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# INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

RELATING TO OTHERS



STEVEN A. BEEBE • SUSAN J. BEEBE • MARK V. REDMOND

# Interpersonal Communication

Relating to Others

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# Contents

Preface ix

About the Authors xvi

## PART ONE

### Interpersonal Communication Foundations 1

#### 1 Introduction to Interpersonal Communication 1

##### Interpersonal Communication Defined 2

Interpersonal Communication Is a Distinctive Form of Communication 3

Interpersonal Communication Involves Mutual Influence Between Individuals 4

Interpersonal Communication Helps Individuals Manage Their Relationships 5

##### Interpersonal Communication's Importance to Your Life 5

Improved Relationships with Family 5

Improved Relationships with Friends and Lovers 6

Improved Relationships with Colleagues 6

Improved Physical and Emotional Health 6

##### Interpersonal Communication and the Communication Process 7

Elements of the Communication Process 7

Models of the Communication Process 8

##### Interpersonal Communication Principles 10

Interpersonal Communication Connects Us to Others 10

Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible 11

Interpersonal Communication Is Complicated 12

Interpersonal Communication Is Governed by Rules 13

Interpersonal Communication Involves Both Content and Relationship Dimensions 14

##### Interpersonal Communication and Technology 15

Differences Between EMC and FtF Communication 17

Understanding EMC 20

##### Interpersonal Communication Competence 24

Become Knowledgeable, Skilled, and Motivated 24

Become Other-Oriented 25

**APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION** to Being a Competent Interpersonal Communicator 27

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 28

#### 2 Interpersonal Communication and Self 31

##### Self-Concept: Who You Think You Are 32

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values Reflect Your Self-Concept 33

Mindfulness: Being Consciously Aware 34

One or Many Selves? 35

How Your Self-Concept Develops 37

##### Self-Esteem: Your Self-Worth 43

##### Facework: Presenting Your Self-Image to Others 45

Projecting Your Face 45

Protecting Others' Face 46

##### How to Improve Your Self-Esteem 47

Engage in Self-Talk 48

Visualize a Positive Image of Yourself 48

Avoid Comparing Yourself with Others 48

Reframe Appropriately 49

Develop Honest Relationships 49

Let Go of the Past 49

Seek Support 49

##### Self and Interpersonal Relationships 50

Self and Interaction with Others 50

Self and Your Future 51

Self and Interpretation of Messages 52

Self and Interpersonal Needs 53



Self and Disclosure to Others	53
Self and Communication Social Style	55
<b>APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION</b> to Self and Interpersonal Communication	58
<b>STUDY GUIDE:</b> Review, Apply, and Assess	59

### 3 Interpersonal Communication and Perception 62

#### Understanding Interpersonal Perception 63

- Stage 1: Selecting 63
- Stage 2: Organizing 66
- Stage 3: Interpreting 67

#### Forming Impressions of Others 68

- We Form Impressions of Others Online: The Social Media Effect 69
- We Emphasize What Comes First: The Primacy Effect 69
- We Emphasize What Comes Last: The Recency Effect 70
- We Generalize Positive Qualities to Others: The Halo Effect 70
- We Generalize Negative Qualities to Others: The Horn Effect 70

#### Interpreting the Behavior of Others 71

- We Attribute Motives to Others' Behavior: Attribution Theory 71
- We Use Our Own Point of Reference About Power: Standpoint Theory 72
- We Draw on Our Own Cultural Background: Intercultural Communication Theory 73

#### Identifying Barriers to Accurate Interpersonal Perception 74

- We Stereotype 74
- We Ignore Information 76
- We Impose Consistency 77
- We Focus on the Negative 77
- We Blame Others, Assuming They Have Control 78
- We Avoid Responsibility 78

#### Improving Interpersonal Perception Skills 80

- Be Aware of Your Personal Perception Barriers 80

- Be Mindful of the Behaviors That Create Meaning for You 80
- Link Details with the Big Picture 80
- Become Aware of Others' Perceptions of You 81
- Check Your Perceptions 81
- Become Other-Oriented 81

#### **APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION** to Interpersonal Perception 82

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 83

### 4 Interpersonal Communication and Diversity: Adapting to Others 86

#### Understanding Diversity: Describing Our Differences 87

- Sex and Gender 88
- Sexual Orientation 89
- Race and Ethnicity 90
- Age 92
- Social Class 93

#### Understanding Culture: Dimensions of Our Mental Software 94

- Individualism: One and Many 95
- Context: High and Low 96
- Gender: Masculine and Feminine 96
- Uncertainty: High and Low Tolerance 96
- Power: Centralized and Decentralized 97
- Time: Short-Term and Long-Term 97

#### Barriers to Effective Intercultural Communication 97

- Ethnocentrism 99
- Different Communication Codes 101
- Stereotyping and Prejudice 102
- Assuming Similarities 102
- Assuming Differences 103

#### Improving Intercultural Communication Competence 104

- Develop Knowledge 106
- Develop Motivation: Strategies to Accept Others 108
- Develop Skill 109

#### **APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION** to Diversity: The Platinum Rule 115

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 116

## PART TWO

### Interpersonal Communication Skills

#### 5 Listening and Responding Skills 119

##### Listening Defined 120

- Selecting 121
- Attending 121
- Understanding 121
- Remembering 122
- Responding 122

##### Listening Styles 123

- Relational Listening Style 123
- Analytical Listening Style 123
- Critical Listening Style 123
- Task-Oriented Listening Style 124
- Understanding Your Listening Style 124

##### Listening Barriers 125

- Being Self-Absorbed 126
- Unchecked Emotions 128
- Criticizing the Speaker 128
- Differing Speech Rate and Thought Rate 129
- Information Overload 129
- External Noise 129
- Listener Apprehension 130

##### Improving Your Listening Skills 130

- How to Improve Listening Comprehension Skills 131
- How to Improve Empathic Listening Skills 134
- How to Improve Critical Listening Skills 140

##### Improving Your Responding Skills 141

- How to Improve Accurate Responding Skills 141
- How to Improve Empathic Responding Skills 144

##### Improving Your Confirmation Skills 148

- How to Provide Confirming Responses 148
- How to Avoid Disconfirming Responses 150

##### APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Listening and Responding Skills 151

##### STUDY GUIDE: Review, Apply, and Assess 152

#### 6 Verbal Communication Skills 155

##### How Words Work 156

- Words Are Symbols 156
- Words Are Arbitrary 158
- Words Are Culture-Bound 159

119

##### The Power of Words 160

- Words Create Perceptions 160
- Words Influence Thoughts 160
- Words Influence Actions 161
- Words Affect and Reflect Culture 162
- Words Make and Break Relationships 162

##### How To Manage Misunderstandings 164

- Be Aware of Missed Meaning 164
- Be Clear 165
- Be Specific 166
- Be Aware of Changes in Meaning 167
- Be Aware of Polarizing Either-Or Extremes 168
- Be Unbiased 168

##### How to Use Words of Support 173

- Describe Your Feelings, Rather Than Evaluate Behavior 174
- Solve Problems Rather Than Control 176
- Be Genuine Rather Than Manipulative 176
- Empathize Rather Than Remain Detached 177
- Be Flexible Rather Than Rigid 177
- Present Yourself as Equal Rather Than Superior 177

##### How to Apologize 178

##### How to Be Assertive 179

- Describe 181
- Disclose 181
- Identify Effects 182
- Be Silent 182
- Paraphrase 182

##### APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION

- to Enhancing Your Verbal Skills 183

##### STUDY GUIDE: Review, Apply, and Assess 184

#### 7 Nonverbal Communication Skills 187

##### Identifying the Importance of Nonverbal Communication 188

- Nonverbal Messages Are the Primary Way We Communicate Our Feelings and Attitudes 188
- Nonverbal Messages Are Usually More Believable Than Verbal Messages 189



- Nonverbal Messages Work with Verbal Messages to Create Meaning 190
- Nonverbal Messages Help People Respond and Adapt to Others 191
- Nonverbal Messages Play a Major Role in Interpersonal Relationships 191
- Understanding Nonverbal Communication Codes** 194
  - Body Movement and Posture 194
  - Eye Contact 196
  - Facial Expression 197
  - Vocal Cues 198
  - Space 201
  - Territory 202
  - Touch 203
  - Appearance 204
- How to Improve Your Skill in Interpreting Nonverbal Messages** 206
  - Look for Dimensions of Meaning in Nonverbal Messages 206
  - Use Effective Strategies for Interpreting Nonverbal Messages 208
  - Be Aware of Limitations When Interpreting Nonverbal Messages 213
- How to Improve Your Skill in Expressing Nonverbal Messages** 214
  - Be Mindful of Your Nonverbal Behavior 214
  - Observe Others' Reactions to Your Nonverbal Behavior 215
  - Ask Others About Your Nonverbal Behavior 215
- APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Nonverbal Communication** 215
  - Practice Your Nonverbal Behavior 216
- STUDY GUIDE: Review, Apply, and Assess** 217
- 8 Conflict Management Skills** 220
  - Conflict Defined 221
    - Conflict Elements 221
  - Conflict as a Process 222
  - Conflict Triggers 225
  - Conflict Myths** 226
    - Myth 1: Conflict Is Always a Sign of a Poor Interpersonal Relationship 226
    - Myth 2: Conflict Can Always Be Avoided 227
    - Myth 3: Conflict Always Occurs Because of Misunderstandings 227
    - Myth 4: Conflict Can Always Be Resolved 227
  - Conflict Types** 227
    - Pseudoconflict: Misunderstandings 228
    - Simple Conflict: Different Stands on the Issues 228
    - Ego Conflict: Conflict Gets Personal 229
  - Conflict and Power** 231
    - Power Principles 231
    - Power Sources 232
    - Power to Persuade 233
    - Power Negotiation 234
  - Conflict Management Styles** 234
    - Avoidance 235
    - Accommodation 236
    - Competition 237
    - Compromise 238
    - Collaboration 238
  - Conflict Management Skills** 240
    - Manage Your Emotions 241
    - Manage Information 245
    - Manage Goals 247
    - Manage the Problem 247
  - APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Conflict Management** 251
  - STUDY GUIDE: Review, Apply, and Assess** 252

## PART THREE

### Interpersonal Communication in Relationships 255

#### 9 Understanding Interpersonal Relationships 255

- Interpersonal Relationships Defined** 256
  - Shared Perception 256
  - Ongoing Interdependent Connection 257
- Relational Expectations 257
- Interpersonal Intimacy 258
- Circumstance or Choice 258
- Power 259



## Genesis of Interpersonal Relationships: Attraction 260

- Sources of Initial Attraction 261
- Sources of Both Initial and Long-Term Attraction 262

## Stages of Interpersonal Relationship Development 264

- Relational Escalation 264
- Relational De-Escalation 266
- Principles Underlying Relational Stages 267

## Theories of Interpersonal Relationship Development 269

- Social Exchange Theory 269
- Relational Dialectics Theory 271
- Self-Disclosure and Social Penetration Theory 273

## APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Understanding Interpersonal Relationships 279

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 280

# 10 Managing Relationship Challenges 282

## Relationship Challenges 283

- Violating Expectations 283
- Maintaining Long Distance Relationships (LDRs) 288
- Relationships That Challenge Social Norms 289

## The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication and Relationships 291

- Deception 291
- Communication That Hurts Feelings 294
- Jealousy 296
- Unwanted Attention 297
- Relational Violence 298

## Relationship De-Escalation and Termination 301

- Signs of Relationship Problems 301
- Repair and Rejuvenation 302
- The Decision to End a Relationship 303
- How Relationships End 304
- Reasons for De-Escalating and Terminating 304
- The Relational Dissolution Process 305
- Strategies for Ending Relationships 307
- Recovery Strategies 309

## APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Relationship Challenges 311

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 312

# 11 Interpersonal Relationships: Friendship and Romance 314

## Friendship 315

- Making Friends 317
- Friendships at Different Stages in Life 317
- Same-Sex Friendships 320
- Cross-Sex Friendships 321
- Diverse Friendships 322

## Romantic Relationships 325

- Qualities of Romantic Relationships 326
- From Friendship to Romance 330
- Dating 330
- Unrequited Romantic Interest 333

## Interpersonal Relationship Strategies 334

- Strategies Used Primarily to Initiate a Relationship 334
- Strategies Used to Initiate and/or Escalate Relationships 337
- Strategies Used to Escalate and/or Maintain Relationships 339

## APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Friends and Romantic Partners 343

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 344

# 12 Interpersonal Relationships: Family and Workplace 346

## Family Relationships 347

- Family* Defined 347
- Family Types 348
- Two Models of Family Interaction 351
- Strategies for Improving Family Communication 355
- Specific Family Relationships 356

## Workplace Relationships 363

- Workplace Friendships 364
- Workplace Romances 366
- Formal Relationships and Communication Directions in the Workplace 369

## APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Family and Workplace Relationships 375

**STUDY GUIDE:** Review, Apply, and Assess 376

**Notes** 378

**Glossary** 402

**Index** 410

**Credits** 416



# Special Features

## ADAPTING TO DIFFERENCES: Understanding Others

---

The World Is Here	9	Gender and Conflict	229
The “Golden Rule”: A Universal Value?	36	Cultural Differences in Self-Disclosure	275
The Power of Perspective	73	Men’s and Women’s Responses to Relationship Challenges	302
A Diversity Almanac	88	Empathy and Sexual Orientation	305
Tao: A Universal Moral Code	110	Female and Male Dating Roles	332
Who Listen Better, Men or Women?	126	Male-Female Communication in the Workplace	368
Do Men and Women Speak the Same Language?	172	Intercultural Bargaining and Deal-Making	374
Cultural and Gender Differences in Interpreting Nonverbal Messages	193		

## COMMUNICATION AND EMOTION

---

The Role of Emotions in Our Relationships with Others	16	How to Accurately Interpret the Nonverbal Expression of Emotions	200
Self and Emotion: How We Influence How We Feel	42	How to Manage Anger: A “Hard” Emotion	244
How to More Accurately Perceive the Emotions of Others	82	Assessing Your Emotional Responses to Relationship Challenges	310
Are Human Emotions Universal?	105	Emotions at Home and in the Workplace	361
What’s Your Emotional Intelligence Level and Why Does It Matter?	139		
The Timing of Saying “I Love You”: After You. No, After You.	176		

## DEVELOPING YOUR SKILLS

---

Practice Being Other-Oriented	26	Practicing Nonverbal Perception Checking	210
Who Are You?	33	Communicating with Prickly People	248
What’s Your Communication Social Style?	57	Graphing Your Relationship Changes	266
Assuming the Best or the Worst About Others: Identifying Alternative Explanations	79	Self-Disclosure as a Dance	278
Identifying and Adapting to Cultural Rules and Norms	114	Trait Forgiveness	287
How to Identify Both Major Ideas and Details to Enhance Listening	133	Friends with a Difference	290
Practice Using “I” Language and Extended “I” Language	175	Relational Expectations	324
How to Express Your Emotions to Others	180	Identifying Your Family System	353
		Other-Oriented at Home and Work	363

## E-CONNECTIONS: Relating to Others

---

Always On	23	Saying It Without Saying It Online	205
Comparing Your “Cyber Self” and Your “Realspace Self”	40	Conflict Happens	239
Forming Stereotypes Online	76	Do Cell Phones Threaten Your Autonomy?	272
How to Enhance the Quality of Online Intercultural Relationships	99	Cyberstalking and Privacy	299
Overcoming Contemporary Listening Challenges	135	Friendship, Romance, and the Internet	334
Using Words to Relate to Others Online	182	Networked Families	360
		Networked Workers	371

**The world does not revolve around you.** This un-profound observation has profound implications for the study of interpersonal communication: **At the heart of quality interpersonal relationships is an emphasis on others.** A focus on others rather than on oneself has been the hallmark of most volunteer, community, and faith movements in the world for millennia. Yet this book is not about religion or philosophy. It's about how to enhance the quality of your interpersonal communication with others.

The importance of being other-oriented was the foundation of the first six well-received editions of *Interpersonal Communication: Relating to Others*, and it continues to be the central theme of the seventh edition.

## New to This Edition

---

Retaining the strengths that readers seem to value most—an easily accessible style, our other-oriented approach, and a balance of theory and skills—this new edition adds fresh examples and research throughout and fine-tunes every feature, activity, and illustration. Here are six good reasons to give this new edition a close look:

1. **Further integration of learning objectives:** We have refined the learning objectives and coordinated them with each chapter's key topic headings. Visually highlighted in the chapter-opening sections, these pairings are also used to structure the end-of-chapter summaries.
2. **Increased emphasis on technology:** Our updated and expanded coverage now includes an augmented discussion of the importance, role, and function of technology and interpersonal communication in Chapter 1. We've also integrated new research and research applications about interpersonal communication and technology into each chapter. The revised feature *E-Connections: Relating to Others*, also included in each chapter, discusses the influence of new technology on interpersonal communication and includes new topics such as how social media influence interpersonal relationships, as well as the latest research applications about Facebook and interpersonal communication.
3. **Updated coverage of emotion:** Our revised discussion includes new research about emotion, the expression of nonverbal messages, and the role of emotion in managing interpersonal conflict.
4. **New skill applications:** We've updated our coverage of interpersonal skills in redesigned *Developing Your Skills* boxes and added new research about the importance of enhancing interpersonal skills and improved relationships.
5. **New assessment activities:** Our new chapter-end assessment activities link the chapter objectives to the assessment of communication skill development and include new exercises to help evaluate your knowledge of interpersonal communication principles.
6. **New and updated research findings, illustrations, and examples:** We have added new material throughout the book, including the latest research about such topics as attachment style, listening styles, conflict management skills, deception, forgiveness responses, and voluntary kin. New cartoons and photos freshen the overall look and emotional impact of the book.

## An Other-Oriented Approach

Becoming other-oriented is a collection of skills and principles that are designed to increase your sensitivity to and understanding of others. Being other-oriented doesn't mean you abandon your own thoughts, ignore your feelings, and change your behavior only to please others; that would not only be unethical, it would also be an ineffective approach to developing genuine, honest relationships with others. An other-oriented person is self-aware in addition to being aware of others. True empathy, emotional intelligence, and sensitivity are possible only when we feel secure about our own identities.

Becoming other-oriented is a mindful process of considering the thoughts, needs, feelings, and values of others, rather than focusing exclusively on oneself. This process involves all the classic principles and skills typically taught in interpersonal communication courses—listening, feedback, conflict management skills, and verbal and non-verbal skills—and places additional emphasis on the importance of the perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, values, and emotions of others.

### BEING Other-ORIENTED

One of the ways we develop our self-concept is by interacting with others. Who are the others in your life who have had the most profound impact on who you are? Most people would say their parents and members of their family. Who besides family members have helped to shape your concept of self? In what ways?

### Being Other-Oriented

The margin feature *Being Other-Oriented* appears throughout the book and connects the other-orientation theme to specific discussions, often presenting thought-provoking questions to get students thinking about how other-oriented their own communication is.

### APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Self and Interpersonal Communication

"To thine own self be true." In this famous line from Act I, Scene iii of *Hamlet*, Polonius is providing advice to his son Laertes as Laertes prepares to travel abroad. Polonius gives Laertes a number of suggestions, and concludes with this wise fatherly advice: "This above all, to thine own self be true; And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."

to them. Rather, as an other-oriented communicator, you are aware of the thoughts and feelings of others, but remain true to your own ethics and beliefs. For example, if you object to watching violent movies and a group of your friends invites you to see a "slasher" movie, you don't have to attend with them. Nor do you have to make a self-righteous speech about your feelings about violent movies;

The word *credo* means belief. What's your personal credo or set of beliefs? Being aware of your personal beliefs—whether those beliefs are about things philosophical, or spiritual, about human nature, or about the political and social issues of the day—can serve as an anchoring point for your interactions with others. Without knowing where your "home" is—your personal credo—

### Applying an Other-Orientation

At the end of each chapter, the summary section *Applying an Other-Orientation to . . .* discusses essential applications and specifically applies the other-orientation to the chapter content.

## A Balance of Principles and Skills

This book provides a clear overview of interpersonal communication theory and principles to help students understand how they communicate, balanced with strategies to help students improve their interpersonal communication skill. Every chapter includes both classic and contemporary research conclusions that document essential interpersonal communication principles. Theory that helps explain the interpersonal communication behavior of others also helps students predict how best to enhance their own interpersonal communication. The research-based skills and practical suggestions throughout will show students how to apply the principles and improve such skills as listening, conflict management, and verbal and nonverbal communication.

## An Emphasis on Diversity

Inherent in our other-oriented approach is the understanding that people differ in significant ways, such as culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political perspectives, and other points of view. It is because of these differences that we need skills and principles that allow us to develop links to other people and encourage us to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships with them.

Communication occurs when people find commonalities in meaning that transcend their differences. Using a competency-based approach, this book presents practical, research-based strategies for increasing understanding when interacting with those

who are different from us. Using examples, illustrations, and research conclusions woven throughout each chapter, we identify ways to become other-oriented despite differences we encounter in people of the other gender or of other cultures, ethnicities, or ideologies.

## Interpersonal Communication and Diversity: Adapting to Others

This in-depth chapter (Chapter 4) not only identifies barriers to competent intercultural communication but also presents strategies to bridge the chasm of differences that still too often divide rather than unite people.

## Adapting to Differences: Understanding Others

This feature, included in every chapter, presents research findings as well as communication strategies for understanding differences.

**ADAPTING TO DIFFERENCES**  
Understanding Others

**The "Golden Rule": A Universal Value?**

<p>It's clear that there are cultural differences among the world's people, including differences in language, food preferences, housing preferences, and a host of other elements; these differences have existed as long as there have been people. Anthropologists and communication scholars who study intercultural communication, a topic we'll discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, teach the value of adapting to cultural differences in order to understand others better. But is it possible that despite their clear differences, there is a universally held principle that influences the behavior of all people? The question is not a new one. Scholars, theologians, and many others have debated for millennia whether there are any universal values that inform all human societies.</p> <p>The importance of being other-oriented rather than self-absorbed is not a new idea. Most world religions emphasize</p>	<p>some version of the same spiritual principle, known in Christianity as the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. There is convincing evidence that this rule has been the foundation of most ethical codes throughout the world. The following principles underlying various religious traditions emphasize the universal importance accorded to being other-oriented.</p> <p><b>Hinduism</b> This is the sum of duty: Do nothing to others that would cause pain if done to you.</p> <p><b>Buddhism</b> One should seek for others the happiness one desires for one self.</p> <p><b>Taoism</b> Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your loss.</p> <p><b>Confucianism</b> Is there one principle that ought to be acted on throughout one's whole life? Surely it is the principle of</p>	<p>loving-kindness: do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.</p> <p><b>Zoroastrianism</b> The nature alone is good that refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.</p> <p><b>Judaism</b> What is hateful to you, do not do to others. That is the entire law; all the rest is but commentary.</p> <p><b>Islam</b> No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.</p> <p><b>Christianity</b> Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Do you find this list of variations on the Golden Rule from different world religions convincing evidence that being other-oriented is a universal value? Are there additional underlying values or principles, such as how the poor or the elderly should be treated, that should inform our interactions with others?</p>
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## An Emphasis on Technology

The line between face-to-face and electronically mediated communication has become increasingly blurred as we text, e-mail, and Skype with our friends and share the latest news and views via Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogs. This text explores the ever-increasing role of technology in interpersonal communication and the implications of technology for our daily communication and our relationships with others. We have significantly updated the introductory discussion of electronically mediated communication (EMC) in Chapter 1 and have included the latest research findings about how our electronic connections affect our face-to-face interactions throughout the book.

## E-Connections: Relating to Others

The *E-Connections* feature focuses on research conclusions about the ways in which technology is changing how we relate to and interact with others and offers practical applications relating to the impact of such technologies as Skype, Facebook, and Twitter on establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

**E-CONNECTIONS**  
Relating to Others

**Always On**

<p>The title of a book by Naomi Baron summarizes the impact of EMC on our lives: <i>Always On</i>.<sup>73</sup> Most of us are constantly connected to others via some electronic means.</p> <p><b>We're online.</b> In 2012, almost 80 percent of Americans actively used the Internet (compared to just under 36 percent of people from China).<sup>74</sup></p> <p><b>We're socially networked.</b> Also in 2012, a tenth of the world population had a Facebook account.<sup>75</sup> In the Twitterverse,</p>	<p>80 percent of people under 25 tended to text rather than phone a friend and leave a short message.<sup>63</sup></p> <p>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 Chell Communications, in 2006, over 83 percent of teenagers in Britain between the ages of 17 and 19 sent or received at least one text message per day.<sup>64</sup> That number is even higher today. In Norway, even just a</p>	<p>Don't text if you've had too much to drink.</p> <p>Don't text while driving.</p> <p>Don't say anything in text you wouldn't say in person.</p> <p>Don't send bad news by text.</p> <p>Norman Silver wrote ten "txt commandments" that humorously summarize the power and influence of text messages in his life:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">U shall luv ur mobil fone with all ur hart.</p>
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## An Emphasis on Relationships

As the book's subtitle *Relating to Others* suggests, we highlight the importance of enhancing interpersonal relationships by developing an increased awareness of and sensitivity to how we relate to others. Relationship chapters focus first on fundamental interpersonal theory and skills directly related to relationships and on theories of the stages of relationship development. While we emphasize the positive nature of relationships, we also provide a glimpse into the challenging "dark side" of relating to others, including such issues as deception, jealousy, and the influence of technology on our interactions and communication. A wide range of relationship types is then explored in detail, including

**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. Throughout this book, the Communication and Emotion boxes highlight the importance of emotion.

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>29</sup> A 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 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.

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>30</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 en-

relationships with friends, romantic partners, family members, and coworkers, as well as strategies for managing these relationships.

## Communication and Emotion

Revised *Communication and Emotion* boxes throughout help students see how emotions affect their relationships with others.

## A Partnership with Students and Instructors

To use a music metaphor, we have provided the “notes,” but the instructor is the one who makes the music, in concert with the student reader. We provide the melody line, but the instructor adds harmony, texture, and color to make the instructional message sing.

Built into the book is a vast array of pedagogical features:

- Chapter-opening sections highlight the one-to-one correspondence of the learning objectives and chapter outlines.
- Student-friendly *Recap* features periodically summarize key concepts and terms.
- *Developing Your Skills* boxes throughout offer practical strategies for applying chapter content.

**RECAP** William James's Dimensions of Self

Definition	Examples
Material Self	All the physical elements that reflect who you are
	Body, clothes, car, home

**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

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.

- Key terms are defined in the margins and are also included in a full end-of-book glossary.
- Using the learning objectives as an organizing framework, our completely reorganized *Study Guide* feature at the end of each chapter gives students the opportunity to review, apply, and assess key chapter concepts through critical thinking questions, questions about ethics, and classroom and group activities.

In addition to the learning resources built into the book, we provide a wide array of instructional resources and student supplements.

## Resources in Print and Online

Key instructor resources include an Instructor's Manual and Test Bank (ISBN 0205930603) and PowerPoint Presentation Package (ISBN 0205930743). These supplements are available at [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc) (access code required). MyTest online test generating software (ISBN 0205930549) is available at [www.pearsonmytest.com](http://www.pearsonmytest.com) (access code required).

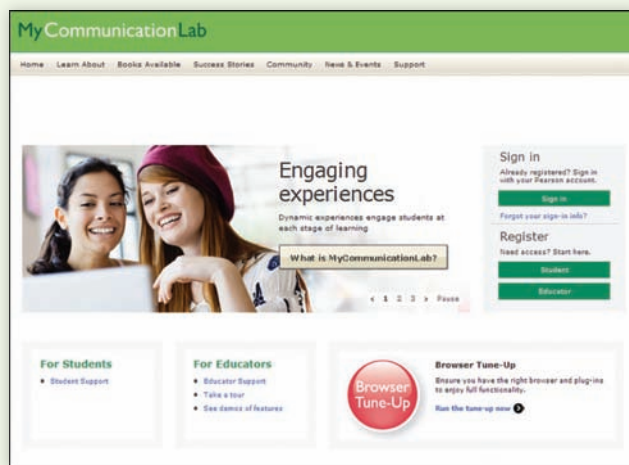
For a complete listing of the instructor and student resources available with this text, please visit the *Interpersonal Communication* e-Catalog page at [www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com).

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**MyCommunicationLab** is an online homework, tutorial, and assessment program that truly engages students in learning. It helps students better prepare for class, quizzes, and exams—resulting in better performance in the course—and provides educators a dynamic set of tools for gauging individual and class progress. And, MyCommunicationLab comes from Pearson, your partner in providing the best digital learning experiences: [www.mycommunicationlab.com](http://www.mycommunicationlab.com).

## MyCommunicationLab Highlights:

- **MediaShare:** This comprehensive file upload tool allows students to post speeches, outlines, visual aids, video assignments, role plays, group projects, and more in a variety of file formats. Uploaded files are available for viewing, commenting, and grading by instructors and class members in face-to-face and online course settings. Integrated video capture functionality allows students to record video directly from a webcam and allows instructors to record videos via webcam, in class or in a lab, and attach them directly to a specific student and/or assignment. The MediaShare app is available via iTunes at no additional charge for those who have purchased MediaShare or MyCommunicationLab access.
- **The Pearson eText:** Identical in content and design to the printed text, the Pearson eText lets students access their textbook anytime, anywhere, and any way they want—including downloading to an iPad. Students can take notes and highlight, just like a traditional text.
- **Videos and Video Quizzes:** Videos provide students with the opportunity to watch and evaluate chapter-related multimedia. Many videos include automatically graded quiz questions.
- **PersonalityProfile:** PersonalityProfile is Pearson's online library for self-assessment and analysis. Online resources provide students with opportunities to evaluate their own and others' communication styles. Instructors can use these tools to show learning and growth over the duration of the course.
- **Study Tools:** A personalized study plan, chapter assessment, key term flashcards, an audio version of the text, and more provide a robust range of study tools to focus students on what they need to know, helping them succeed in the course and beyond.
- **Class Preparation Tool:** Finding, organizing, and presenting your instructor resources is fast and easy with Pearson's class preparation tool. This fully searchable database contains hundreds of resources such as lecture launchers, discussion topics, activities, assignments, and video clips. Instructors can search or browse by topic and sort the results by type. Personalized folders can be created to organize and store content or download resources, as well as upload your own content.



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### Seventh Edition Reviewers

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Steven A. Beebe  
Susan J. Beebe  
Mark V. Redmond



# About the Authors



**Steven A. Beebe** is Regent's Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication Studies and Associate Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication at Texas State University–San Marcos. Steve is the author or co-author of twelve widely used communication books, most of which have been through multiple editions, as well as of numerous articles, book chapters, and conference presentations. He has been a Visiting Scholar at both Oxford University and Cambridge University in England, has traveled widely in Europe and Asia, and has played a leadership role in establishing new communication curricula in Russian universities. In 1996 he was named Outstanding Communication Professor by the National Speaker's Association. He has also received the President's Award for Research as well as the President's Award for Service at Texas State. He is President of the National Communication Association during 2013. His passions in life include his family and a life-long love of music; he is a pianist and organist and is currently struggling to learn the cello.



**Susan J. Beebe's** professional interests and expertise encompass both oral and written communication. Director of Lower-Division Studies in the Department of English at Texas State University–San Marcos, Sue has co-authored three books and has published a number of articles and teaching materials in both English and communication studies. She has received the Texas State Presidential Awards for Excellence in Teaching and in Service and the College of Liberal Arts Award for Excellence in Scholarly/Creative Activities, in Teaching, and in Service. An active volunteer in the community of San Marcos, Texas, Sue was the founding coordinator of the San Marcos Volunteers in Public Schools Program and has served on the San Marcos School Board and the Education Foundation Board. In 1993 she was named the statewide Friend of Education by the Texas Classroom Teachers' Association; in 2000 the San Marcos school district presented her with its Lifetime Achievement Award. Sue enjoys reading, traveling, and caring for the Beebe family cats, Luke and Bouncer. Sue and Steve have two sons: Mark, a graduate of Rice University; and Matt, a graduate of Southwestern University.



**Mark V. Redmond** is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Iowa State University. In 2012 he received the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences award for Outstanding Achievement in Teaching. Besides this book, Mark has authored an introductory text on communication theory and research, edited an upper-level text in interpersonal communication, and co-authored a public speaking text. His research focuses on social decentering (taking into account another person's thoughts, feelings, perspectives, etc.), one of the themes incorporated in this text. His studies have included an examination of initial interactions between strangers, adaptation in interpersonal interactions, interpersonal influence, and intercultural communication competence. He is a Cyclone sports fan with an avocation for playing basketball at least three times a week (despite an aging hook shot). An unaccomplished piano and guitar player, he loves composing and writing songs and vows to someday complete the musical he's been working on for thirty years. Mark and his wife Peggy have three children: Beth, a graduate of the University of Iowa and a nurse at the University of Iowa Hospitals; Nicholas, a graduate of Iowa State University and McCormick Theological Seminary; and Eric, also a graduate of Iowa State.



# 1

## 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  
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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, later chapters 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. This chapter charts 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

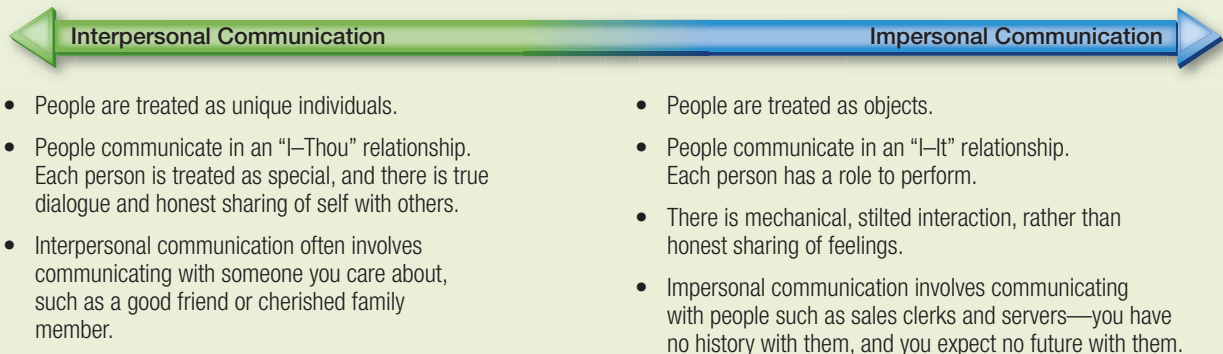
Process that occurs when we treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons.

**Interpersonal Versus Other Forms of Communication.** In this book, 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. In our discussion of self and communication in Chapter 2, we discuss the relationships between your thoughts and your interpersonal communication with others.

## 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 (this 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. As we emphasize in this book, 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.

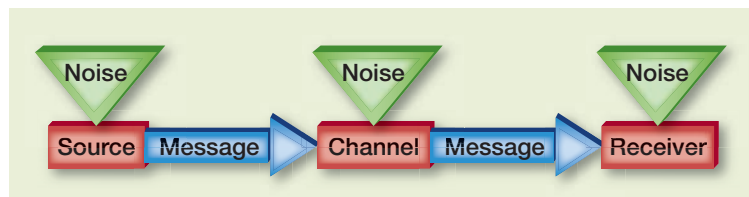
**Communication as Action: Message Transfer.** The oldest and simplest model, shown in Figure 1.1, is *communication as action*—a transferring of meaning. “Did you get my message?” This sentence reflects the communication-as-action approach to human communication. Communication takes place when a message 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 1.2, 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 1.1**

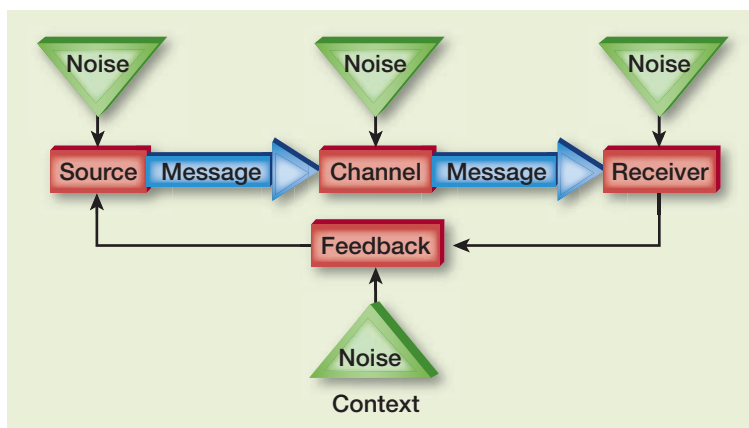
**A Simple Model of Human Communication as Action**



**FIGURE 1.2**

**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.



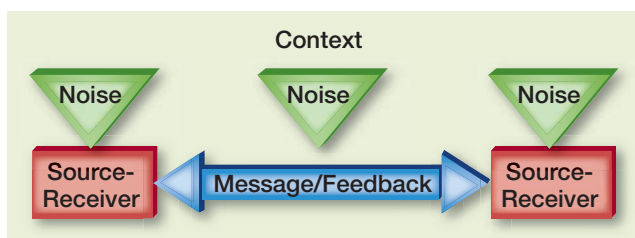


FIGURE 1.3

**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 1.3 indicates, even as you talk, you are also interpreting your partner's non-verbal 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. Throughout the text, 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?