Human Communication in Society

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SIXTH EDITION

Human Communication in Society

6TH EDITION

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Preface

As experienced researchers and instructors in the field of communication, we continue to be impressed by the breadth and depth of scholarship in our discipline; we also recognize that this scholarship presents challenges for students and instructors in the introductory survey course. For example, which research traditions should be covered: the traditional functionalist and psychological perspectives, the interpretive-qualitative perspectives, or the critical perspectives? Which subfields should be covered: intercultural communication, communication technologies, nonverbal communication, or rhetorical studies? Should instructors focus primarily on helping students develop communication skills or should they focus primarily on theories and inquiry?

Our struggle to answer these questions led us to write the first edition of this text, which we believe met the goals we established early on: first, to expose beginning students to the breadth and depth of our discipline's scholarship, and second, to provide a balance between theory and application. Finally, our third goal was to present a lively overview of the discipline, to meet students "where they live," and to engage them in exploring the implications of communication in their daily lives.

Our overarching theme for the first edition was the interaction between the individual and society. In subsequent editions, we've enhanced the emphasis on this theme, adding new examples, illustrations, and pedagogical materials that connect the more traditional individual-centered, functionalist approach—that is, "who you are affects how you communicate"—with more contemporary critical approaches, which focus on the impact of societal structures and history on communication outcomes.

By highlighting this tension between individual and societal forces, we encourage students to recognize the value of multiple perspectives in understanding communication. Students need to be encouraged to think more reflexively about their individualism, as well as their and others' social identities. Students often recognize that if they say the same thing as someone else, the message could be interpreted quite differently due to the differences in gender, age, sexuality, race, and other societal forces. It is important for students to understand how to connect their individuality with larger societal forces that shape their communication experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic has again highlighted these issues for all of us. The conflicts over wearing masks highlight the struggle over individual freedom versus our collective bond to other human beings.

Human Communication in Society, Sixth Edition, like previous editions, covers the full range of topics addressed in existing textbooks but also introduces some useful innovations. We begin by describing the theoretical foundations of the study of communication, including models of communication and the role of identity and perception in communication. We present the factors of verbal and nonverbal communication, a new chapter on in-person conversation, and a chapter on listening and responding. We then explore communication in various contexts such as culture, close relationships, small groups, and organizations. Ours is the first book to provide comprehensive coverage of rhetoric (Chapter 12), and we devote full chapters to communication and mass media (Chapter 13) and to the continuing important topic of interactive (social) media (Chapter 14). Overall, we discuss the full range of paradigmatic approaches in the field, offering a balance between theory and practice.

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Revel is an interactive learning environment that deeply engages students and prepares them for class. Media and assessment integrated directly within the authors' narrative lets students read, explore interactive content, and practice in one continuous learning path. Thanks to the dynamic reading experience in Revel, students come to class prepared to discuss, apply, and learn from instructors and from each other.

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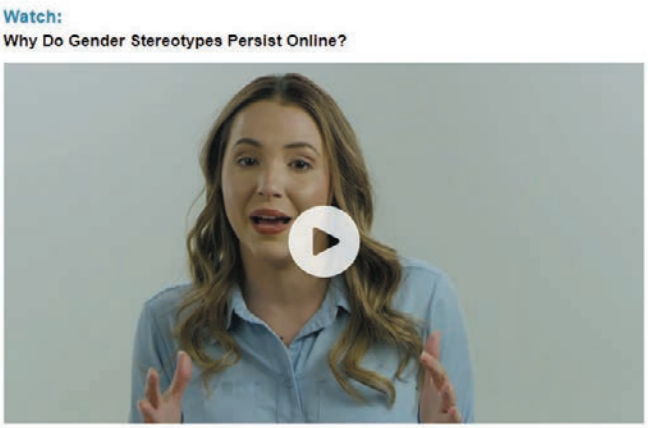
Rather than simply offering opportunities to read about and study human communication, Revel facilitates deep, engaging interactions with the concepts that matter most. For example, students can complete a self-assessment to gauge their own communication style and explore ways to improve upon their skills. Students can respond to ethical issues in communication and see how their responses compare to others'. Students may interactively explore different theories of and approaches to communication, see how communication shapes identity, review the components of language and stages of listening, assess models for relationship development, and analyze

group roles and communication structures in organizations. Students may interactively see how individual factors, cultural influences, and ethnocentric biases shape the way people perceive others and their world. By providing opportunities to read about and practice communication in tandem, Revel engages students directly and immediately, which leads to a better understanding of course material. A wealth of student and instructor resources and interactive materials can be found within Revel. Some of our favorites include:

- **Videos and Video Quizzes** Videos throughout the narrative show the various ways such factors as ethics, culture, language, and listening skills shape the act of communication to boost mastery. Many videos are bundled with correlating self-checks, enabling students to test their knowledge.



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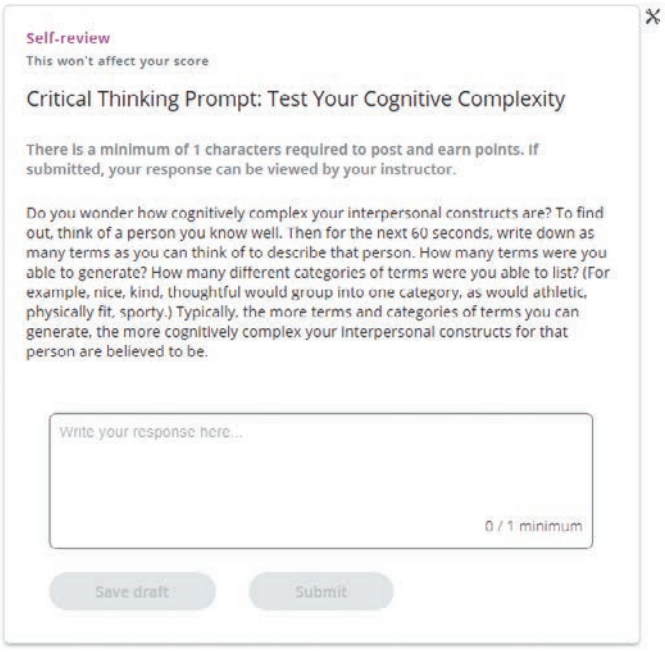

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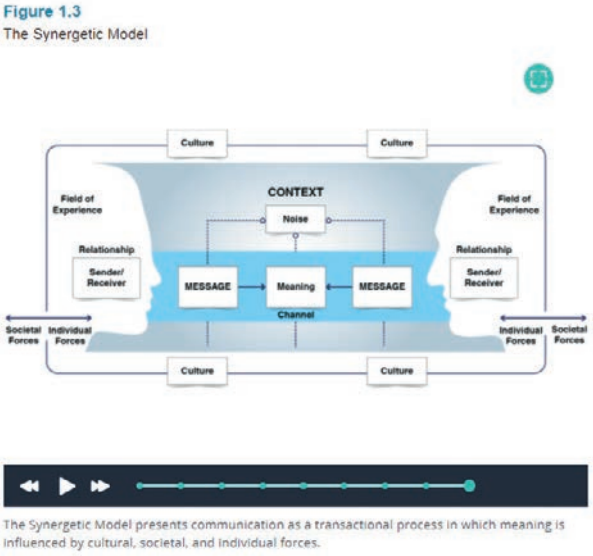

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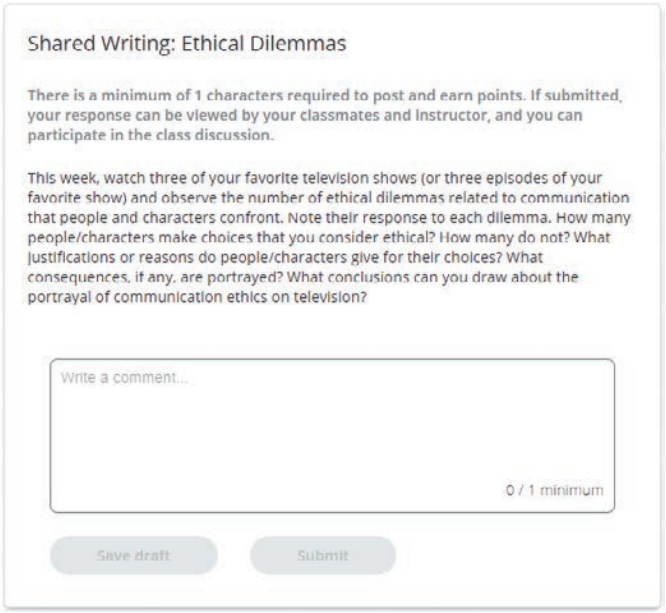
- **Integrated Writing Opportunities** To help students connect chapter content with personal meaning, each chapter offers two varieties of writing prompts: the Journal prompt, eliciting free-form topic-specific responses addressing topics at the module level, and the Shared Writing prompt, which encourages students to share and respond to one another's brief response to high-interest topics in the chapter.



For more information about all of the tools and resources in Revel and access to your own Revel account for *Human Communication in Society*, Sixth Edition, go to www.pearson.com/revel.

New to This Edition

In addition to the immersive learning experience offered by Revel, we've refined and updated the content in this new edition to create a powerful and contemporary resource for helping speakers connect to their audience. We've added several new features and revised features that both instructors and students have praised.

In this edition, general changes include new examples, theories, and applications, as well as updated photos that reflect the pervasiveness of social and other interactive media. Also, all chapters incorporate examples of studies and applications that include LGBTQIA+ communicators.

New features in the sixth edition of *Human Communication in Society* include:

- A new chapter on in-person conversation, emphasizing the importance of conversational skills needed to complement the constant connectivity of interactive/social media.
- More examples of specific research studies, particularly those that address LGBTQIA+ as well as heterosexual relational communication—in all three major paradigms.
- Updated videos that cover a wide range of new topics, including listening skills in the classroom, code switching, social media's impact on communication, and the value of effective group communication.
- Chapters 13 and 14 ("Mass Media and Communication" and "Communicating Through Social and Other Interactive Media") have been updated and revised to more clearly differentiate between communication processes that occur in mass media and interactive media, respectively.
- References in each chapter have been updated to reflect the most recent available research on the topics addressed.
- Updated examples that address contemporary events and trends including the communication challenges of the pandemic that help students connect the concepts to their personal experiences and concerns.

Chapter-by-Chapter Descriptions

Part 1

Chapter 1 explains the theme of this book—the interaction between the individual and society—as well as introducing important communication concepts and models. This chapter includes depictions of the linear, transactional, and synergetic models of communication, presented in a simple and clear format to assist student comprehension. Revel includes interactive models of the figures, allowing students to view the components in more depth. It also features an interactive survey that asks students to assess their communication skills and compare the results with their classmates.

Chapter 2 explores the importance of identities in communication. This edition includes updated examples with a focus on contemporary issues, such as Black Lives Matter, the current discussions over whether Middle Eastern people should be counted as "white" in the census, and Islamophobia. This edition also introduces new identity terms such as BIPOC and enby. We also introduce the concept of intersectionality and how it is applied to identities. Revel includes a multimedia gallery that shows how people perform their identities, along with a video and video quiz that delve into how race impacts perception and identity.

Chapter 3 focuses on communication and perception, including a discussion of schemas and the role of primacy and recency on selective attention. New material includes updated examples that address important issues of the day—for example, a new "Did You Know" feature describing the important function of argot in marginalized or stigmatized groups. Revel includes several interactives that test the student's knowledge of the concepts, including a self-quiz on distinguishing between schemas, prototypes, and scripts as well as a matching assessment that requires students to differentiate between physical, cognitive, and interpretive approaches to communicate.

Part 2

Chapter 4 highlights the elements of verbal communication. This edition includes a discussion of argot and how

it functions. It is also includes a discussion on the status of English as a world language and whether English speakers need to learn other languages. This chapter also includes a discussion of hate speech in the digital environment and the controversy over Facebook's handling of such language use. Revel includes an interactive fill-in-the-blank exercise on "I" statements along with an image gallery that demonstrates the functions of language.

Chapter 5 addresses issues of nonverbal communication. This edition includes more inclusive examples (disability, transgender) and concepts (microaggressions) as well as a new "Did You Know?" feature describing how the meaning of the "OK" nonverbal sign has changed throughout history and in various communities. Revel includes interactive images with informational pop-ups that delve into the nonverbal messages shown within.

Chapter 6 is an entirely new chapter that focuses on in-person conversational interaction and the underlying skills needed to be a successful conversationalist. It covers perspective taking and conversational awareness and addresses how students can more competently initiate conversations, communicate hurtful messages, communicate sexual consent, and apologize, as well as how to recognize and manage manipulative conversation strategies, among others. The chapter also includes a discussion of how race, gender, and socioeconomic class affect conversational interactions. Revel includes videos related to hurtful messages.

Chapter 7 is devoted to listening and responding. The distinction is made early on between hearing and listening, and new material focuses on the notion of online lurkers as listeners—providing an important audience for online content—as well as an updated listening style framework based on recent research. The chapter also discusses the recent civil unrest, suggesting that those with privilege in society need to listen to others "in a manner that is long-term and systemic." Revel delves into the four stages of listening, requiring students to properly identify the key components of each stage. It also features an interactive video self-assessment that asks students to listen to a problem and then respond appropriately.

Part 3

Chapter 8 includes new material on cultural values reflected in U.S. Americans' response to the pandemic health guidelines in comparison to responses of other cultural groups. The chapter also presents updated statistics on U.S. ethnic and racial demographics, migration patterns, refugee trends, and recent hostility directed at Asians and Asian Americans in intercultural encounters. Revel videos showcase various scenarios that involve intercultural communication. Students review these situations in video quizzes and video self-assessments, both of which require students to identify the communication patterns within.

Chapter 9 discusses communication in close relationships. In this edition, the focus of the chapter has been broadened to include more information on friendships (stage model of friendships, turning point model, maintenance behavior) and family communication. It also addresses new topics, like depression and gaslighting, appeals to broader interests (cosplay), and adds a discussion of passive-aggressive communication. Revel features an interactive model of Knapp's stages of romantic relational development.

Chapter 10 explores small group communication, and this edition includes updated material on communication technologies and small group communication. Given the increased importance of virtual communication in educational and professional contexts, this chapter includes an extended discussion of effective virtual small group work, including the factors affecting virtual teamwork as well as guidelines for handing conflict and the unique role of leadership in virtual small group interaction. There are also new examples and description of symptoms of groupthink. Revel includes interactives that delve into small group task roles, small group relational roles, and small group individual roles, with accompanying student audio.

Chapter 11 explores organizational communication. It has been revised to include a discussion of employee dissent, including potential communication strategies for both employees and supervisors in handling dissent. The chapter also includes new discussion on the potential impacts of the pandemic on organizational leadership, the increasing role of mobile communication technologies in home and work contexts, and their impact on work-life conflict. Revel includes an interactive simulation that asks students to put themselves in the mindset of a manager, presenting them with a series of workplace scenarios that require appropriate and ethical responses. Revel content also features new videos related to using technology at work.

Chapter 12 covers public communication and the use of strategic and persuasive communication. Rhetoric is presented with an emphasis on its historical, theoretical, societal, and ethical aspects. Updates are included in this edition as well as a discussion of the power of visual images of African Americans killed by police and the debates over Confederate monuments. This chapter also introduces how people use Twitter as an activist tool. This edition includes more Revel videos to help students prepare to speak in public.

Chapter 13 discusses communication and mass media. This edition updates the contemporary research on hostile media effects, cultivation theory, and the current trends in online viewing of television. We also look at the close relationship between media content and media ownership, as demonstrated in the case of Disney's purchase of large parts of 20th Century Fox and what happened to the Fantastic Four in the move to a new owner. This edition also introduces the work on frame analysis as another way to understand mass media. Revel interactives delve into the evolution of popular media, explore how media use differs across cultures,

and explore how high-power individuals—such as Stephen Colbert—can influence public opinion on current issues.

Chapter 14 covers interactive (social) media and communication. This chapter offers extensive new material, again focusing on the constant communication choices students make in deciding which medium to use to send messages and the consequences of these choices in both personal and professional contexts, as well as how media choices evolve to serve the needs of communicators. The chapter also includes new material on doxing, cancel culture, and problematic social media use (PSMU). There are updated examples, statistics, and research findings reflecting current scholarship and trends in interactive media use as well as guidelines for effective interactive/social media use in the virtual classroom and in interpersonal and professional contexts. Revel includes student testimony videos that explore how they use social media.

Features

Key features retained in this new edition reflect our four goals for this textbook.

Accessible Presentation of Communication Theory

In addition to using a down-to-earth writing style and providing plenty of examples, *Human Communication in Society*, Sixth Edition, offers specific tools throughout the text to help students understand the theory and key concepts:

- **Key terms** are glossed in the margins of the page where the term is first used and defined, listed at the end of each chapter with the page number where the term and definition can be found, and compiled in a convenient Glossary at the end of the text.

KEY TERMS

identity p. 26
symbolic interactionism p. 28
reflected appraisals p. 28
looking-glass self p. 28
particular others p. 29
generalized other p. 29
reference group p. 30
self-fulfilling prophecy p. 30
stereotype threat p. 31
self-concept p. 32
self-esteem p. 32
self-respect p. 33
performance of identity p. 33
self-presentation p. 33
enacting identities p. 33
role expectations p. 35
mutable p. 35
racial identity p. 37
multiracial identity p. 38
national identity p. 38
ethnic identity p. 39
BIPOC p. 40
enby p. 40
gender identity p. 40
cisgender p. 41
transgender p. 41
sexual identity p. 41
gender fluid p. 41
age identity p. 42
social class identity p. 42
disability identity p. 44
religious identity p. 45
intersectionality p. 46

- **Chapter summaries** conclude each chapter.

SUMMARY

2.1 Identify six reasons identity is important to communication.

- We bring our identities to each communication interaction.
- Communication interactions create and shape identities.

Emphasis on Ethics in Communication

Each chapter includes one or more detailed sections discussing ethical issues relevant to that chapter's communication topic.

Opportunities to Apply What Was Learned

We advocate a hands-on approach to the study of communication. For this reason, we've included "Apply What You Know" questions to encourage students to work through challenging concepts.

Student Engagement

We like to think that we have translated our commitment to the field and our love of teaching into a text that will engage students. We encourage this involvement with the following pedagogical features:

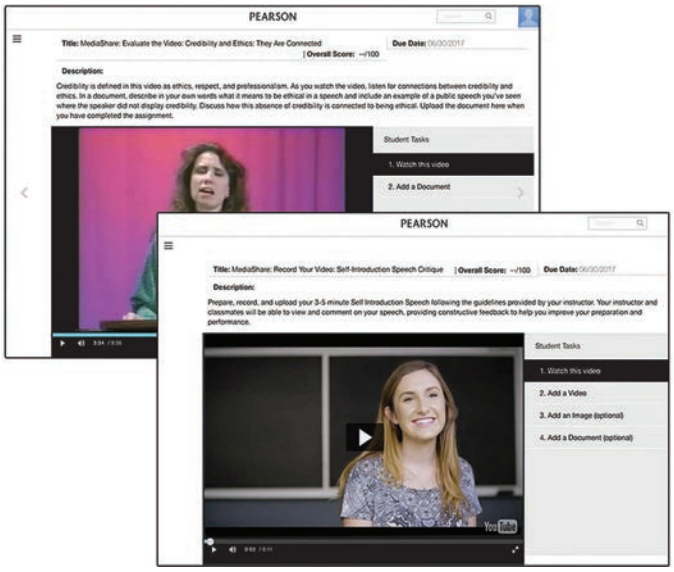
- **"It Happened to Me"** boxes offer real-life accounts of student experiences that provide a "hook" to important communication concepts.
- **"Alternative View"** boxes offer perspectives that challenge mainstream thinking or offer an interpretation of a chapter-related topic counter to conventional wisdom.
- **"Communication in Society"** boxes serve to reinforce the connection between the individual and society as applied to chapter-related topics.
- **Critical Thinking Prompts**, placed in the margins at strategic intervals, encourage students to reflect on how major concepts connect with their everyday experiences.
- **"Did You Know?"** boxes offer examples of chapter-related material that students may find surprising or unfamiliar.
- **"Journal Prompts"** offer students direction in writing about various issues that arise in the chapters. They give the students some direction in thinking about these issues.

Instructor and Student Resources

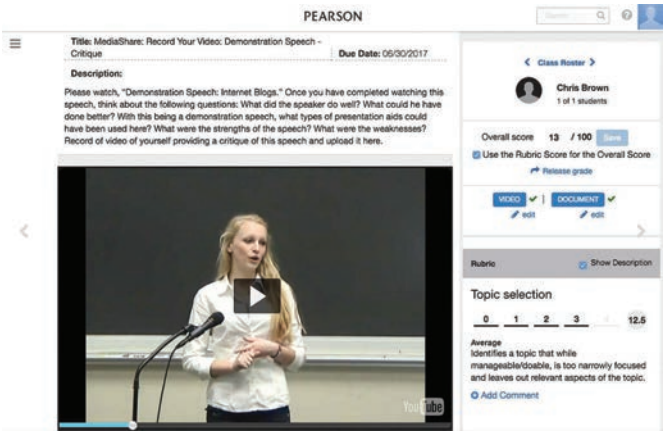
Key instructor resources include an Instructor's Manual (ISBN 9780136863984), Instructor's Solutions Manual, (ISBN 9780136863953), and PowerPoint Presentation Package (ISBN 9780136864035). These supplements are available on the catalog page for this text on Pearson.com/us (instructor login required). MyTest online test generating software (ISBN 9780136863724) is available at www.pearsonmytest.com (instructor login required). For a complete list of the instructor and student resources available with the text, please visit the Pearson Communication catalog, at www.pearson.com/communication.

Pearson MediaShare

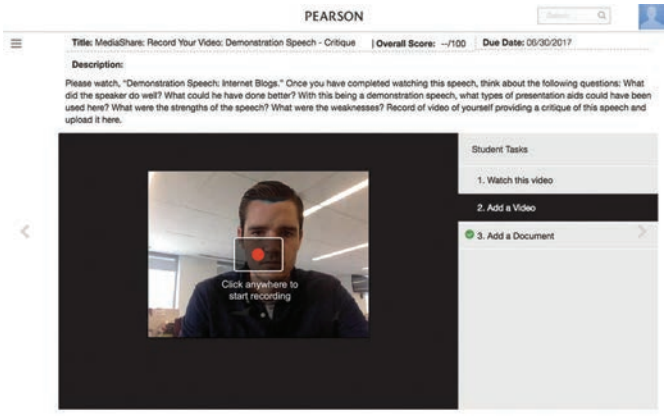
MediaShare integration makes it easier than ever for students and instructors to share and comment on speeches, as well as other videos, documents, images, and more. Users can upload original content for peer and instructor feedback or embed YouTube content with just a few clicks. Having these share-and-comment tools available directly within Revel™ makes for an even more interactive learning experience.



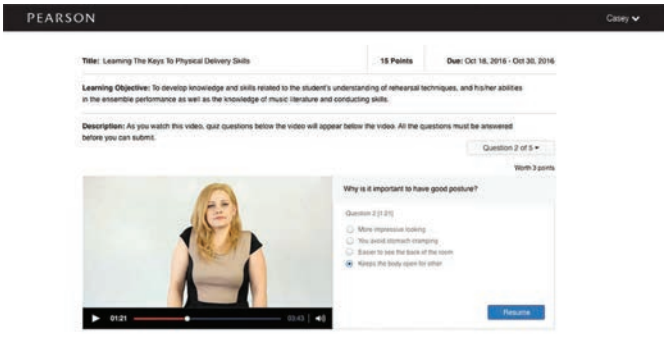
The best of MediaShare functionality, including student video submissions with grading and video quizzes, is now available to use and assign within Revel, making Revel an even more complete solution for Communication courses. By placing these key components of MediaShare within Revel, students have one all-inclusive space to practice and have their performance assessed while actively learning through interactive course content. Revel with MediaShare is an unparalleled immersive learning experience for the Communication curriculum.



- Use MediaShare to assign or view speeches, video-based assignments, role plays, and more in a variety of formats including video, Word, PowerPoint, and Excel.
- Assess students using customizable, Pearson-provided rubrics or create your own around classroom goals, learning outcomes, or department initiatives.



- Set up assignments for students with options for full-class viewing and commenting or private comments between you and the student.
- Record video directly from a tablet, phone, or other webcam.
- Embed video from YouTube via assignments to incorporate current events into the classroom experience.



- Set up quiz questions on video assignments to ensure students master concepts and interact and engage with the media.
- Import grades into most learning management systems.
- Ensure a secure learning environment for instructors and students through robust privacy settings.

A Word about Language

The text's commitment to presenting comprehensive coverage of the complex field of communication carries with it a responsibility to use language thoughtfully. We recognize the fact that, for complex historical and political relations, identity labels carry strong denotative meanings that may vary from person to person and across time. We have made an effort to use inclusive terms to represent the heterogeneity of opinions within various ethnic and racial groups.

For example, the term *Hispanic* was created and used in 1980 by the U.S. government for the census and other purposes of collecting census statistics. However, many individuals of Spanish descent prefer *Latina/o* or *Latinx*. We endeavor to use the latter terms to refer to U.S. Americans of Spanish descent from a specific ancestral nation like Argentina, Mexico, or any country in Latin America or Spain. We also use *Mexican American* when referring to individuals coming more directly from Mexico or *Chicana/o* to designate a more political consciousness among persons of Mexican descent.

Similarly, we use the inclusive term *Asian American* unless the context refers to individuals with a specific national origin (e.g., Japan or the Philippines). We have tried to use the more inclusive term *Black* when it is preferred by those using it (e.g., Black Lives Matter). *Black* is often used as more inclusive, as it includes those from the Caribbean or other parts of the world. We have tried to use *African American* when it is referring more specifically to people who identify in this way. We also use *Native American* and *American Indian* interchangeably, recognizing that individuals are divided in their preferences for each of these terms.

We should also note that we use both *White* (which emphasizes race) and *European American* (which emphasizes ethnicity) to refer to U.S. Americans of European ancestry. At the same time, we recognize that some individuals prefer to emphasize their more specific origins (*Japanese American* rather than *Asian American*, *Yaqui* rather than *Native American*, or *German American* rather than *White*).

We are learning to think more internationally in our use of language. Many of our neighbors in Latin and South America as well as in Canada find it offensive when we use the term *American* to refer to ourselves. (After all, these people are Americans as well.) Therefore, we prefer the term *U.S. American* in recognition of the fact that we are only one society out of many that make up the continents of North and South America.

Finally, in this edition, we also introduced some emerging identity terms, such as enby (NB: non-binary) and BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color). Some of these terms may stay relevant or disappear in the coming years, but it is important for students to be aware of the dynamic nature of these terms.

Acknowledgments

We are once again grateful to all the students and instructors who have provided invaluable feedback to us as we wrote the six editions of *Human Communication in Society*. Unfortunately, we are unable to list here all of the students who participated, but we would like to acknowledge the instructors who have helped to shape and define all editions of our book.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Human Communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Explain why it is important to study human communication.

1.2 Name and describe the seven primary components of communication.

1.3 Explain how the Synergetic Model of Communication differs from previous models.

1.4 Formulate your own communication ethic.

1.5 Articulate what makes a communicator competent.

CHAPTER TOPICS

The Importance of Studying Human Communication

What Is Human Communication?

A Model of Human Communication: The Synergetic Model

Communication Ethics

Putting It All Together: Communicating Competently

"If good communication skills were just common sense, then communication would not so often go awry."

On her way to class, Charee called her dad to let him know what time she would arrive home; she then scrolled through TikTok to see what others were doing while planning her next video. While she waited for class to begin, she checked her Instagram to see how many likes her post had received this morning and looked at one of the community organizations she liked to see what they were organizing today. When the professor arrived, she muted her phone and listened as the class began.

Most people, like Charee, exist in a sea of communication. They text and message their friends and family; spend time on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, creating new content and keeping up-to-date with the latest trends; occasionally stream movies; attend class lectures (sometimes online); and are inundated by media images as they are working out, biking to campus, and hanging out with friends. They remember how quickly they adapted their communication during the pandemic, like elbow bumping instead of shaking hands or hugging. Students interacted with professors and classmates more online than in classrooms. People socialized more on video chats, FaceTime, and Zoom than face-to-face; attended virtual graduations, concerts, weddings, and parties; and some stopped interacting with elderly relatives for a period of time or saw them only virtually. Communicating during and after the pandemic highlights the myriad of verbal, nonverbal, and virtual communication options available and how various contexts can necessitate adaptation.

With so many communication options now available and the occasional necessity for quick adaptation to changing contexts, people need a wider range of communication knowledge, skills, and flexibility than ever before. Successful communicators must converse effectively face-to-face and online; determine what messages to send via social media or in person; and absorb the norms and etiquette surrounding the use of social media. Becoming an effective communicator involves a nimbleness and understanding of the components and processes of communication and putting them into practice in every stage of life. As you work in this course to improve your communication knowledge and skills, you may see positive changes in your relationships, your career, your engagement in civic life, and even your identity. How many other courses can claim all that?

The Importance of Studying Human Communication

1.1 Explain why it is important to study human communication.

As you begin this course, several questions may arise. First, you may wonder exactly how the study of human communication differs from other studies of humans, such as psychology. Communication differs from other social science disciplines because it focuses exclusively on the exchange of messages to create meaning. Scholars in communication explore what, when, where, and why humans interact (Emanuel, 2007). They do so to increase our understanding of how people communicate and to help individuals improve their abilities to communicate in a wide variety of contexts. In addition, unlike most social sciences, the study of communication has a long history—reaching back to the classical era of Western civilization when Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle wrote about the important role of communication in politics, the courts, and learning (National Communication Association [NCA], 2003; Rogers & Chafee, 1983). However, the ability to speak effectively and persuasively has been valued since the beginning of recorded history. As early as 3200–2800 BCE, the Precepts of Kagemni and Ptah-Hotep commented on communication (NCA, 2003).

Second, you may question why anyone needs to study communication; after all, most people have probably been doing a reasonably good job of it thus far. And isn't most communication knowledge just common sense? Unfortunately, it is not. If good communication skills were just common sense, then communication would not so often go awry. In fact, most people struggle with how to communicate well: they don't know how to listen so that other people feel heard; they aren't sure how to convince others to see their point of view; and they often aren't able to settle disagreements with people they care about deeply. Because communication is a complex activity, we need to learn skills that allow us to adapt our communication so others will hear, understand, connect with and care for us. Think of times when you felt others failed to communicate effectively with you. Have you ever felt that one of your teachers talked down to you? Have you had a relationship end because you and your partner had a misunderstanding? Or have you failed to get what you wanted—a job, an invitation, your parents' support—because you couldn't figure out how to interact with others in specific contexts? In sum, talking is not equivalent to communicating. We can drown others in words, but if they do not understand, connect with, and care about those words, then we have not communicated with them at all.

Now that we have so many ways to communicate and maintain relationships with others, some scholars have begun to ask if it is possible to have too much communication. Do you think this is possible or likely? To learn how some communication scholars answer this question, see *Alternative View: Co-rumination: When Too Much Talk Is as Bad as Not Enough*.

Finally, you may think of communication as a set of skills but believe that they are easily learned and wonder why there is an entire course (even a major!) that focuses on communication. Although it is true that every day people use communication to accomplish practical goals such as inviting a friend to see a movie, resolving a conflict with a colleague, or persuading the city council to install speed bumps in their neighborhood, communication is more than just a set of skills, like baking, that one can use in a variety of contexts and settings with little alteration. Rather, communication is an intricate process whose effective performance requires an in-depth understanding of how it works and the ability to apply one's critical thinking skills to communication experiences to learn from and improve them.

ALTERNATIVE VIEW

Co-rumination: When Too Much Talk Is as Bad as Not Enough

You have probably heard that to have good relationships, people need to "communicate more." However, sometimes communicating a lot can have negative effects. One type of "over-communication" that can cause harm is co-rumination. Co-rumination occurs when we talk—again—and again—and again—with others about a problem in our lives. It has been linked to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, binge eating, binge drinking, and self-harm (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008).

Co-rumination often occurs among friends because that is to whom we turn most often when we encounter problems. In an attempt to console or support each other, such as when a breakup occurs, friends often tolerate or even encourage each other to talk extensively about what happened and how they feel. Individuals are most likely to engage in co-rumination during adolescence and young adulthood.

Why is co-rumination unhealthy? During co-rumination, participants' communication focuses incessantly on the issue and its negative effects rather than on solutions. It can even damage relationships, causing "depression contagion." If the co-ruminating friend repeatedly draws the other into negative conversations, it can make both more depressed and lead the friend to avoid the co-ruminator, as such discussions may make one feel worse and helpless to do anything about it. Consequently, experts suggest that a goal should be to balance "problem talk" with positive activities and that one should revisit their joys and successes with friends just as they would their problems (Schwartz-Mette & Smith, 2018).

Can you think of other occasions when people talk "too much"?

SOURCES: Nolen-Hoeksema S., Wisco, B., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Rethinking rumination. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, 400–424.

Schwartz-Mette, R. A., & Smith, R. L. (2018). When does co-rumination facilitate depression contagion in adolescent friendships? Investigating intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *47*(6), 912–924.

▲ If your romantic partner doesn't answer a text message, it could be because she is studying and set her phone on "do not disturb."

Critical Thinking: A Key to Successful Communication

Critical thinking requires that one become a critic of one's own thoughts and behavior. That is, rather than responding automatically or superficially, critical thinkers reflect on their own and others' communication, behavior, and ideas before responding (Paul & Elder, 2008). Scholars have proposed various definitions of critical thinking; the one we advocate describes it as a process that involves the following steps (Passer & Smith, 2004):

1. Identify the assertion or action.
2. Ask, "what is the evidence for and against the assertion or action?"
3. Ask, "what does the bulk of evidence point to?"
4. Ask, "what other explanations or conclusions are possible?"
5. Continue to keep an open mind for new evidence and new ways of evaluating the assertion.

How might one apply this process to communication interactions? Let's explore this with a simple and common example, showing the steps in the process.

Step 1: Identify the action: Imagine that you send a text message to your romantic partner on a Friday evening but hours later have not heard back. How should you interpret the lack of reply, and consequently, how should you respond? If you were thinking non-critically, you might interpret the behavior negatively (my partner is cheating on me!) even though you have little or no evidence to support this interpretation. You then might respond by dashing off an accusatory message.

Step 2: Evaluate your interpretations and beliefs: Critical thinkers evaluate their interpretations and beliefs before responding by asking themselves, "What evidence do I have for this belief or interpretation?" Thus, if their first impulse was to doubt their partner, they would ask themselves, "What evidence exists that my partner is cheating?" Does failing to return a text necessarily mean the partner is intentionally refusing to respond? Even if the partner is purposely refusing to respond to a text, does that mean the reason for refusing is unfaithfulness?

Step 3: What does the bulk of evidence point to? The critical thinker would then question whether this interpretation is supported by sufficient evidence and experience. A critical thinker would ask: What does the bulk of the evidence point to—for example, has my partner cheated before? Does my partner usually respond quickly to messages? Is my partner normally trustworthy?

Step 4: What other conclusions are possible? Next they would consider what other explanations are possible. For example, my partner's phone battery is dead; my partner fell asleep early and didn't receive my messages; my partner is studying and set her phone on "do not disturb."

Step 5: Keep an open mind and evaluate new information as it is presented: Only after following this process would a critical thinker settle on a likely interpretation and response. Even then, the critical thinker would continue to keep an open mind

Critical Thinking Prompt

Now that you have reviewed the steps involved in critical thinking, would you consider yourself high or low in critical thinking skills? What topics or situations are most likely to cause you to use your critical thinking skills? What can you do to improve these skills?

and evaluate new information as it was presented. Thus, even if you decided that there was no evidence that your partner was cheating, you might reevaluate your conclusion if your partner repeatedly failed to reply to texts on Friday nights.

Advantages of Studying Human Communication

There are many advantages to studying human communication. Individuals use communication to meet people, to develop professional and personal relationships, and to terminate dissatisfying ones. Communication scholar Steve Duck (1994) argues that relationships are primarily communicative. Moreover, the relationships we have with others—including how we think and feel about one another—develop as we communicate. Through communication interactions, relationship partners develop shared meanings for events, explanations for their shared past, and a vision of their future together (Alberts et al., 2005; Dixon & Duck, 1993). So, if you tell your romantic partner, "I have never loved anyone as much as I love you, and I never will," you are simultaneously redefining your past romantic relationships, creating shared meaning for the present relationship, and projecting a vision of your romantic future together. Similarly, through communication with friends, coworkers, and acquaintances, we all define and redefine our relationships.

Perhaps most fundamentally, your communication interactions with others allow you to establish who you are to them (Gergen, 1982; Mead, 1934). As you communicate, you attempt to reveal yourself in a particular light. For example, when you are at work, you may try to establish yourself as someone who is pleasant, hardworking, honest, and competent. With a new roommate, you may want your communication behavior to suggest you are responsible, fun, and easygoing. However, at the same time that your communication creates an image of who you are for others, *their* communication shapes your vision of yourself. For example, if your friends laugh at your jokes, compliment you on your sense of humor, and introduce you to others as a funny person, you probably will see yourself as amusing. In these ways, communication helps create both our self-identities and our identities as others perceive them.

Communication has the potential to transform your life—both for the better and for the worse. (To read how one student's communication created a transformation, see *It Happened to Me: Chelsea*.) As many people have discovered, poor or unethical communication can negatively affect lives. How? Communicating poorly during conflict can end relationships, inadequate interviewing skills can result in unemployment, and negative feedback from conversational partners can lessen one's self-esteem. Sometimes communication can have even more significant effects. In 2019, actor Jussie Smollett went to the Chicago police claiming that he had been attacked by two men who hurled racist and homophobic slurs and tied a rope around his neck. Questions about the incident led to a deal in which the charges were dropped in exchange for community service and losing his bond money. In February 2020, prosecutors charged him with making false police reports (Jussie Smollett, 2020), and in June 2020, a judge ruled that these charges did not constitute double jeopardy (Hendrickson, 2020). At the time of this writing, the judicial proceedings have not concluded, but Smollett is being charged for specific, illegal communication acts (filing false police reports).

It Happened to Me

Chelsea

When the professor asked us to identify a time when communication was transformative, many examples came to mind. Finally, I settled on one involving a negative relationship. In high school there's usually one person you just don't get along with. Boyfriend drama, badmouthing, you name it. I remember dreading seeing this one girl, and I'm sure she felt the same about me. Graduation came and went, and I completely forgot about her. A year later, I came across her Facebook page as I was searching for old classmates online. As I thought about how petty our arguments were and how cruel we were to each other, I felt smaller and smaller. So I decided to end it. After friending her, I sent her a private message to apologize for my bad behavior. A couple days later I received a response from her saying she felt the same way and was also sorry for the way she acted. Next week we're going to have a cup of coffee together to really put the past behind us. Maybe to some people that doesn't seem all that life-changing, but after hating this girl for two years, it's an amazing transformation for me.

In contrast, as you can see from Chelsea's story, developing excellent communication skills also can transform your life for the better. The three authors of this book have all had students visit months or years after taking our communication classes to tell us what a difference the classes have made in their lives. A student in a public speaking class reported that, because of her improved presentation skills, she received the raise and promotion she had been pursuing for years; another student in a conflict and negotiation class revealed that her once-troubled marriage became more stable once she learned to express disagreements better. A third student felt more confident after he took a persuasion class that taught him how to influence people.

Studying human communication may also benefit you by opening doors to a new career path. A degree in communication can prepare you for a wide variety of communication careers.

Journal Prompt 1.1: Studying Communication
How does the study of communication differ from other social science disciplines?

What Is Human Communication?

1.2 Name and describe the seven primary components of communication.

Broadly speaking, human communication can be defined as a process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages. In this book, however, we emphasize the influence of individual and societal forces and the roles of culture and context more than other definitions do. Because we believe these concepts are essential to understanding the communication process completely, we developed a definition of human communication that included them. Accordingly, we define **human communication** as a transactional process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages in specific contexts, influenced by individual and societal forces and embedded in culture. In the following sections, we will illustrate our definition of human communication and explore the meaning of each of these concepts and their relationships.

human communication
A transactional process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages in specific contexts, influenced by individual and social forces, and embedded in culture.

Components of Human Communication

Consider the following scenario:

> Charee grew up in the United States and knew she needed to talk to her father, Pham, who was reared in Vietnam, about her desire to participate in political rallies in their city. The rallies were protesting police actions in the Black community following George Floyd's death in Minneapolis. She was concerned about how the conversation would go. She knew that, as immigrants, her parents were very patriotic and would not look favorably on activist protests against law enforcement or any other government entity. She hoped to convince her father that it was a good idea for her to participate to make changes to policing as well as show that many Asian Americans support Black Lives Matter. Yet she also wanted to display respect for him as her father and the head of the household. To ensure that things went well, she decided that they should meet at his favorite neighborhood café in the early afternoon so they could talk privately. She rehearsed how she would convey information that he might not be happy to hear and practiced responses to the objections she expected him to raise.

▼ As this picture illustrates, communication is symbolic in that the words we use to communicate an idea such as "I love you" are arbitrary and are not inherently connected to the concept to which they refer.

As this example reveals, communication is a complex process that can require considerable thought and planning. The complexity inherent in communication is a result of the variety of factors that compose and influence it. The seven basic components of communication to consider in planning an interaction are *message creation*, *meaning creation*, *setting*, *participants*, *channels*, *noise*, and *feedback*. Each of these features is central to how a communication interaction unfolds. To help you understand this process, we analyze Charee's experiences with her father.

Message Creation **Messages** are the building blocks of communication, and the process of taking ideas and converting them into messages is called **encoding**. (Receiving a message and interpreting its meaning is referred to as **decoding**.) Depending on the importance of a message, people are more or less careful in encoding their messages. In our example, Charee was concerned with how she encoded her messages to her father. She particularly wanted to both persuade him that she should become more politically active and assure him that this would not change their close relationship. To accomplish this, she decided to encode her idea into this message: "I promise that I will make sure to stay in touch while I'm at rallies, I'll do my best to stay safe, and I'll text you."

messages
The building blocks of communication.

encoding
Converting ideas into messages.

decoding
Receiving a message and interpreting its meaning.

When we communicate, we encode and exchange two types of messages—verbal and nonverbal—and most of these messages are symbolic. A **symbol** is something that represents something else and conveys meaning (Buck & VanLear, 2002). For example, a Valentine's Day heart symbolizes the physical heart, it represents romantic love, and it conveys feelings of love and romance when given to a relational partner. The verbal system is composed of linguistic symbols (that is, words), whereas the nonverbal message system is composed of nonlinguistic symbols such as smiles, laughter, winks, vocal tones, and hand gestures.

symbol
Something that represents something else and conveys meaning.

When we say *communication is symbolic*, we are describing the fact that the symbols we use—the words we speak and the gestures we use—are arbitrary, or without any inherent meaning (Dickens, 2003). Rather, their meaning is derived as communicators employ agreed-on definitions. For instance, putting up one's hand palm forward would not mean "stop" unless people in the United States agreed to this meaning, and the word *mother* would not mean a female parent unless speakers of English agreed that it would. Because communicators use symbols to create meaning, different groups often develop distinct words for the same concept. For instance, the common word for a feline house pet is *cat* in English but *neko* in Japanese. Thus, there is no intrinsic connection between most words and their meanings—or many gestures and their meanings.

Because human communication is predominantly symbolic, humans must agree on the meanings of words. Consequently, words can, and do, change over time. For example, the term *gay* typically meant "happy" or "carefree" from the seventeenth century through much of the twentieth century. Although the term was occasionally used to refer to same-sex relationships as early as the 1800s, it has come to be used widely only since the late 1990s, when users agreed to this meaning and usage. Nonetheless, people may have different meanings for specific symbols or words, especially if they come from different ethnic or national cultures. Read about one student's difficulties communicating while on a trip to Europe in *It Happened to Me: Alyssa*.

It Happened to Me

Alyssa

Recently I traveled in Europe; I had no idea how difficult it would be to communicate, even in Scotland. I spent the first few days navigating Edinburgh on my own. It was so hard! People tried to help, but because of the differences in word choice and accents, I couldn't fully understand their directions. After Edinburgh I went to Germany, where I had an even harder time communicating due to the language barrier. So I resorted to using nonverbal gestures, like calling the server in a restaurant by raising a hand/finger. Turns out this gesture is not the way to get the attention of a server, as I read later in my guidebook; it can even be considered rather rude.

As Alyssa's experience reveals, though most people recognize that cultures vary in the words they use for specific ideas and items, they don't always realize that nonverbal gestures can have varied meanings across cultures as well. Creating messages is the most fundamental requirement for communication to occur, but it certainly is not enough. Messages also create shared meanings for everyone involved in the interaction.

Meaning Creation The goal of exchanging symbols—that is, of communicating—is to create meaning. The messages we send and receive shape meaning beyond the symbols themselves. We also bring to each message a set of experiences, beliefs, and values, often influenced by our culture, that help shape specific meanings. For example, *Top Chef* host Padma Lakshmi, in her Hulu show *Taste the Nation*, describes the way food creates, continues, and preserves culture (especially in immigrant communities). This also means that people can hear the same message but understand it differently. Charee was aware of this as she planned the conversation with her father. She knew they didn't always have precisely the same meanings for every word. For example, the phrase *independent thinker* to describe a son or daughter carried positive meanings for her as a millennial-age college student, but she knew it carried more negative and potentially upsetting meanings for her father. Therefore, when talking to her father, she would never argue that participating in political rallies was good for her because it would help her become more independent.

Meaning is made even more complex because, as the example suggests, each message carries with it two types of meaning—content meaning and relationship meaning.

content meaning
The concrete meaning of the message and the meanings suggested by or associated with the message, as well as the emotions triggered by it.

relationship meaning
What a message conveys about the relationship between the parties.

Content meaning includes denotative and connotative meaning. Denotative meaning is the concrete meaning of the message, such as the definition you would find in a dictionary. Connotative meaning describes the meanings suggested by or associated with the message and the emotions triggered by it. For example, denotatively the word *mother* refers to one's female parent, whereas connotatively it may include meanings such as warmth, nurturance, and intimacy. **Relationship meaning** describes what the message conveys about the relationship between the parties (Robinson-Smith, 2004; Watzlawick et al., 1967). For example, if a colleague at work told you to "run some copies of this report," you might become irritated, but you probably wouldn't mind if your boss told you to do the same thing. In both cases the relationship message may be understood as "I have the right to tell you what to do," which is appropriate if it comes from your supervisor—but not if it comes from a peer.

Finally, communication helps create the shared meanings that shape families, communities, and societies. Specifically, the meanings we have for important issues including politics, civil behavior, family, and spirituality—as well as for less important concerns such as what food is tasty or what type of home is desirable—are created through people's interactions with one another. For example, if you were asked what your family "motto" is (that is, what is important in your family), what would you say? Some people might say it is "family first," whereas others declare it is "do the right thing." How do families come to have these shared beliefs and meanings? They do so through the countless interactions they have with one another; through these conversations and everyday experiences they create a meaning for what is important to their family. What do you think happens when two people marry, one of whom believes "family first" and another who thinks "do the right thing" is more important than even family? Like the families they grew up within, they will interact, live together, and jointly develop shared meanings for their family beliefs. A similar process occurs when people come together to form groups, organizations, communities, and societies. In sum, our relationships, our understanding of the world, and our beliefs about life and death are created through the interactions we have with others.

Setting The physical surroundings of a communication event make up its setting.

setting
The physical surroundings of a communication event.

Setting includes the location where the communication occurs, environmental conditions, time of day or day of the week, and the proximity of the communicators. Together these factors create the physical setting, which affects communication interaction.

Why do you think Charee chose to meet in midafternoon at her father's favorite café as the setting for their conversation? She did so for several reasons. First, her father would be more likely to feel relaxed and in a good mood in a familiar location that he liked. Second, she selected the middle of the afternoon so they would have more privacy and fewer interruptions. Finally, she chose a public setting because she believed her father would remain calmer in public than in a private setting, such as at home. As you can see, Charee carefully selected a comfortable setting that she believed would enhance her chances of being successful.

Participants During communication, **participants**—two or more people—interact. The number of participants, as well as their characteristics, will influence how the interaction unfolds. Typically, the more characteristics participants share (cultural, values, history), the easier they will find it to communicate because they can rely on their common assumptions about the world.

participants
The people interacting during communication.

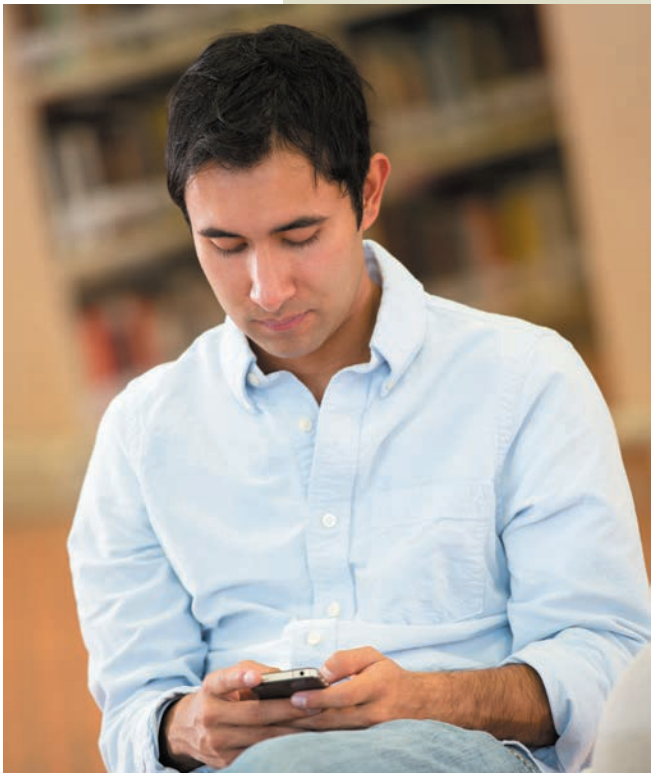
As Charee planned her conversation, she recognized that she and her father shared a number of important characteristics—respect for elders in the family, a communal approach to relationships, and a desire for harmony. However, she also realized that they differed in important ways. Although she was close to her family, she desired more independence than her father would want for himself or for her. In addition, she believed it was acceptable for young, single women to make their own decisions about how to think and how to live their lives, a belief she was sure her father didn't share to the same extent.

The type of relationship communicators have and the history they share also affect their communication. Whether communicators are family members, romantic partners, colleagues, friends, or acquaintances affects how they frame, deliver, and interpret a message.

Because Charee was talking with her father rather than her boyfriend, she focused on displaying respect for his position as her father and asking (rather than telling) him about wanting to attend a protest rally that week. As we have suggested already, the moods and emotions that communicators bring to and experience during their interaction influence it as well. Because Charee wanted to increase the likelihood that the conversation with her father would go well, she tried to create a situation in which he would be in a calmer and happier frame of mind.

channel
The means through which a message is transmitted.

noise
Any stimulus that can interfere with or degrade the quality of a message.



▼ Mobile messaging is one channel of communication. What other channels do you often use?

Channels For a message to be transmitted from one participant to another, it must travel through a channel. A **channel** is the means through which a message is conveyed. Historically, the channels people used to communicate with one another were first face-to-face and then written. Today, thanks to technology, we have many more communication channels—email, texting, social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to name just a few.

The channel that a person selects to communicate a message can affect how the message is perceived and its impact on the relationship. For example, if your romantic partner broke up with you in an Instagram post or by changing their Facebook relationship status instead of by talking to you face-to-face, how would you respond? Because Charee was sensitive to the importance of the communication channel she used with her father, she elected to communicate with him face-to-face because it was a channel her father was familiar with and would find appealing.

Noise **Noise** refers to any stimulus that can interfere with or degrade the quality of a message. Noise includes external signals of all kinds: not only loud music and voices but also