesperson.
- Correct a grocery store cashier who has scanned an item at the wrong price.
- Meet with a teacher who gave your son or daughter a failing grade.
- Ask your professor for a one-day extension on a paper that is due tomorrow.
- Ask someone for a donation to a worthy cause.
- Ask a professor for permission to get into a class that has reached its maximum enrollment.
- Accept an unappealing book as a gift from a friend.
- Remind your son or daughter that he or she needs to practice the cello.

found that “in the early 1950s, only 12 percent of teens aged 14 to 16 agreed with the statement ‘I am an important person.’ By the late 1980s, an incredible 80 percent—almost seven times as many—claimed they were important.”<sup>101</sup> Twenge and two of her colleagues found evidence for an increased self-focus among students in the twenty-first century.<sup>102</sup>

We may find ourselves speaking without considering the thoughts and feelings of our listener when we have a need to purge ourselves emotionally or to confirm our sense of self-importance, but doing so usually undermines our relationships with others. A self-focused communicator often alienates others. Research suggests that fortunately, almost by necessity, we adapt to our partner in order to carry on a conversation.<sup>103</sup>

How do you become other-oriented? Being other-oriented is really a collection of skills rather than a single skill. This collection of essential communication skills includes being self-aware, being aware of others, using and interpreting verbal messages, using and interpreting nonverbal messages, and listening and responding to others.<sup>104</sup> Being empathic—able to experience the feelings and emotions of others—is especially important in becoming other-oriented. After listening to and empathizing with others, someone who is other-oriented is able to appropriately adapt messages to them.

To appropriately adapt messages to others is to be flexible. We do not identify tidy lists of sure-fire strategies that you can always use to win friends and influence people. The same set of skills is not effective in every situation, so other-oriented communicators do not assume that “one size fits all.” Rather, they assess each unique situation and adapt their behavior to achieve the desired outcome. Adaptation includes such things as simply asking questions in response to a communication partner's disclosures, finding topics of mutual interest to discuss, selecting words and examples that are meaningful to our partner, and avoiding topics that we don't feel comfortable discussing with another person. Adapting messages to others does *not* mean that we tell them only what they want to hear; that would be unethical.

Other-oriented communicators are ethical. **Ethics** are the beliefs, values, and moral principles by which we determine what is right or wrong. To be an ethical communicator means to be sensitive to the needs of others, to give people choices rather than forcing them to act a certain way. Unethical communicators believe that they know what other people need, even without asking them for their preferences. Being manipulative and forcing opinions on others usually results in a climate of defensiveness. Effective communicators seek to establish trust and reduce interpersonal barriers, rather than erect them. Ethical communicators keep confidences; they keep private information that others wish to be kept private. They also do not intentionally decrease others' feelings of self-worth. Another key element in being an ethical communicator is honesty. If you intentionally lie or distort the truth, then you are not communicating ethically or effectively. Ethical communicators also don't tell people only what they want to hear. In our Study Guide section, we pose ethical questions to help you explore the ethics of interpersonal relationships.

In addition to appropriately and ethically adapting to others, being other-oriented includes developing positive, healthy attitudes about yourself and others. In 1951, Carl Rogers wrote a pioneering book called *Client-Centered Therapy*, which transformed the field of psychotherapy. In it, Rogers explains how genuine positive regard for another person and an open supportive communication climate lay the foundation for trusting relationships. But Rogers did not invent the concept of developing a positive, healthy regard for others. The core principles of every religion and faith movement in the last 5000 years include a focus on the needs of others. Our purpose is certainly not to promote a specific religion or set of spiritual beliefs. What we suggest is that becoming other-oriented, as evidenced through knowledge, skill, and motivation, can enhance your interpersonal communication competence and the quality of your life.

**ethics** The beliefs, values, and moral principles by which a person determines what is right or wrong.

## APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Being a Competent Interpersonal Communicator

To be a competent interpersonal communicator is to be an other-oriented communicator—to focus on the needs, interests, values, and behaviors of others while being true to your own principles and ethical credo. We've previewed some of the knowledge, provided a rationale for being motivated to master interpersonal competencies, and offered a glimpse of the skills that enhance an other-orientation.

**Knowledge.** When you view communication as a transactive process rather than as a simplistic action or even an interactive process, you gain realistic insight into the challenge of communicating with others and the potential for misunderstandings. Knowing the messiness and

dynamic nature of communication, as well as the various components of the process (source, message, channel, receiver, context, and feedback) can help you better diagnose communication issues in your own relationships and improve your ability to accurately decode the messages of others.

**Motivation.** Why learn how to be other-oriented? As we've noted, learning about interpersonal communication has the potential to enhance both the quality of your relationships with others and your health. Developing your skill and knowledge of interpersonal communication can enhance your confidence to improve your relationships with family members, friends, lovers, and colleagues.

**Skill.** To be competently other-oriented takes more than knowledge of the elements and nature of communication (although that's a good start), and more than a strong motivation to enhance your abilities. It takes skill. As you begin your study of interpersonal communication, you will learn how to listen, respond, use, and interpret verbal messages, express and interpret emotional meanings of messages, more accurately use and interpret nonverbal messages, manage conflict, and adapt to human differences. To be other-oriented is to have the knowledge, nurture the motivation, and develop the skill to relate to others in effective and ethical ways.

## Interpersonal Communication Defined

**OBJECTIVE 1** Compare and contrast the definitions of communication, human communication, and interpersonal communication.

Human communication is at the core of our existence, in our daily interactions and the relationships we develop. Our communication can be viewed as a continuum, with impersonal communication on one end, which treats people as objects (“I–It”), and interpersonal communication (“I–Thou”) on the other, through which you interact with others as unique individuals.

### Key Terms

other-oriented communication	mass communication
human communication	public communication
interpersonal communication	small group communication
impersonal communication	intrapersonal communication
	relationship

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Draw a relationship scale on a piece of paper, and label it “impersonal” at one end and “intimate” at the other. Place your family members, friends, and work colleagues on the scale. Why do some fall toward the “impersonal” end? What makes those relationships less personal than others? Discuss and compare your entries with those of classmates.

### Assessing Your Skills

1. Briefly describe a recent interpersonal communication exchange that was *not* effective. Analyze the exchange. Write down some of the dialogue if you remember it. Did the other person understand you? Did your communication have the intended effect? Was your message ethical?
2. At this time, how would you rate your overall interpersonal communication skill on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high and 1 being low? At the end of the course, make another assessment of your interpersonal communication skill and compare the result.

## Interpersonal Communication's Importance to Your Life

**OBJECTIVE 2** Explain why it is useful to study interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication touches every aspect of our lives and is vital in developing and improving relationships with family, loved ones, friends, and colleagues, as well as contributing to our physical and emotional well-being.

### Critical Thinking Questions

Think of an example in which interpersonal communication was not a satisfying and positive experience between you and a family member, friend, lover, or colleague. How did the relationship suffer? What could you have done to improve the situation? After completing the course, answer the question again to see if you have new options for enhancing your interpersonal communication skill.

### Assessing Your Skills

Select five people from your family or identify friends that you have known for a long time. Draw a line graph charting the quality of your relationship with these five people for the past five years (the line goes up when you've had a positive relationship and down when the relationship has been less positive from your perspective). Use the current month to note the yearly benchmark for overall quality of the relationship. Identify the factors and experiences that influence you to rate a relationship as positive and/or negative for each relationship.

## Interpersonal Communication and the Communication Process

**OBJECTIVE 3** Describe the key components of the communication process including communication as action, interaction, and transaction.

Interpersonal communication is a complex process of creating meaning in messages in the context of an interpersonal relationship. In order to understand this process, various perspectives and models have been developed over the years. Human communication as action is the oldest and most basic model, describing communication as a linear input/output process of transferring meaning from sender to receiver. Newer communication models include communication as interaction, which includes feedback as a crucial element in the communication process, and human communication as transaction, based on systems theory, which views source and receiver as experiencing the communication simultaneously.

### Key Terms

source	noise
encode	feedback
decode	context
message	systems theory
channel	episode
receiver	

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. What makes interpersonal communication a complex process? Explain, drawing on some of your own everyday communication exchanges.

2. Think of some recent interpersonal communication exchanges you've had. Which communication model best captures the nature of each exchange? Analyze each exchange, identifying the components of communication. Was feedback an important component? Were you and your partner experiencing the communication simultaneously? What was the context? What were sources of internal and external noise? Did you or your partner have problems encoding or decoding each other's messages?

### Assessing Your Skills

Working with a group of your classmates or individually, develop your own model of interpersonal communication. Include all of the components that are necessary to describe how communication between people works. Your model could be a drawing or an object that symbolizes the communication process. Share your model with the class, describing the decisions you made in developing it. Illustrate your model with a conversation between two people, pointing out how elements of the conversation relate to the model.

### Interpersonal Communication Principles

**OBJECTIVE 4** Discuss five principles of interpersonal communication.

Five fundamental principles help explain interpersonal communication and enhance our understanding of how it works:

- Interpersonal communication connects us to others.
- Interpersonal communication is irreversible.
- Interpersonal communication is complicated.
- Interpersonal communication is governed by rules.
- Interpersonal communication involves both content and relational dimensions.

Each principle has a corollary myth associated with it.

### Key Terms

symbol	metacommunication
rule	mood
content	emotional contagion
relationship dimension	

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. What rules govern your relationship with your mother? Your father? Your communication teacher? Your roommate? Your coach? Your spouse? Your siblings?
2. Ethics: Your parents want you to visit them for the holidays. You would rather spend the time with a friend. You don't want to hurt your parents' feelings, so you tell them that

you are working on an important project and you won't be able to come home for the holidays. Your message is understood. It achieves the intended effect: Your parents don't seem to have hurt feelings, and you don't go home. Explain whether your message is ethical or unethical.

### Assessing Your Skills

1. The RECAP box summarizes the principles of and myths about interpersonal communication. Identify other myths or common misunderstandings about the interpersonal communication process.
2. Review the discussion of principles of interpersonal communication. Give an example from your own relationships that illustrates each principle.
3. Osmo Wiio, a Scandinavian communication scholar identified several maxims of communication. Provide an example of each of the four maxims from your own experience.

### Interpersonal Communication and Technology

**OBJECTIVE 5** Discuss electronically mediated communication's role in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal communication can still take place even when people are not face to face. In the past, non-face-to-face messages, from smoke signals to mailed letters, allowed humans to communicate over long distances. Today, much of our communication is electronically mediated through a variety of devices that carry our messages, from smartphones to the Internet and more. Electronically mediated communication (EMC) differs from face-to-face (FtF) communication with regard to six key factors: time, varying degrees of anonymity, potential for deception, nonverbal cues, role of the written word, and distance. Several theories and models of electronically mediated messages help us understand the similarities and differences between electronically mediated and face-to-face communication.

### Key Terms

electronically mediated communication (EMC)	social presence
hyperpersonal relationship	cues-filtered-out theory
asynchronous message	media richness theory
synchronous message	social information-processing theory

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. Does electronically mediated communication make us more or less other-oriented than face-to-face communication?

Explain. Think of the different types of EMC that you use in your daily life. How does each of these affect your social presence?

- Ethics: There is a greater potential for deception with electronically mediated communication than with face-to-face communication. What other ethical issues arise with EMC? What are some steps you can take to be sure that you are communicating ethically via electronic media? And how do you evaluate the credibility and reliability of the electronically mediated communication you receive?

### Assessing Your Skills

Keep a one-day log of your electronically mediated interactions (e.g., phone calls, Facebook messages, text messages, etc.). Select several messages and note whether there was a greater emphasis on the content or the relational elements of the messages you exchanged during the interaction.

## Interpersonal Communication Competence

**OBJECTIVE 6** Identify strategies that can improve your interpersonal communication competence.

Although recent research suggests that some people may, in fact, be born with better interpersonal skills than others, you *can* learn ways to enhance your communication competence. Competent communicators are knowledgeable, skilled, and motivated, and they draw on their knowledge, skill, and motivation to become other-oriented. Other-oriented communicators

are also ethical: honest, trustworthy, and sensitive to the needs of others.

### Key Terms

**egocentric communicator**  
**ethics**

### Critical Thinking Questions

- Ethics: Think about your primary goal for this course. Is it to develop communication strategies to help you achieve personal goals? Is it to develop sensitivity to the needs of others? What is behind your goal? Is your purpose ethical?
- What are some strategies and suggestions you can use to avoid being an egocentric communicator?

### Assessing Your Skills

- Provide an assessment of your overall interpersonal knowledge, motivation, and skill. Which of these three areas do you most need to develop?
- Make a list of the communication skills that could help you enhance your ability to be other oriented. Rank order the skills in terms of importance and value to you.



Listen to the **Audio Chapter Summary** at **MyCommunicationLab**



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## ENDNOTES

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