



FIFTH EDITION

# IN THE COMPANY of OTHERS

An Introduction to Communication

J. DAN ROTHWELL

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# **In the Company of Others**



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**J. DAN ROTHWELL**

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*To my family,*  
**MARCY, HILARY, GEOFF, BARRETT, AND CLARE**

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# Preface

There are many good human communication textbooks available. If you compare just their Table of Contents (TOCs), it might seem that barely a whit of difference exists among the lot. What sets the fifth edition of *In the Company of Others* apart? Certainly not the TOC. Aside from the unique chapter on power and the two appendices (interviewing and special occasion speeches), it must appear to the casual observer that this fifth edition covers the same general topics as most other texts and is just a standard textbook. Surface appearances, however, can be deceiving.

Recognizing that students rarely read the preface because it is marginally relevant to them, I am specifically addressing instructors who might consider addressing *In the Company of Others* in their courses. It is unrealistic to expect you to peruse the cornucopia of competing communication texts and compare them to this new edition as though you have nothing better to do with your precious time. So let me highlight distinguishing features that make this textbook unique as a complete package.

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## Distinguishing Features

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*In the Company of Others* covers in depth the standard topics found in every human communication textbook. Its special features, however, separate it from the crowd.

### **Unique Topic Selection or Coverage: Beyond the Standards**

Every author wrestles with what to include and exclude from a textbook that covers a subject as broad as human communication. *In the Company of Others* provides substantial coverage of

a multitude of topics that are excluded or given only cursory treatment by other authors:

1. Channel changing impact
2. Hindsight bias: answering the “only common sense” view of communication
3. Four types of communication noise (physical, physiological, semantic, and psychological)
4. Five elements of ethical communication (honesty, respect, fairness, choice, and responsibility) with applications
5. Hypercompetitiveness and communication climate
6. Ethics of hypercompetitiveness
7. Sensory limitations and sensation/perception subjectivity
8. Inattentional blindness and social media blunders
9. Excessive self-esteem
10. Contingencies of self-worth
11. Benevolent versus hostile sexism
12. Culture and gender linkages
13. Self-humbling and self-enhancement cultural differences
14. Power-distance and cultures
15. Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism versus multiculturalism
16. Acculturation strategies and intercultural communication
17. Gender similarities versus gender differences hypotheses
18. Female *and* male body image issues
19. The “beauty bias”
20. First impressions, accuracy and inaccuracy
21. Elements of language (structure, productivity, displacement, and self-reflexiveness)

22. Abstraction process (way beyond the “abstraction ladder”)
23. The great texting debate
24. Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: the debate over whether you can think without language
25. Signal reactions to words
26. Taboo language
27. Dead-level abstracting
28. False dichotomies
29. Mislabeling and stigma
30. Inferential errors
31. Street harassment of women (and some men)
32. Myths about nonverbal communication
33. Body shape and cultural perceptions of beauty
34. Touch taboos
35. Gated communities and territoriality
36. Personal space and prison designs
37. Comprehending phonemes (units of sound in language) and words (hearing is not listening)
38. Benefits of forgetting
39. Conversational narcissism
40. Competitive interrupting
41. Ambushing and listening
42. Critical listening: skepticism, cynicism, true belief, and the probability model
43. Open-mindedness and critical listening
44. Burden of proof
45. Confirmation bias and rationalization of disconfirmation
46. The Law of Very Large Numbers
47. Passive aggression (six types)
48. Sexual harassment
49. Violence and aggression in relationships and prevention strategies
50. Verbal and nonverbal indicators of power
51. Power resources
52. Types of power: dominance, prevention, and empowerment
53. Triangular theory of love (seven types)
54. Stages of relationships (coming together and coming apart): communication strategies
55. Opening lines (initiating relationships) and their effectiveness
56. Recognizing flirting signals
57. Communication approaches to intensifying relationships
58. Connecting bids and relationship maintenance
59. Defensive versus supportive communication: beyond a checklist
60. Negativity bias
61. Psychological reactance
62. Cross-sex friendships
63. Social media “addiction”: myth versus reality
64. Cell phone and Internet etiquette
65. Online romance and dating
66. Intercultural romances
67. Serial arguments
68. Destructive versus constructive interpersonal conflicts
69. Dialectics within intimate relationships and with outsiders
70. Honesty in relationships: Always the best policy?
71. Contempt and the corrosion of relationships
72. Forgiveness in relationships
73. Culture and conflict management
74. Anger management of self and others
75. Workplace bullying
76. Groupware and communication competence
77. Group synergy
78. Influence of group size on communication dynamics
79. Gender and ethnicity and leadership in groups
80. Teamwork and teambuilding in groups
81. Difficult group members (“bad apples”)

82. Virtual groups
83. Reframing and creative group problem solving
84. Speech anxiety causes and solutions
85. Strategies for gaining *and* maintaining attention (see especially the humor section)
86. Extensive treatment of fallacies and evaluating supporting materials
87. Cooperative argumentation
88. Toulmin structure of argument
89. Competent speaking style
90. Attitude-behavior consistency and persuasive speaking
91. Social judgment theory
92. Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion
93. Fear appeals and persuasive speaking
94. Anger appeals and persuasive speaking
95. Identification and persuasive speaking
96. Source credibility and persuasive speaking
97. Contrast effect (door-in-the-face) strategy and persuasive speaking
98. Two-sided persuasion
99. Cognitive dissonance and persuasive speaking
100. Extensive models of both informative and persuasive speeches with applications of text material embedded

My apology to any authors whose books include some of these topics in extensive detail. I was not able to peruse each of the dozens of human communication textbooks available, only what I thought was a representative sample. *This list is not meant to be a criticism.* In my decades of writing textbooks and reading hundreds of reviews from bright, insightful colleagues, it has become abundantly clear that there is no one, incontrovertible view of how human communication should be taught and the subjects that should be included to enhance students' learning. I offer this list of topics as a potential aid in deciding whether *In the Company of Others* appeals to you as a textbook that extensively addresses topics that stretch beyond

the standard offerings. There is no expectation that every topic will resonate with you as a "must cover" option.

### Readability: Beyond the Ordinary

Samuel Johnson's comment, "What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure," guided the writing of this textbook. Readability is a vital concern to me, as I know it is to students. Textbooks are not meant to read like spy thrillers, but they don't need to read like an instruction manual for installing and setting up your new flat-screen TV. Similarly, an overly dense, theoretical text written in technical language can impede clarity and understanding for students. Consequently, I searched in obvious and not-so-obvious places for the precise example, the amusing illustration, the poignant event, and the dramatic instance to engage readers, enhance enjoyment, and improve clarity. Colorful language and lively metaphors are sprinkled throughout the text. Vivid heads and subheads (see, e.g., stages of relationship development in Chapter 8) help *In the Company of Others* seem less "textbooky." Humor is plentiful (see especially the introduction and "sharing meaning" segment in Chapter 1, the "semantics" and "displacement" segments in Chapter 4, the introduction to Chapter 5, the "active listening" segment in Chapter 6, and humor as attention strategy in Chapter 13 for concentrated examples). Reviewers have been generous with their praise about the readability of *In the Company of Others*. Students have likewise offered generous praise. Readability is often singled out as a distinctive characteristic that separates this textbook from others.

### Scholarship: Beyond Opinion and Anecdotes

Too often mass-market books, and some textbooks, on human communication offer chirpy homilies encouraging readers to get along with others, be cooperative, improve self-esteem, listen intently, and the like. These are agreeable and worthwhile sentiments. Nevertheless, students can be forgiven if they find themselves perplexed by how to accomplish all of these worthwhile goals and more.



My own preference, both as a teacher and as a textbook author, is to provide detailed, practical ways, *supported by abundant research*, to address the myriad communication challenges each of us face in our complex lives. I look for insights, explanations, and practical solutions revealed by voluminous research that addresses issues uppermost in students' minds. If little had changed in this regard since the fourth edition of this text was published, I would feel content to leave well enough alone. Much has changed in our increasingly technocentered world, however, and much has been learned in the interim to help us meet the new challenges. The almost 1,700 references, most of them very recent, are a testament to my commitment to provide more than personal opinion based on anecdotes and observations. Students don't always appreciate the inclusion of scholarly research in a textbook, but we as academics take pride in practicing what we teach by providing evidence for our claims and advice. (See the introduction to the "leadership" section in Chapter 10 for elaboration of this point.) Otherwise, we might as well assign comedian Steve Harvey's mundane, anecdotal, and sexist advice book (*Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*) as required student reading.

### **Communication Competence Model: A Foundation for Students**

The communication competence model is one of our discipline's unique contributions to understanding and improving human behavior. A premise of this book is that communication competence, whether in the arena of interpersonal relations, small-group work, public speaking, or communication technology, is critical to student success and achievement. The five components of the model—knowledge, skill, sensitivity, commitment, and ethics—for achieving communication effectiveness and appropriateness underscore the complexity of the communication process and provide direction and guidance for students. The model is integrated throughout the text (see the *Index*), not merely discussed in the first chapter and then dropped entirely or mentioned only briefly in later chapters. Most topics and issues in the text, including perception of self and

others, intercultural and gender communication, language use, nonverbal communication, listening, transacting power, managing conflict, and using communication technologies, are analyzed from the model's perspective. In addition, *Developing Communication Competence* boxes are included to help students improve their communication.

### **Cooperation: A Recurring Theme**

Cooperation is a recurring theme of this book. One of the great potential contributions of the communication discipline is that not only can we discuss cooperation theoretically, we can also provide specific, concrete advice on how to structure human transactions so cooperation can become a reality. Many textbooks in several disciplines pay lip service to the need for human cooperation, but they are noticeably devoid of informed, research-supported suggestions regarding how to make it happen. This does little more than frustrate students who are looking for practical guidance on working collaboratively. *In the Company of Others* thoroughly addresses the issue of cooperation in a variety of communication contexts. This book is based on the assumption that cooperation should be nurtured and cultivated.

### **Controversy: Embracing Disagreement**

Communication theory separated from the realities of a complex and not always pleasant world can seem sadly irrelevant to students faced with vexing problems. Addressing important controversies directly can provide significant opportunities for student learning. Consider the white-hot issue of gender violence in relationships. Most human communication textbooks exclude any discussion of this enormously important issue (compare the indexes). The abundant, credible evidence I present, however, shows that violence from both men and women is prevalent in intimate relationships. So why exclude this topic from honest and open treatment? Communication is at the center of this "dark side" of intimate relationships. Power sharing and ways to communicate power balancing provide students important insights on how to prevent and address intimate aggression.

The aim of *Focus on Controversy* boxes is to show students how to weigh evidence and draw conclusions supported by research on important issues that spark disagreement. Additional examples of controversies addressed and worthy of class discussion include the ethics of hypercompetitiveness, absolute honesty in relationships, excessive self-esteem, verbal obscenity, texting and its effects on language skills, and plagiarism of public speeches. Every controversy receives a balanced treatment. Conclusions are drawn, and thought-provoking questions are posed. Treatment of relevant controversies will certainly spark interesting discussion in the classroom and, more important, trigger critical thinking by students.

### **Culture and Gender: Connected**

Gender and culture are important themes because we live in a world of increasing diversity. *In the Company of Others* treats gender and culture as integral parts of the overall discussion of communication. Gender receives special attention early in the text, and culture and gender are the main subjects of Chapter 3. This material is thoroughly integrated in subsequent chapters. Topics related to gender and culture include cultural differences in perception and nonverbal meanings, the role of gender and culture in powerful/powerless language, cross-cultural friendships and romantic relationships, gender and cultural bias in the workplace, the effects of communication technologies on cultural transactions, leadership and the glass ceiling in groups, and many others.

### **Social Media: A Fresh Look at Communication Technologies**

No one can doubt the enormous impact that communication technologies are having on our lives. How we cope with these technologies and the huge changes they bring are vital issues. Technological changes and advances are addressed in substantial detail throughout the text, but particular emphasis is given to the influence of technologies on social relationships (see especially Chapter 8). *In the Company of Others* provides the most extensive coverage of technology and its impact on our communication of any textbook on the market (see “technology”

in the *Index*). Subjects include social online networks, student-teacher electronic communication rules, cyberdating and cyberlove, electronic marriage proposals, e-dumping, text messaging and language proficiency, nonverbal cues and electronic communication, social media distractions and listening, electronic technology and information overload, the “Google effect,” halfalogues and cell phone intrusion, indiscriminate self-disclosure on Twitter and Facebook, cyberaddiction, cyberconflicts, virtual groups, cell phone and online etiquette, *Wikipedia*, Internet research and misinformation, and PowerPoint uses and misuses, among others.

### **Power: Worthy of a Chapter**

Power is inherent in every human transaction. “To be human is to be immersed in power dynamics” (Keltner, 2007). “There’s only one path to intimacy. It runs straight through shared power in relationships” (Marano, 2014). It is perplexing that most textbooks give so little attention to the integral role power plays in all human relationships. If mentioned at all, power is usually treated more as an aside, or relegated to only a single specific topic or two, such as power and leadership in groups. The communication discipline has many valuable insights to offer on this essential subject that requires more than perfunctory, obligatory mention. Chapter 7 gives special focus and detailed analysis to the subject of power in relationships, and later chapters include additional discussions and applications. Such topics as the effects of power imbalances in relationships, the significance of sharing power in relationships, sexual harassment in the workplace, sources of personal power, strategies for transacting power competently and cooperatively, and ways to empower ourselves and others are addressed.

### **Critical Thinking: Open Minds Versus Closed Minds**

Asking students to think critically and to determine which ideas and conclusions make sense may strike some students as promoting closed-mindedness. “Shouldn’t all ideas be given an equal hearing?” *Chapter 6 explores skepticism and the probability model like no other textbook, discussing the issue of open- and closed-mindedness*

in the process. Open-mindedness is explained as following where the evidence and reasoning lead, while closed-mindedness is accepting or rejecting an idea or conclusion despite what the evidence and reasoning suggest. Chapters 12, 13, 14, and 15 offer further coverage of critical thinking, with an emphasis on using sound reasoning and concrete evidence to build both informative and persuasive speeches. The *Focus on Controversy* boxes in each chapter also provide models for using sound reasoning and evidence to bolster claims.

### Speech Anxiety and Attention Strategies: Extensive Treatment

*In the Company of Others* provides the most extensive treatment of speech anxiety of any human communication textbook. Speech anxiety is the most important concern on most students' minds when they are told that giving speeches will be a required activity in class. Also, no hybrid textbook on communication covers attention strategies for both gaining and maintaining it as thoroughly as *In the Company of Others*. Let's face the facts: no one wants to listen to boring speeches, and no one wants to present a speech that puts the audience in a stupor. Attention strategies are a vital part of any effective speech.

### Film School Feature: Opportunity to Apply Communication Theory

The very popular *Film School Case Studies* at the end of every chapter identifies carefully selected movies on DVD or streaming video that illustrate key concepts. Instead of doing the work for students by analyzing each film and applying it to chapter material, I ask students to do this by answering critical thinking questions. More current films have been added to most chapter lists in this edition.

### Carefully Composed Model Speeches: Applications

A major concern I had with general communication textbooks before I wrote *In the Company of Others* was the discrepancy between text descriptions and actual models of informative and persuasive speeches. Often the model speech even contradicted advice provided in

the main text. Model informative and persuasive speeches have been carefully composed to illustrate the advice offered in this text.

## New to this Edition

The proven organization of the text remains firm, but many significant improvements have been made.

### Updates Throughout

- Almost 500 new references have been added and more than 500 older references have been deleted. Dozens of new studies, surveys, and statistics on a wide variety of topics have been included throughout the text. The scholarship has been thoroughly updated in every chapter.
- More than a hundred new examples, stories, jokes, anecdotes, and pop culture references have been added so that the material is contemporary, resonates with readers, and sparks reader interest.
- Many new photos, cartoons, and graphics have been added or have replaced previous illustrations. Custom cartoons drawn by Marcy Wieland appear in the public speaking chapters.
- Model informative and persuasive speeches have been thoroughly updated with more current research and statistics included, and the entire speeches have been edited for concision.
- The *Film School Case Studies* feature has been updated with many recent films included for analysis by students.

### Additional Changes for This Edition

- New chapter openings have been provided for Chapters 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, and 13.
- Thirteen of the 15 chapters have been significantly condensed, saving substantial room for additional photos and cartoons while still shortening the text by 43 aggregate pages.
- Significant sections of Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, and 13 have been reorganized

for improved clarity and impact. Some sections have been moved to different chapters to improve the organization (see especially Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13).

- New captions have been provided for cartoons and photos, many asking multiple-choice or analytical questions.
- TED Talks and YouTube links now appear at the end of all four public speaking chapters (Chapters 12 to 15). These links provide students with opportunities to view excellent as well as not-always-good speeches for analysis and entertaining video presentations on key subject matter (e.g., delivery, organization, and cognitive dissonance).

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## Organization of the Text

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*In the Company of Others* is divided into four parts. First, Chapters 1 to 6, on the fundamentals of communication, lay the groundwork for the rest of the book. Subjects include the communication competence model, the role of perception in human transactions, intercultural and gender communication, the use and misuse of language, nonverbal communication, and the listening process. Each of these subjects crosses into every area of communication. Second, Chapters 7 to 9, on interpersonal communication, discuss power in communication transactions, interpersonal dialectics, strategies for making relationships work, and conflict-management techniques. Third, Chapters 10 and 11, on group communication, explain the anatomy of small groups, teambuilding, and teamwork in groups and organizations. Fourth, Chapters 12 to 15, on public speaking, address preparing a first speech, presenting a more sophisticated speech to an audience, and constructing an effective informative or persuasive speech.

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## Supplements

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A comprehensive support package accompanies the fifth edition of *In the Company of Others*:

### For Students

- The **Companion Website** ([www.oup.com/us/rothwellitcoo](http://www.oup.com/us/rothwellitcoo)) offers a wealth of study and review resources, including: audio tutorials, chapter outlines, chapter summaries, key term flashcards, learning objectives, *Quizzes Without Consequences*, review questions, worksheets, speech preparation checklists, and speech topic ideas.
- **Now Playing 2016 Student Edition** illustrates how communication concepts play out in a variety of situations, using a mass medium that is interactive, familiar, and easily accessible to students. Content can also be accessed via the Companion Website ([www.oup.com/us/nowplaying](http://www.oup.com/us/nowplaying)).

### For Instructors

- **Ancillary Resource Center (ARC)** at [www.oup-arc.com](http://www.oup-arc.com) is a convenient, instructor-focused website that 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 Oxford University Press to keep instructors informed when new content becomes available. The following items are available on the ARC:
  - An **Instructor's Manual and Test Bank** with numerous, classroom-tested activities, video links, and multiple-choice and true-false questions; asterisked activities that rate extensively tested exercises, activities, demonstrations, and illustrations.
  - Newly revised **PowerPoint-based lecture slides** highlight key concepts, terms, and examples and incorporate images from each chapter.
- **Now Playing 2016 Instructor's Edition** includes an introduction on how to incorporate film clips in class as well as even more film and TV examples, viewing guides and assignments, sample responses to the discussion questions in the student edition, and a full list of references.

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J. Dan Rothwell is chair of the Communication Studies Department at Cabrillo College. He has a BA in American history from the University of Portland (Oregon), an MA in rhetoric and public address, and a PhD in communication theory and social influence. His MA and PhD are both from the University of Oregon. He has authored four other books: *In Mixed Company: Communication in Small Groups and Teams*; *Telling It Like It Isn't: Language Misuse and Malpractice*; *Interpersonal Communication: Influences and Alternatives* (with James Costigan); and *Practically Speaking*, a public speaking text with Oxford University Press. During his extensive teaching career, Dr. Rothwell has received more than two dozen teaching awards, including the 2014

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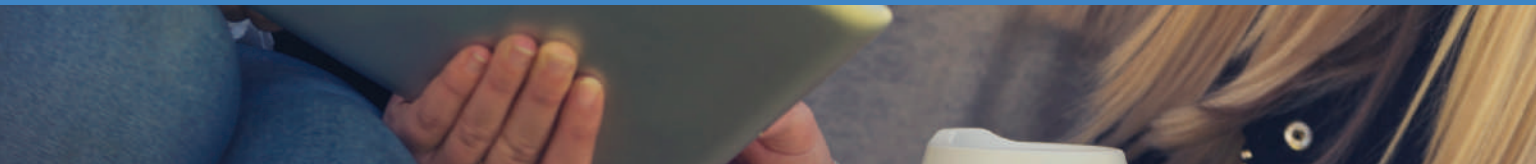


**BY THE END OF THIS CHAPTER, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:**

**1.** Debunk common myths about communication.

**2.** Understand the transactional nature of human communication.

**3.** Diagnose communication problems using the communication competence model of effective and appropriate transactions—the theme of this text.





# Competent Communication

**WHAT MAKES US LAUGH** illustrates the richness and complexity of human communication. A study called LaughLab sought to determine the world's funniest joke (British Association for the Advancement of Science, 2002). More than 350,000 people from more than 70 countries logged on to an Internet site, contributed 40,000 jokes, and then, from a random selection, rated the jokes on a scale from 1 to 5. Here's the joke that received the highest overall rating:

Two hunters from New Jersey are out in the woods when one of them falls to the ground. He doesn't seem to be breathing. The other whips out his mobile phone and calls the emergency services. He gasps out to the operator: "My friend is dead. What can I do?" The operator in a calm soothing voice says, "Just take it easy. First let's make sure he's dead." There is silence, then a shot is heard. The guy's voice comes back on the line. He says, "Okay, now what?"

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

- **Benefits of Communication Competence**
- **Communication Myths**
- **Defining Communication**
- **Defining Communication Competence**
- **Achieving Communication Competence**
- **Creating a Communication Climate**

**4.** Understand the five global ways to achieve communication competence.

**5.** Recognize and create a cooperative, not a competitive, communication climate in a variety of contexts.



Humor is a matter of subjective perception. What is thigh-slappingly funny to one person may be offensive or lame to another. The LaughLab study found that men often favor jokes that put down women, involve sexual innuendo, or are aggressive (see also Nicholson, 2010). For example:

**Texan:** Where are you from?

**Harvard Graduate:** I come from a place where we do not end our sentences with prepositions.

**Texan:** Okay, where are you from, Jackass?

Women often prefer jokes that are based on word play, such as “A man walks into a bar with a piece of tarmac under his arm. He says to the bartender: ‘A pint for me, and one for the road.’”

Culture also influences what is perceived to be funny. Americans preferred this joke:

A man and a friend are playing golf one day at their local golf course. One of the guys is about to chip onto the green when he sees a long funeral procession on the road next to the course. He stops in mid-swing, takes off his golf cap, closes his eyes, and bows down in prayer. His friend says, “Wow, that is the most thoughtful and touching thing I have ever seen. You truly are a kind man.” The man replies, “Yeah, well, we were married 35 years.”

The joke favored most by the British participants in the LaughLab study was this one:

A woman gets on a bus with her baby. The bus driver says, “That’s the ugliest baby that I’ve ever seen. Ugh!” The woman goes to the rear of the bus and sits down, fuming. She says to a man next to her, “The driver just insulted me!” The man says, “You go right up there and tell him off—go ahead. I’ll hold your monkey for you.”

The French liked this joke: “‘You’re a high-priced lawyer! If I give you \$500, will you answer two questions for me?’ The lawyer responds, ‘Absolutely! What’s the second question?’”

Using humor can be tricky business (Warren & McGraw, 2013). Jokes about religion, sex, and the underprivileged can cause deep offense in some circumstances (Kuipers, 2006). Jokes that rely on ethnic stereotypes and humor that disparages others are risky and can easily backfire (Wanzer et al., 2006). Some humor, such as slapstick, crosses cultural boundaries easily, but sick jokes and dark humor do not (Lewis, 1996).

Humor is largely a social event that bonds us with others (Nicholson, 2010). Typically, we like to laugh, and we like people who make us laugh. This is one reason we might email jokes at work. Humor, however, can be a dicey proposition, especially if it contains sexual content. One person receiving an emailed joke about sex might be amused, but another might file sexual harassment charges against the sender. A salacious joke told during a speech could provoke an awkward silence or a mass exodus by the audience.

We laugh louder and longer when a joke is told to us than when we merely read it (Provine, 2000). Often we laugh at a joke that doesn’t seem funny because we don’t want to embarrass the joke teller or because not laughing at a joke told by a more powerful person (e.g., your boss) can place you in an uncomfortable position (Myatt, 2012). How well you tell a joke also influences the response. This mostly involves nonverbal elements of facial expressions, eye movements, tone of voice, gestures, posture, and body movements.

Humor touches on virtually every main topic explored in this text—communication climate, perception, gender, culture, verbal and nonverbal communication, listening, power, conflict, relationships, groups, public speaking, and communication technologies. Knowing how to use humor well requires communication competence—the unifying theme of this text.

*The purpose of this chapter is to explain the communication competence model. It serves as a map to guide your exploration of how to communicate well with others.*

## Benefits of Communication Competence

*Communication* is mostly what we humans do, often with the grace and clarity of an inebriated celebrity at an awards ceremony. You spend most of your time in college communicating. As the National Communication Association states, “Communication is the foundation of all disciplines” (Rhodes, 2010, p. 13). You listen to and ask questions of your professors; give oral reports and speeches in classes; debate controversial issues; engage in class discussions; talk to, text, and tweet fellow classmates and roommates; and form friendships through conversation that may even blossom into true love. The entire academic enterprise is largely a communication event. Anything that occupies so much of your time is certainly worth serious attention. This section discusses two general reasons to study communication: (1) the social, personal, and workplace benefits of communicating competently, and (2) the need to improve our communication with others.

### Social Connection: Communicating with Others

We humans are “the social animal” (Aronson, 2012). Our brains “are wired to be social. We are driven by deep motivations to stay connected with friends and family. We are naturally curious about what is going on in the minds of other people” (Lieberman, 2013, p. ix).

Communication is the means by which we establish social connection and build relationships. Social media have exploded in popularity, permitting unprecedented social connection. Facebook, the world’s most popular social networking site, for example, had 1.4 billion monthly “active users” and almost 900 billion “daily active users” in 2015 (C. Smith, 2015). Americans between ages 18 and 24 send and receive, on average, a prodigious 3,853 text messages per month. Female college students average 105 minutes per day texting, and male college students average

84 minutes per day (Roethel, 2014). Almost half of those 18 to 34 years old view texting as “just as meaningful . . . as an actual conversation on the phone” (“18-24-Year-Old Smartphone Owners,” 2013). Then there is Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram, among others, which contribute to our being awash in social media that connect us with others.

The depth of our social connections in the digital age, however, has come into question. For example, a reporter for *The New York Times*



Electronic devices can be socially connecting or disconnecting, and either result can begin surprisingly early. Francisco Sanchez, age 2, is thoroughly engrossed watching a YouTube video alone. He and his sister, Juliana, age 5, later sit side-by-side, but these siblings seem to be alone together.

observes that Facebook can too often be “a place of indiscriminate musings and minutiae, where people report their every thought, mood, hiccup, cappuccino, increased reps at the gym or switch to a new brand of toothpaste” (Ball, 2010). One study of Twitter tweets found that 41% of the tweets were “pointless babble” of the “I am eating a sandwich now” variety (Kelly, 2009).

All conversations, however, do not have to be deep and meaningful, and most are assuredly not wellsprings of wisdom and insight, but no matter. Sometimes we may need to talk about meaningless “stuff” just to connect for many reasons. One study found that everyday talk itself, whether face-to-face or on Facebook, helps maintain friendships and closeness, and when such talk decreases, it creates uncertainty and concerns that the friendship is in jeopardy (Ledbetter & Keating, 2015). The mere act of talking to others can create social connection.

The vital importance of social connection is perhaps even more obvious when you feel the sting of social rejection. The pain we experience from social rejection can be intense, and memories of social pain can be much more intense than those of physical pain (Lieberman, 2013). The pain from a broken leg usually fades relatively quickly; the pain from a “broken heart” can linger for a lifetime.

Consider further what your life would be like if you did not interact with another human being for a week, a month, or even a year. Stories of feral or “wild” children growing up without any apparent human contact and horrific instances of children imprisoned in closets or basements demonstrate how extreme the results of social isolation can be (Newton, 2002). Despite intensive training, however, these unfortunate children do not learn to communicate normally unless their plight is discovered within the first six years of life. After age 6, learning a language, any language, is very difficult, and shortly after puberty, the capacity to master a language virtually disappears if no language at all has been acquired (Kuhl et al., 2005).

### Workplace Benefits: Positions, Performance, and Promotion

Communication skills are critical to landing a job, performing effectively, and receiving

promotions in the workplace. A study of more than 400 employers conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers ranked communication skills as the *most important qualification* a candidate for employment can possess (“Top 10 Skills,” 2013). Additional research arrives at the same conclusion (Hansen & Hansen, 2015b). Moreover, once people are hired, skillful communication is the determining factor in how well they perform on the job and their likelihood of promotion (Morreale & Pearson, 2008).

### Communication Improvement: All Can Benefit

All of us can benefit from improving our communication with others, but not if we’re convinced that no improvement is necessary. In one large study, team members’ assessments of their group leaders were a whopping 50% *lower* than the team leaders’ self-assessments (LaFasto & Larson, 2001). Many studies report that college students vastly overrate their oral communication skills when compared to employers’ assessments of them (Jaschik, 2015; Pinola, 2012).

No one is a perfect communicator, so studying communication can benefit everyone. This is why more than a thousand faculty members surveyed from a wide variety of academic disciplines and colleges identified these *essential skills* for every college graduate: *speaking, listening, problem solving, interpersonal skills, working in groups, and leading groups* (R. Diamond, 1997). That previews the general content of this text.

## Communication Myths

American humorist Will Rogers once remarked, “It isn’t what we don’t know that gives us trouble; it’s what we know that ain’t so.” As used here, a **myth** is a belief that is contradicted by fact. Communication myths can disrupt your ability to improve your communication knowledge and skills. If what you know about communication “ain’t so,” then what chance do you have to improve your communication competence? Because common misconceptions can interfere with your understanding of what

communication is, let's first discuss what communication is not.

### **Myth 1: Communication Is a Cure-All**

Relationships can't always be fixed by better communication. Sometimes communicating clearly reveals just how far apart individuals in a relationship have grown. Skillful communication may ease the pain of breaking up, but it may not sufficiently heal the wounds of a bruising relationship. Similarly, despite its importance to your employment future, improving your interviewing skills may not be sufficient to land a job. If the most challenging aspect of any job you've held involved asking, "Would you like fries with that?" then your chances of landing a high-skills managerial or technical position are about the same as a snail's safe passage across a freeway.

*Research also reveals that some problems between individuals are not solvable* (Fulwiler, 2012; Gottman & Silver, 1999). Your partner may never learn to enjoy events attended by large crowds. Your coworker may never develop a sunny disposition and a less cynical view of the world. Your boss may never be more than an imperious, narcissistic, inconsiderate tyrant. Your roommate may never become a tidy person. Competent communication can help us cope with our recurring disagreements and challenges, but it may not change people.

Communication is a very important tool. When employed skillfully, communication can help solve numerous problems. Communication, however, is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is not the basis of all human problems. Thus, not all problems can be solved, even by textbook-perfect communication.

### **Myth 2: Communication Is Just Common Sense**

Because all of us have communicated all of our lives, it is easy to think, as you read this text, "Oh, that's just common sense." This "I-knew-that-already" tendency is called the **hindsight bias** (Roese & Vohs, 2012). For example, everybody knows that opposites attract, correct? When psychologist David Myers (2002) told this to college students, most found the observation

to be unremarkable. Yet when another group of college students was told the *opposite* ("Birds of a feather flock together"), most also found this observation to be plain common sense. Sometimes what we know isn't so.

The proof for the claim that "I knew that already," of course, is whether you can provide the accurate information *before* you are told what the research says is true. I regularly quiz my students at the beginning of each term on their general knowledge of communication (see Box 1-1). I do not ask them technical definitions of concepts or query them about remote facts. The questions are kept within the average college student's communication experience. Thus, it is by far the easiest test of the term. Consistently, however, students do very poorly; most flunk the test. Such results are not unexpected, though, and certainly not cause for ridicule. One of your primary purposes for taking a communication course should be to learn new information, to gain new insights, and to unlearn the misinformation popular culture often disseminates.

If communication consists mostly of common sense, with no requirement for studying or training, then why do so many people exhibit inadequate communication knowledge and skills? Why is the divorce rate so persistently high, and why are breakups so often nasty, uncivilized battles? Why are most teams unsuccessful in achieving their desired goals and performing well (Coutu, 2009)? Why does it seem that public speaking is almost a lost art, as far too many politicians anesthetize us with bland, ghostwritten speeches? Why do so many Twitter users seemingly share every thought that enters their head only to realize too late that they have acted foolishly? Why have blogging sites so often become forums for "Internet trolls" to share abusive, bigoted comments?

As you read this text, note that what passes in the popular media for knowledge and insight about communication, and what may seem like common sense, is often pure myth. How do we know? *Because abundant research says so!*

### **Myth 3: Communication Quantity Equals Quality**

"One of our culture's most cherished ideas is that when it comes to communication in

## BOX 1-1 DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

## Hindsight Bias Test

Choose either **TRUE** or **FALSE** for each statement. Each correct answer is worth 2 points.

- |  |                                   |                                    |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Research on communication between men and women shows that differences are so vast that women seem to be from Venus and men from Mars.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 2. Personal relationships have a good chance of lasting and remaining strong as long as both partners balance negative, judgmental communication (criticism, blame) with an equal amount of positive, supportive communication (praise, recognition, affection). | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 3. Venting your anger (expelling it, not holding it in) so that it doesn't build up steam until you explode is usually a productive and effective way to manage your anger.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 4. Females, far more than males, have body image concerns.   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 5. Relationships cannot thrive if there is any deception between partners.   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 6. The greater the fear appeal (e.g., scaring people about the health dangers of smoking), the likelier your audience members will be persuaded by your message to change their behavior (e.g., stop smoking).   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 7. Whenever we travel to another culture, we should attempt to be as direct, precise, and explicit in our communication as we can be to avoid misunderstandings.   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 8. Women rarely use violence against their male partners.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 9. Most people can usually detect lying from others; college students, because of their general intelligence and education, are actually quite good at it.   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 10. Compromising is the most effective strategy for managing conflicts in relationships and groups because it is based on fairness.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 11. Competition motivates the vast majority of individuals to give their very best performance.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 12. Some stereotypes can be accurate depictions of groups in general.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 13. Self-disclosure (communicating personal information about ourselves that others would not know unless we told them) should be plentiful on a first date to help determine whether a second date is desired.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 14. Conflicts should not be avoided because this will only make things worse.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 15. Parents should take every opportunity possible to praise their children because an individual can never have too much self-esteem.   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 16. First impressions are almost always inaccurate because they are based on very limited information.   | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |
| 17. You cannot think without language; just try thinking without words.  | <input type="radio"/> <b>TRUE</b> | <input type="radio"/> <b>FALSE</b> |

(continued)

(continued)

18. You can stop sending messages of any sort to other people if you want to, even when they are observing you.  TRUE  FALSE
19. No one is ever completely powerless.  TRUE  FALSE
20. Converting a person from one strong belief to a contradictory belief is very achievable if you know how to use persuasive strategies effectively.  TRUE  FALSE

**See answers and how to score this test at the end of the chapter. Explanations occur throughout this text. Providing explanations here is premature and lacks context for understanding.**

relationships, more is better” (Swann et al., 2003, p. 1104). Is this really the case, however? Relentless criticism is more communication, but it is hardly better communication. Persistently text messaging a boyfriend or girlfriend about a nasty argument may intensify the conflict, especially if the original argument centered on “smothering” with too much attention. If you have a disagreement with your professor about a grade, repeatedly approaching your teacher in the hope that persistence, or “nagging,” might produce a favorable grade change will likely fail (Dunleavy et al. 2008). It may even harden your professor’s resolve to stop listening to you. According to long-term studies of couples’ communication, 69% of all marital conflicts never go away, and arguments about such conflicts recur year after year (Gottman & Gottman, 2006). These are called **serial arguments**. Couples who argue sometimes keep resurrecting points of contention, and like someone picking a scab, they reopen old wounds again and again. Finally, in a survey by LexisNexis of 1,700 white-collar professionals in five countries, almost 60% revealed that being constantly accessible via cell phone, email, and by other means was distracting and a serious interference with working effectively on tasks. More than half felt “demoralized” and close to a “breaking point” from information overload that resulted from easy access (Walsh & Vivona, 2010). *More communication isn’t always better communication.*

## Defining Communication

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* takes about 1,200 words to define *communication*. Communication scholars and researchers have contributed more than a hundred different definitions of their own. There is no ideal, or sacred, definition of communication. Authors, scholars, and students of human communication offer definitions suitable to their perspectives on the subject.

The definition that best fits the perspective presented in this textbook is as follows: **Communication** is a transactional process of sharing meaning with others. Yet this seemingly simple, 10-word definition requires explanation. Be thankful that you won’t be asked to memorize or explain the *OED*’s definition.

### Communication Is Transactional: The Evolving Perspective

Many communication models have been developed over the years, and each attempts to describe communication in concrete terms. In this section, three communication models are discussed in the order of their development: linear, interactive, and transactional. Each of these models provides insights that explain how the communication process works.