

Understanding Human Communication



Understanding Human Communication

THIRTEENTH EDITION

Ronald B. Adler

SANTA BARBARA CITY COLLEGE

George Rodman

BROOKLYN COLLEGE
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Athena du Pré

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA

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ONLINE APPENDIX Communicating for Career Success Available at www.oup.com/us/adleruhc

Preface

If you want to push most communication professors' buttons, claim that the principles they study and teach are "just common sense."

The truth is that communication, like many things in life, may *look* straightforward. But beneath the veneer of simplicity, it's fraught with challenges and questions. For example:

- Why do others misunderstand you? (And why do they accuse you of not understanding them?)
- How can you know when another person is telling the truth?
- When it comes to communicating, are men from Mars and women from Venus, or are we more or less the same?
- Why do we often get the most defensive when we know we're wrong?
- What makes some teams so effective and others disappointing?
- Why are so many well-informed speakers uninteresting and hard to understand?
- Why do people feel so nervous when speaking in public, and what can they do about it?

Understanding Human Communication answers questions such as these. It aims to provide an engaging, comprehensive, useful introduction to the academic study of human communication as it is practiced in the 21st century. To see how well this book succeeds, we invite you flip to any page and ask three questions: Is the content important? Is the explanation clear? Is it useful?

Approach

This 13th edition builds on the approach that has served well over half a million students and their professors. Rather than take sides in the theory-versus-skills debate that often rages in our discipline, *Understanding Human Communication* treats scholarship and skill development as mutually reinforcing. Its reader-friendly approach strives to present material clearly without being overly simplistic. Examples on virtually every page make concepts clear and interesting. A contemporary design makes the material inviting, as do amusing and instructive cartoons and photos that link concepts in the text to today's world.

New to This Edition

Beyond its user-friendly voice and engaging design, this edition reflects both the growth of scholarship and changing trends in the academic marketplace. Longtime users will discover not only a more contemporary look and feel but expanded coverage of key concepts and a wealth of new learning tools.

New Content

- **Expanded coverage of social media.** Throughout the book, readers will find new and updated coverage of topics including social media etiquette and the uses and gratifications of social media (Chapter 1), the risks of overusing mediated communication channels (Chapters 1 and 7), identity management on social media (Chapter 2), online social support (Chapter 5), the differences between mediated and in-person close relationships (Chapter 7), tips for meeting an online date for the first time (Chapter 7), working in virtual groups (Chapter 9), and cyberspace work environments (Chapter 10). New and updated “Understanding Communication Technology” boxes highlight the increasingly important role of technology in human communication.
- **Updated discussions of communication and culture.** Chapter 3 is devoted entirely to communication and culture. It focuses on cocultural factors that students are likely to encounter close to home every day: ethnicity, regional differences, gender/sexual orientation, religion, physical abilities, age/generation, and socioeconomic status. Updated material addresses cultural hegemony and intersectionality theory. The discussion of culture extends throughout the book, most visibly in “Understanding Diversity” boxes. New and updated boxes in this edition explore the challenge of managing personal pronouns in an era of increasing gender fluidity (Chapter 3), the effect of language on worldview (Chapter 4), and the advantages of multicultural teams (Chapter 10). In-text discussions and captioned photos address topics such as microaggressions (Chapter 2), cultural conflict styles (Chapter 8), and cultural leadership preferences (Chapter 9).
- **New tips for career success.** “@Work” boxes appear throughout the text, covering new and expanded topics such as the connection between communication skills and career success (Chapter 1), professional identity management and job interviewing (Chapter 2), the risks of humblebragging (Chapter 2), vocal cues and career success (Chapter 6), and new examples of effective presentations at work (Chapters 11–14). An online appendix, “Communicating for Career Success,” is available at www.oup.com/us/adleruhc and contains advice on how to communicate professionally in seeking employment and once on the job.
- **New chapter-opening profiles.** These stories highlight real-life communication challenges and are woven into the fabric of the chapter content. Profiles feature interesting and relevant personal stories, including those of Zappos founder Tony Hsieh, television personality and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner, young publishing executive Erica Nicole, body language expert Amy Cuddy, relationship expert Brené Brown, startup whiz Matt Mullenweg, human rights activist Malala Yousafzai, students who have overcome disabilities, and others who have fought for equal rights. Questions at the end of the profiles prompt students to connect the material to their own lives.
- **New and expanded coverage of important topics in each chapter.** For example:
 - Chapter 1 discusses the social and physical benefits of effective communication. It includes a new “Understanding Communication Technology” box on controlling social media use and a new checklist on social media etiquette.
 - Chapter 2 now includes an expanded discussion of self-esteem, social influences on the self-concept, how stereotyping and scripts degrade the

quality of communication, and how empathy and frame switching provide better understanding of others.

- Chapter 3 includes a new “Understanding Diversity” box on gender pronouns as well as expanded discussions of cultural dominance and religion-based stereotyping.
- Chapter 4 contains a new discussion of the differences between connotative and denotative meaning. In addition, it includes a clearer, expanded explanation of pragmatic rules and a more complete explanation of how power relationships are expressed in language use. Chapter 4 also offers a current view of similarities and differences between characteristically male and female speech.
- Chapter 5 offers new evidence on the personal and career benefits of effective listening, as well as gender differences in social support.
- Chapter 6 addresses contemporary speech mannerisms such as uptalk and vocal fry.
- Chapter 7 now includes treatment of the role communication plays in maintaining friendships, family connections, and romantic relationships. It also includes a clearer treatment of how dialectical tensions shape communication in close relationships, and the roles of lies and evasions in relational maintenance.
- Chapter 8 (now titled “Managing Conflict in Interpersonal Relationships”) has been reorganized to present both familiar and new material in a clearer and more useful way.
- Chapter 9 includes new material on transformational leadership.
- Chapter 10 includes three new checklists on teamwork and a new table on decision-making methods.
- Chapters 11–14 have all new sample speeches, outlines, and analyses. Their topics include many forms of diversity, including LGBTQ life, as well as current controversies such as gun control. Chapter 13 provides new examples of how to spark visual interest in a speech, how to use vocal citations, and how to incorporate photos, videos, and audio files into a presentation.

Learning Tools

- **Checklists** in every chapter, many of them new for this edition, provide handy reference tools to help students build their skill sets and internalize what they have learned. New checklists address how to use social media courteously (Chapter 1); perception checking (Chapter 2); minimizing misunderstandings (Chapter 4); mindful listening, paraphrasing, and controlling defensiveness (Chapter 5); being a better friend (Chapter 7); creating positive communication climates (Chapter 8); getting slackers to do their share in groups and working with difficult bosses (Chapter 9); and dealing with difficult team members (Chapter 10).
- **Self-assessments** invite students to evaluate and improve their communication skills and to consider their identities as communicators. These features include quizzes to help students understand more about their listening styles (Chapter 5), love languages (Chapter 7), interpersonal communication climates (Chapter 8), leadership and followership styles (Chapter 9), team effectiveness (Chapter 10), and more.

- **Learning Objectives** now correspond to major headings in each chapter and coordinate with the end-of-chapter summary and review. They provide a clear map of what students need to learn and where to find that material.
- A new “**Making the Grade**” section at the end of each chapter helps students test and deepen their mastery of the material. Organized by learning objective, this section summarizes the key points from the text and includes related questions and prompts to promote understanding and application.
- “**Understanding Communication Technology**” boxes highlight the increasingly important role of technology in human communication.
- “**Understanding Diversity**” boxes provide a more in-depth treatment of intercultural communication topics.
- “**@Work**” boxes show students how key concepts from the text operate in the workplace.
- “**Ethical Challenge**” boxes engage students in debates such as whether honesty is always the best policy, the acceptability of presenting multiple identities, and how to deal effectively with difficult group members.
- **Key Terms** are boldfaced on first use and listed at the end of each chapter, and a new **Marginal Glossary** helps students learn new terms.
- **Activities** at the end of each chapter can be completed in class and help students apply the material to their everyday lives. Additional activities are available in the Instructor’s Manual (*The Complete Guide to Teaching Communication*) at <https://arc2.oup-arc.com/>.
- **Ask Yourself** prompts in the margins invite students to apply the material to their own lives. These also provide a confidence-building opportunity to get students speaking in class before undertaking formal presentations.
- Marginal **cultural idioms** not only highlight the use of idioms in communication but also help nonnative English speakers appreciate the idiosyncratic expressions and colloquialisms they normally take for granted.
- An **enhanced support package** for every chapter (described in detail below) includes video links, pre- and post-reading quizzes, activities, discussion topics, examples, tools for recording and uploading student speeches for assessment, an online gradebook, and more.

Optional Chapter

Along with the topics included in the text itself, a custom chapter is available on **Mass Communication**. Ask your Oxford University Press representative for details, or see the *Understanding Human Communication* website at www.oup.com/us/adleruhc.

Ancillary Package

The 13th edition of *Understanding Human Communication* contains a robust package of ancillary materials that will make teaching more efficient and learning more effective. Instructors and students alike will be pleased to find a complete suite of supplements.

Online Learning

This edition of *Understanding Human Communication* offers a host of options for online learning:

- **Dashboard** delivers high-quality content, tools, and assessments to track student progress in an intuitive, web-based learning environment.

Dashboard gives instructors the ability to manage digital content from *Understanding Human Communication*, 13th edition, and its supplementary materials in order to make assignments, administer tests, and track student progress. Assessments are designed to accompany this text and are automatically graded so that instructors can easily check students' progress as they complete their assignments. The color-coded gradebook illustrates at a glance where students are succeeding and where they can improve. Dashboard is engineered to be simple, informative, and mobile. All Dashboard content is engineered to work on mobile devices, including iOS platforms.

With this edition's Dashboard, professors and students have access to a variety of interactive study and assessment tools designed to enhance their learning experience, including:

- Multiple choice pre- and posttests to accompany each chapter
- Interactive drag-and-drop questions in each chapter
- Animations with assessment questions based on the 13th edition's figures, which help reinforce difficult and abstract concepts
- Short video clips with assessment in each chapter to show communication in action and help students apply what they have learned
- Examples of professional and student speeches, accompanied by review and analysis questions
- Interactive flashcards to aid in self-study
- **Course cartridges** are an alternative to Dashboard. They are available for a variety of Learning Management Systems, including Blackboard Learn, Canvas, Moodle, D2L, and Angel. Course cartridges allow instructors to create their own course websites integrating student and instructor resources available on the Ancillary Resource Center and Companion Website. Contact your Oxford University Press representative for access or for more information about these supplements or customized options.

For Instructors

Ancillary Resource Center (ARC) at <https://arc2.oup-arc.com/>. This convenient, instructor-focused website provides access to all of the up-to-date teaching resources for this text—at any time—while guaranteeing the security of grade-significant resources. In addition, it allows OUP to keep instructors informed when new content becomes available. The following items are available on the ARC:

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

- ***Now Playing, Instructor's Edition***, includes an introduction on how to incorporate film and television clips in class, as well as even more film examples, viewing guides and assignments, a complete set of sample responses to the discussion questions in the student edition, a full list of references, and an index by subject for ease of use. *Now Playing* also has an accompanying companion website at www.oup.com/us/nowplaying, which features descriptions of films from previous editions and selected film clips.

For Students

- ***Now Playing, Student Edition***, available free in a package with a new copy of the book, explores contemporary films and television shows through the lens of communication principles. Updated yearly, it illustrates how communication concepts play out in a variety of situations, using mass media that are interactive, familiar, and easily accessible to students.
- The **Companion Website** is an open-access student website at www.oup.com/us/adleruhc that offers activities, audio tutorials, chapter outlines, review questions, worksheets, practice quizzes, flashcards, and other study tools. This companion site is perfect for students who are looking for a little extra study material online.

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Ron Adler
George Rodman
Athena du Pré

About the Authors

Ronald B. Adler is Professor of Communication Emeritus, at Santa Barbara City College. He is coauthor of *Interplay: The Process of Interpersonal Communication; Essential Communication; Looking Out, Looking In*; and *Communicating at Work: Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions*.

George Rodman is Professor in the Department of Television and Radio at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, where he founded the graduate media studies program. He is the author of *Mass Media in a Changing World, Making Sense of Media*, and several books on public speaking.

Athena du Pré is Distinguished University Professor of Communication at the University of West Florida. She is the author of *Communicating About Health: Current Issues and Perspectives* and coauthor of *Essential Communication*, as well as other books, journal articles, and chapters on communicating effectively.

Understanding Human Communication



Communication: What and Why

1

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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 - ▼ Modeling Communication
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1

Apply the transactional communication model described on pages 9–10 to a specific incident, explaining how that exchange is part of a relational, symbolic process.

1.2

Identify the types of communication that operate in human interaction.

1.3

Compare and contrast face-to-face and mediated communication, including social media.

1.4

Describe the effects of changing communication technology on the study of human communication in recent decades.

1.5

Explain the key needs you and others attempt to satisfy by communicating.

1.6

Suggest ways of improving your communication competence in a specific situation.

1.7

Identify how misconceptions about communication can create problems, and suggest how changes in communication can lead to better outcomes.



You don't have to be CEO of a billion-dollar company to recognize the importance of effective communication.



Tony Hsieh uses communication to build relationships with colleagues and customers. What role does communication play in the quality of your relationships at school, at work, and in your personal life?



Describe the communication style of someone you admire. In what ways does that person display respect for others? How does he or she encourage mutual understanding?



What communication skills do you think will be most essential in the career you envision for yourself? Why?

ZAPPOS IS A BILLION-DOLLAR COMPANY. But if you go looking for the CEO, don't ask directions to the executive suite. Tony Hsieh (pronounced *Shay*) sits at a standard-issue desk in the midst of the company's busy call center. "I think I would probably get lonely in an office. I'd be away from all the action," explains the energetic visionary.¹

Hsieh maintains a legendary fervor for open communication. By being in the same room as everyone else, he can easily share information and listen to employees' ideas in real time. It's an unconventional approach with unconventional results: Zappos skyrocketed to success as an online retail company in about 10 years. Behind that success is the philosophy that supportive relationships, enhanced by effective communication, matter more than anything else.

We'll return to Hsieh as an example throughout the chapter. His success makes a strong case for the importance of communication. But perhaps the strongest argument for studying this subject is its central role in our lives. The average person spends 7 out of every 10 waking hours actively communicating with family members, friends, coworkers, teachers, and even strangers.² With computers, phones, tablets, and all the rest, it's possible to carry on several conversations at one time. Of course, more communication isn't always better communication. In this chapter, we begin to explore how to make wise choices about what messages we share with others and how we share them.

Communication Defined

The term *communication* isn't as simple as it might seem. People use it in a variety of ways that are only vaguely related:

- A dog scratches at the back door to be let out.
- Data flows from one computer database to another in a cascade of electronic impulses.
- Strangers who live thousands of miles apart notice each other's social media postings, and they build a relationship via email, text messaging, and instant messaging.
- Locals offer directions to a group of confused-looking people who seem to be from out of town.
- A religious leader gives a sermon encouraging the congregation to get more involved in the community.

We need to narrow our focus before going on. A look at this book's table of contents shows that it does not deal with animals. Neither is it about Holy Communion, the bestowing of a material thing, or many of the other subjects mentioned in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* 1,200-word definition of *communication*. What, then, are we talking about when we use the term?



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Characteristics of Communication

As its title suggests, this is a book about understanding human communication—so we'll start by explaining what it means to study communication that is unique to members of our species. For our purposes we'll define human **communication** as *the process of creating meaning through symbolic interaction*. Examining this definition reveals some important insights.

communication The process of creating meaning through symbolic interaction.

Communication Is a Process We often think about communication as if it occurs in discrete, individual acts such as one person's utterance or a conversation. But in fact, communication is a continuous, ongoing process. There are probably people in your life who have changed your outlook through their words and actions. This change typically occurs over time, not instantly.

As a case in point, consider the CEO of Zappos. Tony Hsieh recognizes that creating a culture of happiness at Zappos requires more than a speech, a memo from HR, or slogans on the wall. Developing trust, creativity, and respect takes time. Hsieh made a commitment to listen to team members every day and take their ideas seriously. Open communication and effective listening have allowed Zappos to become one of the best places to work in the country.³

Consistency is key. Even what appears to be an isolated message is often part of a much larger process. Consider, for example, a friend's compliment about your appearance. Your interpretation of those words will depend on a long series of experiences stretching far back in time: How have others judged your appearance? How do you feel about your looks? How honest has your friend been in the past? How have you been feeling about each other recently? All this history will help shape your response to the friend's remark. In turn, the



Communication (without an "s") refers to the study of how people share messages. That's the primary focus of this book. *Communications* (with an "s") usually refers to the technologies that enable the exchange of information.

Can you give examples of the proper use of "communication" versus "communications"?



Communication is something we do *with*, not to others.

How well is your communication synchronized with others in important relationships?

symbol An arbitrary sign used to represent a thing, person, idea, event, or relationship in ways that make communication possible.



More than 150 years after the U.S. Civil War, the Confederate flag still evokes strong emotions. Some view it as a symbol of racism, while others see it as honoring the sacrifices of brave Confederate soldiers.

Which symbols communicate messages that draw you toward others? Which ones create discord?

words you speak and the way you say them will shape the way your friend behaves toward you and others—both in this situation and in the future.

This simple example shows that it's inaccurate to talk about "acts" of communication as if they occur in isolation. To put it differently, communication isn't a series of incidents pasted together like photographs in a scrapbook; instead, it is more like a motion picture in which the meaning comes from the unfolding of an interrelated series of images. The fact that communication is a process is reflected in the transactional model introduced later in this chapter.

Communication Is Relational, Not Individual Communication isn't something we do *to* others; rather, it is something we do *with* them. Like many types of dancing, communication depends on the involvement of a partner. A great dancer who doesn't consider and adapt to the skill level of his or her partner can make both people look bad. In communication and in dancing, even two highly skilled partners must work at adaptation and coordination. Finally, relational communication—like dancing—is a unique creation that arises out of the way in which the partners interact: It varies with different partners.

Psychologist Kenneth Gergen captures the relational nature of communication well when he points out how our success depends on interaction with others. As he says, "one cannot be 'attractive' without others who are attracted, a 'leader' without others willing to follow, or a 'loving person' without others to affirm with appreciation."⁴

Because communication is relational, or transactional, it's often a mistake to suggest that just one person is responsible for a relationship. Although it's easy to blame each other for a disappointing outcome, that's often fruitless and counterproductive. It's usually far better to ask, "How did we handle this situation poorly, and what can we do to make it better?"

The transactional nature of communication shows up in school, where teachers and students influence one another's behavior. For example, teachers who regard some students negatively may treat them with subtle or overt disfavor. As a result, these students are likely to react to their teachers' behavior negatively, which reinforces the teachers' original attitudes and expectations.⁵

Communication Is Symbolic Chapter 4 discusses the nature of symbols in more detail, but this idea is so important that it needs an introduction now. **Symbols** are used to represent things, processes, ideas, or events in ways that make communication possible.

One feature of symbols is their arbitrary nature. For example, there's no logical reason why the letters in the word *book* should stand for the object you're reading now. Speakers of Spanish call it a *libro*, and Germans call it a *Buch*. Even in English, another term would work just as well as long as everyone agreed to use it in the same way.

Conflicts can arise when people attach different meanings to a symbol. (See the Confederate flag photo on this page.) Is calling your friend a "gangsta" a joke or an insult? Are flowers offered after a fight an expression of apology or an attempt to avoid guilt? How people feel about each other depends a great deal on how they interpret one another's actions.

Animals don't use symbols in the varied and complex ways that we do. There's nothing symbolic about a dog scratching at the door to be let out; there is a natural connection between the door and the dog's goal. By contrast, the significance of a word or action is only arbitrarily related to the meaning we give it. Besides reflecting our identity, symbolic communication allows people to think or talk about the past, explain the present, and speculate about the future.

Modeling Communication

So far we have introduced a basic definition of communication and considered its characteristics. This information is useful, but it only begins to describe the process we will examine throughout this book. One way to deepen your understanding is to look at some models that describe what happens when two or more people interact. Over the years, scholars have developed an increasingly accurate and sophisticated view of this process.

A Linear Model Until about 50 years ago, researchers viewed communication as something that one person “does” to another.⁶ In this **linear communication model**, communication is like giving an injection: A **sender encodes** (puts into symbols) ideas and feelings into some sort of **message** and then conveys them to a **receiver**, who **decodes** (attaches meaning to) them (Figure 1-1).

One important element of the linear model is the **communication channel**—the method by which a message is conveyed between people. Face-to-face contact is the most obvious channel. Writing is another channel. In addition to these long-used forms, **mediated communication** channels include telephone, email, instant messaging, faxes, voice mail, and video chats. (The word *mediated* reflects the fact that these messages are conveyed through some sort of communication medium.) The self-assessment on page 8 will help you appreciate how the channel you choose can help determine the success of your messages.

At first glance, the linear model suggests that communication is a straightforward matter: If you choose your words correctly, your message should get through without distortion. But even in the closest relationships, misunderstanding is common. In one study, researchers invited several pairs of people into their lab.⁷ Some were married; others were strangers. The subjects invariably predicted that the married couples would understand each other better than strangers. In reality, the level of understanding was about the same. This finding highlights what the researchers called the “closeness-communication bias.” Overestimating how well we understand others can result in potentially serious misunderstandings.

The channel you choose can make a big difference in the effect of a message. For example, if you want to say “I love you,” a generic e-card probably wouldn’t have the same effect as a handwritten note. Likewise, saying “I love you” for the first time via text message could make a very different statement than saying the words in person.

Why are misunderstandings—even in our closest relationships—so common? One factor is what scholars call **noise**—a broad category that includes any force that interferes with the accurate reception of a message. Noise can occur at every stage of the communication process. Three types of noise can disrupt communication—external, physiological, and psychological. *External noise* (also called “physical” noise) includes those factors outside the receiver that make hearing difficult, as well as many other kinds of distractions. For instance, a weak signal would make it hard for you to understand another person on the phone, and sitting in the rear of an auditorium might make hearing a speaker’s remarks difficult. External noise can disrupt communication almost anywhere

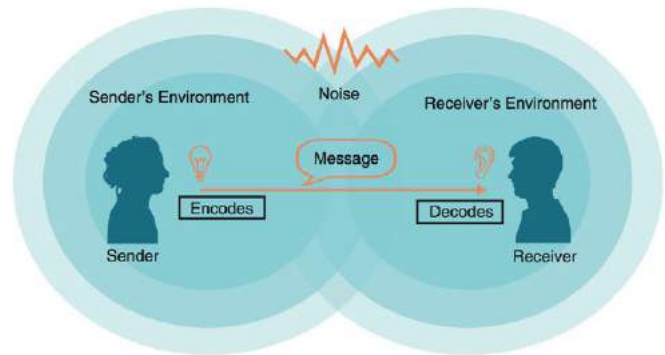


FIGURE 1-1 Linear Communication Model

linear communication model A characterization of communication as a one-way event in which a message flows from sender to receiver.

sender The originator of a message.

encode Put thoughts into symbols, most commonly words.

message A sender’s planned and unplanned words and nonverbal behaviors.

receiver One who notices and attends to a message.

decode To attach meaning to a message.

channel The medium through which a message passes from sender to receiver.

mediated communication Communication sent via a medium other than face-to-face interaction.

noise External, physiological, and psychological distractions that interfere with the accurate transmission and reception of a message.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Your Communication Choices

INSTRUCTIONS:

Consider which communication channel(s) you would use in each situation described below.

Scenario	Your Communication Choice				
	Face-to-Face	Phone	Email	Text	Social Media
1. You have been concerned about a friend. The last time you were together you asked, "Is anything wrong?" Your friend replied, "I'm fine." Now it's been several weeks since you have heard from your friend, and you're worried. Which channel do you think is best for gauging your friend's true emotions?					
2. You're angry and frustrated with a professor and want to deal with this concern before the problem gets worse. Which communication choice offers you the best opportunity to address the problem?					
3. On Thursday your boss tells you it's okay to come in late Monday morning. You're worried he will forget that he gave you permission. What channel(s) should you use to make sure he remembers?					
4. You're applying for a job when a friend says, "You won't believe the photo of you that I'm going to post from the party last weekend!" How would you try to dissuade your friend from posting the photo?					
5. You just ended a long-time relationship. What's the best way to let your friends and family know?					
6. What is a communication challenge you currently face? Which channel(s) would be best suited to addressing it?					

EVALUATING YOUR RESPONSES

Explain the reasoning behind your choices. After reading this book, retake this assessment to see if your choices have changed.

environment Both the physical setting in which communication occurs and the personal perspectives of the parties involved.

in our model—in the sender, channel, message, or receiver. *Physiological noise* involves biological factors in the receiver or sender that interfere with accurate reception: illness, fatigue, and so on. *Psychological noise* refers to forces within a communicator that interfere with the ability to express or understand a message accurately. For instance, worrying about a recent conflict might make it hard to focus on work or school. In the same way, you might be so upset to learn you failed a test that you would be unable (perhaps unwilling) to understand clearly where you went wrong.

A linear model shows that communicators often occupy different **environments**—fields of experience that help them understand others' behavior. In communication terminology, *environment* refers not only to a physical location but also to the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds that participants bring to a conversation.

Consider just some of the factors that might contribute to different environments:

- A might belong to one ethnic group and B to another.
- A might be rich and B poor.
- A might be in a rush and B have nowhere to go.
- A might have lived a long, eventful life, and B might be young and inexperienced.
- A might be passionately concerned with the subject and B indifferent to it.

Notice how the model in Figure 1-1 (page 7) shows that the environments of the sender and receiver overlap. This area represents the background that the communicators must have in common. As the shared environment becomes smaller, communication becomes more difficult. Consider a few examples in which different perspectives can make understanding difficult:

- Bosses who have trouble understanding the perspective of their employees will be less effective managers, and workers who do not appreciate the challenges of being a boss are more likely to be uncooperative (and probably less suitable for advancement).
- Parents who have trouble recalling their youth are likely to clash with their children, who have never known and may not appreciate the responsibility that comes with parenting.
- Members of a dominant culture who have never experienced how it feels to be outside of it may not appreciate the concerns of people from nondominant cocultures, who may not have experienced how it feels to be in the majority.

Differing environments make understanding others challenging but certainly not impossible. Hard work and many of the skills described in this book provide ways to bridge the gap that separates all of us to a greater or lesser degree. For now, recognizing the challenge that comes from dissimilar environments is a good start. You can't solve a problem until you recognize that it exists.

A Transactional Model Because of its simplicity, the linear model does not effectively represent the way most communication operates. The transactional communication model in Figure 1-2 (page 10) presents a more accurate picture in several respects.

Most notably, the **transactional model** shows that sending and receiving are simultaneous. Although some types of mass communication do flow in a one-way, linear manner, most types of personal communication are two-way exchanges. The roles of sender and receiver that seemed separate in the linear model are now superimposed and redefined as those of *communicators*. This new term reflects the fact that at a given moment we are capable of receiving, decoding, and responding to another person's behavior, while at the same time that other person is receiving and responding to ours.

Consider, for instance, the significance of a friend's yawn as you describe your romantic problems. Or imagine the blush you may see as you tell one of your raunchier jokes to a new acquaintance. Nonverbal behaviors like these show that most face-to-face communication is a two-way affair. The discernible response of a receiver to a sender's message is called **feedback**. Not all feedback is nonverbal, of course. Sometimes it is oral, as when you ask an instructor questions about an upcoming test or volunteer your opinion of a friend's new haircut. In other cases it is written, as when you answer the questions on a midterm exam or respond to a letter from a friend. Figure 1-2 makes the importance of feedback clear. It shows that most communication is, indeed, a two-way affair.

transactional communication model

A characterization of communication as the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages in an ongoing, irreversible process.

feedback The discernible response of a receiver to a sender's message.