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Seventh Edition

Introducing
COMMUNICATION
THEORY
Analysis and Application



Richard L. West | Lynn H. Turner

SEVENTH EDITION

Introducing Communication Theory

Analysis and Application

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INTRODUCING COMMUNICATION THEORY

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Preface

As we present the seventh edition of *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application*, we remain excited by its enormous success. The previous six editions demonstrate that communication theory courses are vibrant, that teachers of communication understand the importance of theoretical thinking, and that both instructors and students appreciate the consistent and organized template we employ throughout. This text explores the practical, engaging, and relevant ways in which theory operates in our lives. *It is written primarily for students who have little or no background in communication theory.*

We originally wrote the book because we thought that students need to know how theorizing helps us understand ourselves, as well as our experiences, relationships, media, environment, and culture. We also wrote this book because we believe that students should have a text that relates theory directly to their lives. We felt that some books insulted the student and trivialized theory while other books were written at a level that was far too advanced for an undergraduate. In this book, we take great care to achieve the following additional objectives:

- Familiarize students with the principles and central ideas of important theories they are likely to encounter in the communication discipline.
- Demystify the notion of theory by discussing it in concrete and unequivocal ways.
- Provide students with an understanding of the interplay among theory, communication, and application.
- Introduce students to the research process and the role of theory within this process.
- Assist students in becoming more systematic and thoughtful critical thinkers.

The seventh edition of this book maintains its original focus of introducing communication theory to students in an accessible, appealing, and consistent way. We believe that students understand material best when it is explained in a clear, direct way through a number of realistic and applicable examples. Our hope is that students will take away a basic knowledge of, and appreciation for, communication theory from reading our text.

The theories in communication studies have roots in both communication and in other fields of study. This interdisciplinary orientation is reflected in the selection of the various theories presented in the text. We not only include the unique contributions of communication theorists, but also theories with origins in other fields of study, including psychology, sociology, biology, education, business, and philosophy. Communication theorists have embraced the integration of ideas and principles forged by their colleagues across many disciplines. Yet, the application, influence, and inherent value of communication are all sustained by the theorists in this text. In other words, although theories cut across various academic disciplines, their relevance to communication remains paramount and we articulate this relevancy in each theory chapter. We do not presume to speak for the theorists; we have distilled their scholarship in a way that we hope represents and honors their hard work. Our overall goal is to frame their words and illustrate their theories with practical examples and instances so that their explication of communication behaviors becomes accessible for students.

Together, we have over 60 years of experience in teaching communication theory. During this time, we have learned a great deal. *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application* utilizes and applies all that we as teachers have learned from our students. We continue to be indebted to both students and colleagues whose suggestions and comments have greatly influenced this newest edition. In fact, many of these observations are found throughout the book!

The Challenges of Teaching and Learning Communication Theory

The instructor in a communication theory course may face several challenges that are not shared by other courses. First, because many students think of theory as distant, abstract, and obscure, teachers must overcome these potentially negative connotations. Negative feelings toward the subject can be magnified in classrooms where students represent a variety of ages and socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. *Introducing Communication Theory* addresses this challenge by offering a readable and pragmatic guide that integrates content with examples, capturing the essence and elegance of theory in a straightforward manner. In addition, the book takes an incremental approach to learning about theory, resulting in a thoughtful and appropriate learning pace. In our decades of teaching this course, we have found that students cannot be overwhelmed with too much information at once. Therefore, we unpack theory in reasonable and digestible ways.

A second challenge associated with teaching and learning communication theory relates to preconceived notions of research: Students may view scholarship as difficult or remote. This book demonstrates to students that they already possess many of the characteristics of researchers, such as curiosity and ambition. Students will be pleasantly surprised to know that they operate according to many personal theories every day. Once students begin to revise their misconceptions about research and theory, they are in a position to understand the principles, concepts, and theories contained in this book.

A third challenge of teaching and learning communication theory is capturing the complexity of a theory in an approachable way without oversimplifying the theoretical process. To address this problem, instructors often present a skeletal version of a theory and then fill in the missing pieces with personal materials. By providing a variety of engaging examples and applications reflecting a wide range of classroom demographics, *Introducing Communication Theory* facilitates such an approach.

A final challenge relates to a theory's genesis and today's students. Clearly, in this technological age, students look for and usually crave a desire to find a "tech angle" to communication theory. Although many theories were conceptualized decades ago, in each chapter, we have provided the most recent research that represents a theory-technology framework. Further we have added student comments in each chapter that speak to how the theory can be applied to technology, such as social media, texting, and so forth.

Major Changes in Content in the New Edition

As we do in every new edition, we have edited and modified *each and every chapter* to reflect our continued emphasis on making theory more approachable.

Most importantly, *the entire book has been reorganized to reflect the template most useful to students.*

In the past, we relied on an approach that was context-specific. Yet, after reflecting on how students learn, looking at the foundational information, and reviewing comments by colleagues across the country, we were struck by the narrowness of this approach. We found ourselves "forcing" a complex theory into a particular context, sometimes neglecting the fact that many of the theories fall across several contexts.

Therefore, the reorganization of the book adheres to a commonly-accepted division found in the field: Approaches to Knowing, or better known as Empirical, Interpretive, and Critical-Cultural approaches. Each "Approach to Knowing" is elaborated in Chapter 3, allowing students to see the relationship of a foundational chapter with the theory chapters.

In this seventh edition, we strengthened and streamlined each chapter and in many cases, reorganized the chapter to make the material more accessible. Further, we've updated many of our opening vignettes to make

them aligned with the communication challenges that students face in their lives. And, of course, we've rigorously updated each theory in keeping with the current research and changes in the theorists' thinking.

Representative Chapter Changes

Responding to the need to articulate further theories related to cultural diversity, we have added a new chapter (Chapter 30, Co-Cultural Theory). To keep the book a manageable length, Cognitive Dissonance Theory has been archived for the seventh edition. In addition, each foundational and subsequent theory chapter has undergone revision to make the content more recent, examples more compelling, material more organized, and critiques more balanced. Here's a sample of specific changes made in various chapters:

Chapter 1 (Thinking About Communication: Definitions, Models, and Ethics) adds the new holistic model of communication as students consider the value of context and technology in communication theory

Chapter 2 (Thinking About the Field: Traditions and Contexts) now includes an historical understanding of the communication field, from Classical origins to contemporary thinking

Chapter 3 (Thinking about Theory and Research) includes new information on "Theory as Metaphor," providing students further clarification of how theory functions in their lives

Chapter 5 (Uncertainty Reduction Theory) extends discussion of the expansions to the theory including context and technology.

Chapter 6 (Social Exchange Theory) expands section on power, exchange patterns, and matrices.

Chapter 8 (Social Information Processing Theory) contains new information on social media and the hyperpersonal effect

Chapter 9 (Structuration Theory) reconfigured in tone to make it more practical

Chapter 10 (Organizational Information Theory) presents new clarification on the relationship between sensemaking and storytelling

Chapter 11 (Agenda Setting Theory) has been significantly reorganized and also highlights the history of the theory and the 3-part process of agenda setting.

Chapter 12 (Spiral of Silence Theory) provides more information on the effects of social isolation and the "outing" process of GLBT individuals

Chapter 13 (Uses and Gratifications Theory) is now comprised of an expanded section on the history of the theory with additional attention paid to media effects

Chapter 14 (Face Negotiation Theory) adds a reconceptualization of the theory as representing the empirical, interpretive, and critical approaches

Chapter 16 (Coordinated Management of Meaning) includes refinement, through example, of conversational coordination

Chapter 17 (Communication Privacy Management Theory) now consists of a new section on the key components and axioms of the theory, keeping up with how Petronio revised the theory in 2013

Chapter 18 (Groupthink) presents new information on "polythink" and its consequences in group and team communication

Chapter 25 (Relational Dialectics Theory) now presents a section on RDT 2.0 and RDT as a critical theory

Chapter 27 (Cultural Studies) contains new information on the continued dominance of television as a source of information for older citizens

Features of the Book

To accomplish our goals and address the challenges of teaching communication theory, we have incorporated a structure that includes number of special features and learning aids into the seventh edition:

- *Part One, Foundations.* The first three chapters of the book continue to provide students a solid foundation for studying the theories that follow. This groundwork is essential in order to understand how theorists conceptualize and test their theories. Chapters 1 and 2 define communication and provide a framework for examining the theories. We present several traditions and contexts in which theory is customarily categorized and considered. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the intersection of theory and research. This discussion is essential in a theory course and also serves as a springboard for students as they enroll in other courses. In addition, we present students with a template of various evaluative components that we apply in each of the subsequent theory chapters.
- *Theories and Theoretical Thinking.* Updated coverage of **all** theories. Separate chapters on each of the theories provide accessible, thorough coverage for students and offer flexibility to instructors. Because of the feedback we received from the previous edition, we retained the original theories from the sixth edition and added one NEW theory, Co-Cultural Theory by Mark Orbe. This updating results in a more thoughtful, current, and applicable presentation of each theory. As noted earlier, in many cases, we have provided the most recent information of the influences of culture and/or technology upon a particular theory, resulting in some very compelling discussions and examples.
- *Chapter-opening vignettes.* Each chapter begins with an extended vignette, which is then integrated throughout the chapter, providing examples to illustrate the theoretical concepts and claims. We have been pleased that instructors and students point to these vignettes as important applications of sometimes complex material. These stories/case studies help students understand how communication theory plays out in the everyday lives of ordinary people. These opening stories help drive home the important points of the theory. In addition, the real-life tone of each vignette entices students to understand the practicality of a particular theory.
- *A structured approach to each theory.* Every theory chapter is self-contained and includes a consistent format that begins with a story, followed by an introduction, a summary of theoretical assumptions, a description of core concepts, and a critique (using the criteria established in Part One). This consistency provides continuity for students, ensures a balanced presentation of the theories, and helps ease the retrieval of information for future learning experiences. Instructors and students have found this template to be quite valuable because it focuses their attention on the key elements of each theory.
- *Student Voices boxes.* These boxes, featured in every chapter, present both new and returning student comments on a particular concept or theoretical issue. The comments, extracted from journals in classes we have taught, illustrate the practicality of the topic under discussion and also show how theoretical issues relate to students' lives. This feature illustrates how practical theories are and how much their tenets apply to our everyday lived experiences. It also allows readers to see how other students taking this course have thought about the material in each chapter.
- *Visual template for theory evaluation.* At the conclusion of each theory chapter, a criteria for theory evaluation (presented in Chapter 3) is employed. In addition, the theory's context, scholarly tradition (based on Robert Craig's typology), and approach to knowing are presented on charts.
- *Theory at a Glance boxes.* In order for students to have an immediate and concise understanding of a particular theory, we incorporate this feature at the beginning of each theory chapter. Students will have these brief explanations and short summaries before reading the rest of the chapter, thereby allowing them to have a general sense of what they are about to encounter.
- *Theory-Into-Practice (TIP) inserts.* We include this feature to provide further application of the information contained in the chapter. We identify a conclusion or two from the theory and then provide a real-world application of the particular claim. This feature sustains our commitment to enhancing the pragmatic value of a theory.

- *Afterword: ConnectingQuests.* This final section of the book provides students with an integration of the various theories in order to see the interrelationships between theories. We believe that theories cut across multiple contexts. To this end, students are asked questions that address the intersection of theories. For instance, to understand “decision making” from two theoretical threads, students are asked to compare the concept and its usage in both Groupthink and Structuration Theory.
- *Tables and figures.* To increase conceptual organization and enhance the visual presentation of content, we have provided several tables and figures throughout the text. Further, we have provided cartoons to provide another engaging reading option. Many chapters have visual aids for students to consider, helping them to understand the material. These visuals provide a clearer sense of the conceptual organization of the theories, and they support those students who best retain information visually.
- *Running glossary.* Throughout each chapter, a running glossary provides students immediate access to unfamiliar terms and their meanings.
- *Appendix.* At the end of the book all of the theories are listed with a short paragraph summarizing their main points.

In addition to the aforementioned features, several new additions exist in the new edition of *Introducing Communication Theory*:

- **NEW CHAPTER ON CO-CULTURAL THEORY.** We removed a chapter profiling an older theory from a discipline other than communication (Cognitive Dissonance) and replaced that with a newer theory centered in communication. Co-Cultural Theory has myriad applications for the diverse, multi-cultural world in which we live.
- **NEW THEORY INTO ACTION.** Students will be introduced to further applications of the various theories and theoretical concepts by examining popular press stories. Stories and articles exemplifying various parts of a theory are provided, extrapolated from media headlines around the world.
- **NEW STUDENTS TALKING TECH.** The feature has been added to reflect students’ comments about social media and technology pertaining to various theoretical issues. Dialogue applications related to Snapchat, Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter, YouTube, Weibo, Instagram, among others are spliced throughout the book to demonstrate students’ understanding and application of the theories to contemporary communication contexts.
- **NEW “ORIGINS THEORY” RECOGNITION.** Because numerous theories have their origins in other theoretical frameworks, we present students a list of “subordinate” theories that were inspirational and influential upon a current theoretical discussion.
- **NEW TIMELY EXAMPLES.** To ensure that communication theory remains relevant to all generations of students, the book includes relevant and contemporary topics, including many hashtag activism movements such as #MeToo, #TakeAKnee, #BlackLivesMatter, among others. In addition, examples related to immigration, Title IX, impeachment, minimum wage, Wikipedia, hate speech, school shootings, and many more are integrated for students to consider as they unpack the complexity of each theory.
- **NEW INTEGRATION OF NEARLY 200 NEW REFERENCES.** The explosion in communication research, in particular, is reflected in the incorporation of dozens of new studies, essays, and books that help students understand the theory or theoretical issue. We also provide students with easy access to a citation by integrating an APA format (the accepted writing style in the communication field) so that they can see the relevancy and currency of a theory. When appropriate, we also have provided URLs for useful websites.

New Organization of the Material

Part One, Foundations, provides a conceptual base for the discrete theory chapters in Part Two. Chapter 1 begins by introducing the discipline and describing the process of communication. Chapter 2 provides the prevailing traditions and contexts that frame the communication field. In this chapter, we focus on Robert Craig's guide to the ways in which communication theory can be considered. The chapter then turns to primary contexts of communication, which frame the study of communication in most academic settings across the country. Chapter 3 explores the intersection of theory and research. In this chapter, we provide students an understanding of the nature of theory and the characteristics of theory. The research process is also discussed, as are perspectives that guide communication research. Our goal in this chapter is to show that research and theory are interrelated and that the two should be considered in tandem as students read the individual chapters. Chapter 3 also provides a list of evaluative criteria for judging theories as well as for guiding students toward assessment of each subsequent theory chapter.

With Part One establishing a foundation, Part Two, Theories and Theoretical Thinking, introduces students to 27 different theories, each in a discrete, concise chapter and discussed within a particular Approach to Knowing (Post-Positive, Interpretive, and Critical) identified in Chapter 3 and emphasized in an insert between the Foundational and Theory chapters. In addition, many of these theories cut across communication contexts.



The 7th edition of *Introducing Communications Theory: Analysis and Application* is now available online with Connect, McGraw-Hill Education's integrated assignment and assessment platform. Connect also offers SmartBook for the new edition, which is the first adaptive reading experience proven to improve grades and help students study more effectively. All of the title's website and ancillary content is also available through Connect, including:

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Lynn H. Turner is a Professor in Communication Studies at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Lynn received her BA from the University of Illinois and her MA from the University of Iowa, and she received her PhD from Northwestern University. She has taught communication theory and research methods to undergraduates and graduates in the Diederich College of Communication at Marquette since 1985. Prior to coming to Marquette, Lynn taught at Iowa State University and in two high schools in Iowa. Her research interests include interpersonal communication, family communication, and gendered communication. She is the recipient of several awards, including Marquette's College of Communication Research Excellence Award, and the Book of the Year award from the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender for her book with Patricia Sullivan, *From the Margins to the Center: Contemporary Women and Political Communication*. Lynn is a past president of the Central States Communication Association and was recognized for her contributions in service and research by CSCA as a member of their Hall of Fame.



Rich and Lynn, together, are coauthors of dozens of essays and articles in the communication field. In addition, the two have served as guest coeditors of the *Journal of Family Communication* a few times, focusing on diversity and the family. In addition, they have coauthored several books, including *Gender and Communication*, *Perspectives on Family Communication*, *IPC*, and *Understanding Interpersonal Communication*, and *an Introduction to Communication*. The two have coedited the *Family Communication Sourcebook* (Sage, 2006; Winner of the Outstanding Book Award by the National Communication Association), and *The Handbook of Family Communication*. Further, both are the recipients of the Bernard J. Brommel Award for Outstanding Scholarship and Service in Family Communication. Finally, both recognize the uniqueness and the honor to have served as president of the National Communication Association (Lynn in 2011; Rich in 2012), “the oldest and largest organization in the world promoting communication scholarship and education” (www.natcom.org).

CHAPTER 1

Thinking About Communication: Definitions, Models, and Ethics

I suppose all of us get accustomed to look at what we are doing in a certain way and after a while have a kind of “trained incapacity” for looking at things in any other way.

—Marie Hochmuth Nichols

The Hernandez Family

José and Angie Hernandez have been married for almost 30 years, and they are the parents of three children who have been out of the house for years. But, a recent layoff at the company where their son Eddy worked has forced the 24-year-old to return home until he can get another job. The job market after the recession was still not moving along fast enough.

At first, Eddy’s parents were glad that he was home. His father was proud of the fact that his son wasn’t embarrassed about returning home, and his mom was happy to have him help her with some of the mundane tasks at home. In fact, Eddy showed both José and Angie how to instant message their friends and also put together a family website. His parents were especially happy about having a family member who was “tech-savvy” hanging around the house.

But the good times surrounding Eddy’s return soon ended. Eddy brought his cell phone to the table each morning, marring the Hernandezes’ once-serene breakfasts. The clicking sound of texting and his incessant looking down undermined an otherwise calm beginning to the day. In addition, José and Angie’s walks each morning were complicated because their son often wanted to join them. At night, when they went to bed, the parents could hear Eddy Skyping with his friends, sometimes until 1:00 A.M. When

Eddy’s parents thought about communicating their frustration and disappointment, they quickly recalled the difficulty of their son’s situation. They didn’t want to upset him any further. The Hernandezes tried to figure out a way to communicate to their son that although they love him, they wished that he would get a job and leave the house. They simply wanted some peace, privacy, and freedom, and their son was getting in the way. It wasn’t a feeling either one of them liked, but it was their reality.

They considered a number of different approaches. In order to get the conversation going, they even thought about giving Eddy a few website links related to local apartment rentals. Recently, the couple’s frustration with the situation took a turn for the worse. Returning from one of their long walks, they discovered Eddy on the couch, hung over from a party held the night before at his friend’s house. When José and Angie confronted him about his demeanor, Eddy shouted, “Don’t start lecturing me now. Is it any wonder that none of your other kids call you? It’s because you don’t know when to stop! Look, I got a headache and I really don’t need to hear it right now!” José snapped, “Get out of my house. Now!” Eddy left the home, slamming the front door behind him. Angie stared out of the window, wondering when or if they would ever hear from their son again.

The value of communication has been lauded by philosophers (“Be silent or say something better than silence”—Pythagoras), writers (“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug”—Mark Twain), performing artists (“Any problem, big or small, in a family usually starts with bad communication”—Emma Thompson), business leaders (“Writing is great for keeping records and putting down details, but talk generates ideas”—T. Boone Pickens), motivational speakers (“The quality of your communication is the quality of your life”—Tony Robbins), talk show hosts (“Great communication begins with connection”—Oprah), and even reality TV superstars (“Why not share my story?”—Kim Kardashian). Perhaps one of the most lasting of all words came from a 1967 film (*Cool Hand Luke*): “What we got here is a failure to communicate”—a quotation that has subsequently been stated in such diverse settings as in the movie *Madagascar*, the song “Civil War” by Guns N’ Roses, and television shows *NCIS*, *Modern Family*, *Law and Order: SVU*, and *Frasier*. It’s clear that nearly all cross sections of a Western society view communication as instrumental in human relationships. And clearly, regardless of where we live around the globe, we can’t go through a day without communication.

In the most fundamental way, communication depends on our ability to understand one another. Although our communication can be ambiguous (“I never thought I’d get this gift from you”), as we suggested above, one primary and essential goal in communicating is understanding. Our daily activities are wrapped in conversations with others. Yet, as we see with the Hernandez family, even those in close relationships can have difficulty expressing their thoughts.

Being able to communicate effectively is highly valued in the United States. Corporations have recognized the importance of communication. In 2019, in an agreement establishing an alliance between the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the National Safety Management Society (https://www.osha.gov/dcsp/alliance/nsms/nsms_20031001_final.html) communication is identified as instrumental in establishing a national dialogue on safety and health. Indeed, the entire safety profession supports this claim (<http://www.com.edu/gcsi/>): “First and foremost, risk managers must be good communicators.” Health care, too, is focusing more on the value of communication. Interestingly, as early as the late 1960s, doctor–patient communication has been a topic of concern in research (Korsch, Gozzi, & Francis, 1968). More recent literature shows that effective doctor–patient communication is essential for the recovery of patients. Finally, in the classroom, researchers have concluded that affirming feedback/student confirmation positively affects student learning (Titsworth, Mazer, Goodboy, Bolkan, & Myers, 2015), and in athletics, this confirming communication influences athlete motivation and competitiveness (Cranmer, Gagnon, & Mazer, 2019). And, with respect to cross-platform messaging sites such as WhatsApp, individuals in intergenerational families report its use helps to make communicating to various family members both realistic and practical (Taipale, 2019). Make no mistake about it: Abundant evidence underscores the fact that communication is an essential, pervasive, and consequential behavior in our society.

As a student of communication, you are uniquely positioned to determine your potential for effective communication. To do so, however, you must have a basic understanding of the communication process and of how communication theory, in particular, functions in your life. We need to be able to talk effectively, for instance, to a number of very different types of people during an average day: roommates, teachers, ministers, salespeople, family members, friends, automobile mechanics, and health care providers, among many others.

Communication opportunities fill our lives each day. However, we need to understand the whys and hows of our conversations with others. For instance, why do two people in a relationship feel a simultaneous need for togetherness and independence? Why do some women feel ignored or devalued in conversations with men? Why does language often influence the thoughts of others? How do media influence people’s behavior? To what extent can social media affect the communication among people? These and many other questions are at the root of why communication theory is so important in our society and so critical to understand.

Defining Communication

Our first task is to create a common understanding for the term *communication*. Defining communication can be challenging because it's a term that has been used by a wide assortment of people—from politicians to evangelical preachers to our parents. It is also an all-encompassing term and invoked with different motivations in mind. A friend might think everything is communication, while you might think that it occurs only with mutual understanding. Sarah Trenholm (2014) notes that although the study of communication has been around for centuries, it does not mean communication is well understood. In fact, Trenholm interestingly illustrates the dilemma when defining the term. She states, "Communication has become a sort of 'portmanteau' term. Like a piece of luggage, it is overstuffed with all manner of odd ideas and meanings. The fact that some of these do fit, resulting in a conceptual suitcase much too heavy for anyone to carry, is often overlooked" (p. 4).

We should note that there are many ways to interpret and define communication—a result of the complexity and richness of the communication discipline. Imagine, for instance, taking this course from two different professors. Each would have their own way of presenting the material, and each classroom of students would likely approach communication theory in a unique manner. Ideally, the result would be two exciting and distinctive approaches to studying the same topic.

Students Talking Tech

Maddy



My own way of defining communication would have to include how I met my current boyfriend. I would never be with him if it wasn't for social media and Bumble. The site let me—as a woman—make the first move. When I heard about this app, I thought, "Finally!" I was sick of guys who were looking for "now" rather than "now and later!" My boyfriend and I talked online and then over the phone, and then we met. The whole process was something I controlled, which made it easier and more comfortable for me. I can't imagine that I would've had any chance to even meet this guy, let alone communicate with him, if Bumble didn't help me start that process.

This uniqueness holds true with defining communication. Scholars tend to see human phenomena from their own perspectives, something we delve into further in the next chapter. In some ways, researchers establish boundaries when they try to explain phenomena to others. Communication scholars may approach the interpretation of communication differently because of differences in scholarly values. With these caveats in mind, we offer the following definition of *communication* to get us pointed in the same direction. **Communication** is a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish, interpret, and co-create meaning in their environment(s). We necessarily draw in elements of mediated communication as well in our discussion, given the importance that communication technology plays in contemporary society. With that in mind, let's define five key terms in our perspective: *social, process, symbols, meaning, and environment* (Figure 1.1).

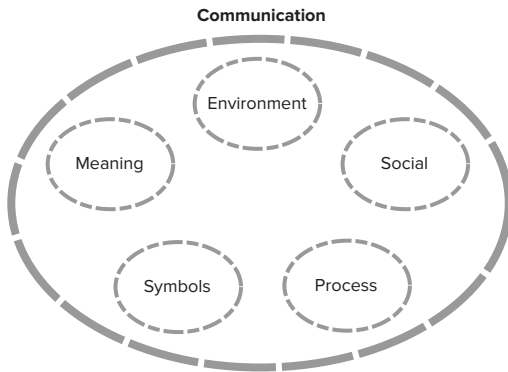


Figure 1.1 Key Terms in Defining Communication

First, we believe that communication is a social process. When interpreting communication as **social**, we mean to suggest that it involves people and interactions, whether face-to-face or online. This necessarily includes two people, who act as senders and receivers. Both play an integral role in the communication process. When communication is social, it involves people who come to an interaction with various intentions, motivations, and abilities. To suggest that communication is a **process** means that it is ongoing and unending. Communication is also dynamic, complex, and continually changing. With this view of communication, we emphasize the dynamics of making meaning. There-

fore, communication has no definable beginning and ending. For example, although José and Angie Hernandez may tell their son that he must leave the house, their discussions with him and about him will definitely continue well after he leaves (e.g., “What do we do now?”). In fact, the conversation they have with Eddy today will most likely affect their communication with him tomorrow. Similarly, our past communications with people have been stored in their minds and have affected their conversations with us.

The process nature of communication also means that much can happen from the beginning of a conversation to the end. People may end up at a very different place once a discussion begins. This is exemplified by the frequent conflicts that roommates, spouses, and siblings experience. Although a conversation may begin with absolute and inflexible language, the conflict may be resolved with compromise. All of this can occur in a matter of minutes.

Individual and cultural changes affect communication. Conversations between siblings, for example, have shifted from the 1950s to today. Years ago, siblings rarely discussed the impending death of a parent or the need to take care of an aging parent. Today, it’s not uncommon to even young people talking about senior care, home health care, and even cremation arrangements. Perceptions and feelings can change and may remain in flux for quite some time.

Some of you may be thinking that because the communication process is dynamic and unique it is virtually impossible to study. However, C. Arthur VanLear (1996) argues that because the communication process is so dynamic, researchers and theorists can look for patterns over time. He concludes that “if we recognize a pattern across a large number of cases, it permits us to ‘generalize’ to other unobserved cases” (p. 36). Or, as communication pioneers Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don Jackson (1967) suggest, the interconnect- edness of communication events is critical and pervasive. Thus, it is possible to study the dynamic communi- cation process.

To help you visualize this process, imagine a continuum where the points are unrepeatable and irreversible. The communication field employed the historical spiral or helix to explain this process (**Figure 1.2**). In doing so, two conclusions emerged: (1) communication experiences are cumulative and are influenced by the past, and (2) because present experiences inevitably influence a person’s future, communication is nonlinear. Communication, therefore, can be considered a process that changes over time and among interactants.

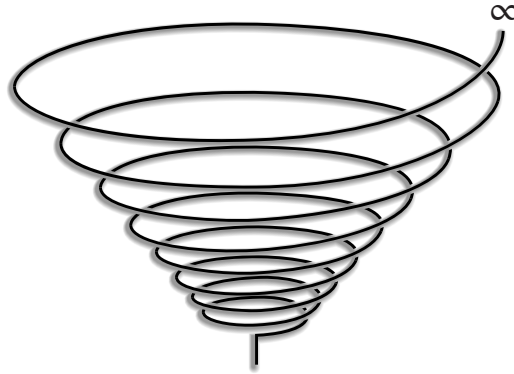


Figure 1.2 Communication Process as a Helix

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A third term associated with our definition of communication is *symbols*. A **symbol** is an arbitrary label or representation of phenomena. Words are symbols for concepts and things—for example, the word *love* represents the idea of *love*; the word *chair* represents a thing we sit on. Labels may be ambiguous, may be both verbal and nonverbal, and may occur in face-to-face and mediated communication. Symbols are usually agreed on within a group but may not be understood outside of the group. In this way, their use is often arbitrary. For instance, most college students understand the phrase “preregistration is closed”; those outside of college may not understand its meaning. Further, there are both **concrete symbols** (the symbol represents an object) and **abstract symbols** (the symbol stands for a thought or idea).

Even the innocuous Twitter symbol—the hashtag—resonates in a number of fields, particularly in politics. Think, for instance, of the thousands of tweets that President Trump sent before and during his presidency, even though most of his posts represented the “politics of debasement” (Ott, 2017, p. 58). Further, in-depth political reporting and discussion are fast becoming rare in politics, and “the more candidates used Twitter to broadcast their thoughts, the more people retweeted them, spreading their messages and journalists mentioned tweets in their election coverage (Buccoliero, Bellio, Crestini, & Arkoudas, 2018, p. 88). The search for a condensed, 140-character tweet has supplanted efforts to investigate and interrogate, sometimes called “viral politics” (Penney, 2014, p. 80). So, the hashtag symbol effectively has become a representation of a story that used to be several hundred words found in newspapers and magazines.

In addition to process and symbols, meaning is central to our definition of communication. **Meaning** is what people extract from a message. In communication episodes, messages can have more than one meaning and even multiple layers of meaning. Without sharing some meanings, we would all have a difficult time speaking the same language or interpreting the same event. Judith Martin and Tom Nakayama (2017) point out that meaning has cultural consequences:

[W]hen President George W. Bush was about to go to war in Iraq, he referred to this war as a “crusade.” The use of this term evoked strong negative reactions in the Islamic world, due to the history of the Crusades nearly 1,000 years ago While President Bush may not have knowingly wanted to frame the Iraq invasion as a religious war against Muslims, the history of the Crusades may make others feel that it is. (p. 70)

Clearly, not all meaning is shared, and people do not always know what others mean. In these situations, we must be able to explain, repeat, and clarify. For example, if the Hernandezes want to tell Eddy to move out, they will probably need to go beyond telling him that they just need their “space.” Eddy may perceive “needing space” as simply staying out of the house two nights a week. Furthermore, his parents will have

to figure out what communication “approach” is best. They might believe that being direct may be best to get their son out of the house. Or they might fear that such clear communication is not the most effective strategy to change Eddy’s behavior. Regardless of how José and Angie Hernandez communicate their wishes, without sharing the same meaning, the family will have a challenging time getting their messages across to one another.

The final key term in our definition of communication refers to the multiple environments related to communication. An **environment** is the situation or context in which communication occurs. The environment includes a number of elements, including time, place, historical period, relationship, and a speaker’s and listener’s cultural backgrounds. You can understand the influence of environments by thinking about your beliefs and values pertaining to socially significant topics such as marriage equality, physician-assisted suicide, and immigration into the United States. If you have had personal experience with any of these topics, it’s likely your views are affected by your perceptions.

The environment can also be mediated. By that, we mean that communication takes place with technological assistance. At one point or another, all of us have communicated in a mediated environment, namely through email, chat rooms, or social networking sites. These mediated environments influence the communication between two people in that people in electronic relationships are (usually) not able to observe each other’s eye behavior, listen to vocal characteristics, or watch body movement (Skype and Snapchat are exceptions to this, however). Clearly, the mediated environment has received a great deal of attention over the years as communication theory continues to develop.

Models of Understanding: Communication as Action, Interaction, and Transaction

Communication theorists create **models**, or simplified representations of complex interrelationships among elements in the communication process, which allow us to visually understand a sometimes complex process. Models help us weave together the basic elements of the communication process. Although there are many communication models, we discuss the three most prominent ones here (linear, interactional, and transactional). In discussing these models and their underlying approaches, we wish to demonstrate the manner in which communication has been conceptualized over the years. We conclude our discussion by proposing a fourth model that infuses technology and other elements into our discussion. We term this the holistic model.

Communication as Action: The Linear Model

In 1949, Claude Shannon, a Bell Laboratories scientist and professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Warren Weaver, a consultant on projects at the Sloan Foundation, described communication as a linear process. They were concerned with radio and telephone technology and wanted to develop a model that could explain how information passed through various channels. The result was the conceptualization of the **linear model of communication**.

This approach to human communication comprises several key elements, as **Figure 1.3** demonstrates. A **source**, or transmitter of a message, sends a **message** to a **receiver**, the recipient of the message. The receiver is the person who makes sense out of the message. All of this communication takes place in a **channel**, which is the pathway to communication. Channels frequently correspond to the visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory senses. Thus, you use the visual channel when you see your roommate, and you use the tactile channel when you hug your parent.

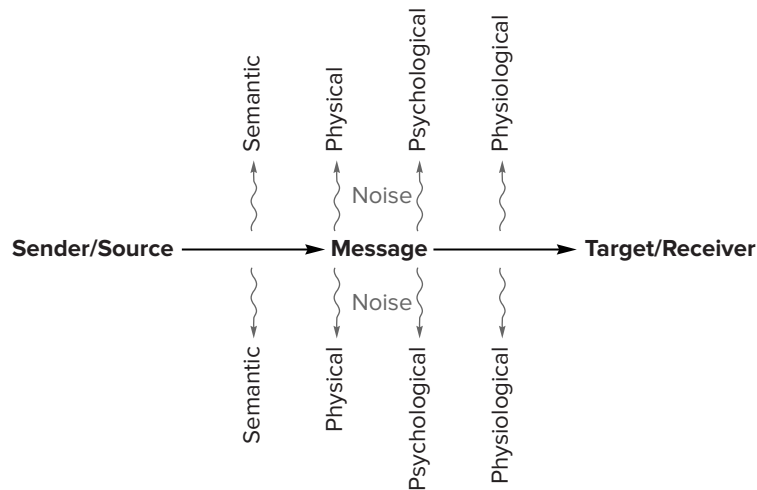


Figure 1.3 Linear Model of Communication

Communication also involves **noise**, which is anything not intended by the informational source. There are four types of noise. First, **semantic noise** pertains to the slang, jargon, or specialized language used by individuals or groups. For instance, when Jennifer received a medical report from her ophthalmologist, the physician's words included phrases such as "ocular neuritis," "dilated fundoscopic examination," and "papillary conjunctival changes." This is an example of semantic noise because outside of the medical community, these words have limited (or no) meaning. **Psychological noise** refers to a communicator's prejudices, biases, and predispositions toward another or the message. **Physical, or external, noise** exists outside of the receiver. To exemplify these two types, imagine listening to participants at a political rally. You may experience psychological noise listening to the views of a politician whom you do not support, and you may also experience physical noise from the people nearby who may be protesting the politician's presence. Finally, **physiological noise** refers to the biological influences on the communication process. Physiological noise, exists if you or a speaker is ill, fatigued, or hungry.

Although this view of the communication process was highly respected many years ago, the approach is very limited for several reasons. First, the model presumes that there is only one message in the communication process. Yet we all can point to a number of circumstances in which we send several messages at once. Second, as we have previously noted, communication does not have a definable beginning and ending. Shannon and Weaver's model adopts this mechanistic orientation. Furthermore, to suggest that communication is simply one person speaking to another oversimplifies the complex communication process. Listeners are not so passive, as we can all confirm when we are in heated arguments with others. Clearly, communication is more than a one-way effort and has no definable middle or end.



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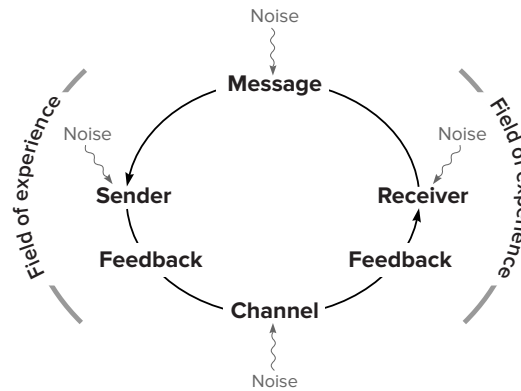


Figure 1.4 Interactional Model of Communication

Communication as Interaction: The Interactional Model

The linear model suggests that a person is only a sender or a receiver. That is a particularly narrow view of the participants in the communication process. Wilbur Schramm (1954), therefore, proposed that we also examine the relationship between a sender and a receiver. He conceptualized the **interactional model of communication**, which emphasizes the two-way communication process between communicators (Figure 1.4). In other words, communication goes in two directions: from sender to receiver and from receiver to sender. This circular process suggests that communication is ongoing. The interactional view illustrates that a person can perform the role of either sender or receiver during an interaction, but not both roles simultaneously.

One element essential to the interactional model of communication is **feedback**, or the response to a message. Feedback may be verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional. Feedback helps communicators to know whether or not their message is being received and the extent to which meaning is achieved. In the interactional model, feedback takes place after a message is received, not during the message itself.

To illustrate the critical nature of feedback and the interactional model of communication, consider our opening example of the Hernandez family. When Eddy's parents find him on the couch drunk, they proceed to tell Eddy how they feel about his behavior. Their outcry prompts Eddy to argue with his parents, who in turn, tell him to leave their house immediately. This interactional sequence shows that there is an alternating nature in the communication between Eddy and his parents. They see his behavior and provide their feedback on it, Eddy listens to their message and responds, then his father sends the final message telling his son to leave. We can take this even further by noting the door slam as one additional feedback behavior in the interaction.

A final feature of the interactional model is a person's **field of experience**, or how a person's culture and experiences influence their ability to communicate with another. Each person brings a unique field of experience to each communication episode, and these experiences frequently influence the communication between people. For instance, when two people come together and begin dating, the two inevitably bring their fields of experience into the relationship. One person in this couple may have been raised in a large family with several siblings, while the other may be an only child. These experiences (and others) will necessarily influence how the two come together and will most likely affect how they maintain their relationship.

Like the linear view, the interactional model has been criticized. The interactional model suggests that one person acts as sender while the other acts as receiver in a communication encounter. As you have experienced, however, people communicate as both senders and receivers in a single encounter. But the prevailing criticism of the interactional model pertains to the issue of feedback. The interactional view assumes two people speaking and listening, but not at the same time. But what occurs when a person sends a nonverbal

message during an interaction? Smiling, frowning, or simply moving away from the conversation during an interaction between two people happens all the time. For example, in an interaction between a mother and her daughter, the mother may be reprimanding her child while simultaneously “reading” the child’s nonverbal behavior. Is the girl laughing? Is she upset? Is she even listening to her mother? Each of these behaviors will inevitably prompt the mother to modify her message. These criticisms and contradictions inspired development of a third model of communication.

Communication as Transaction: The Transactional Model

The **transactional model of communication** (Barnlund, 1970; Frymier, 2005; Wilmot, 1987) underscores the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages in a communication episode, as **Figure 1.5** shows. To say that communication is transactional means that the process is cooperative; the sender and the receiver are mutually responsible for the effect and the effectiveness of communication. In the linear model of communication, meaning is sent from one person to another. In the interactional model, meaning is achieved through the feedback of a sender and a receiver. In the transactional model, people build shared meaning. Furthermore, what people say during a transaction is greatly influenced by their past experience. So, for instance, at a college fair, it is likely that a college student will have a great deal to say to a high school senior because of the college student’s experiences in class and around campus. A college senior will, no doubt, have a different view of college than, say, a college sophomore, due in large part to their past college experiences.

Transactional communication requires us to recognize the influence of one message on another. One message builds on the previous message; therefore, there is an interdependency between and among the components of communication. A change in one causes a change in others. Furthermore, the transactional model presumes that as we simultaneously send and receive messages, we attend to both verbal and nonverbal elements of a message. In a sense, communicators negotiate meaning. For instance, if a friend asks you about your family background, you may use some private language that your friend doesn’t understand. Your friend may make a face while you are presenting your message, indicating some sort of confusion with what you’ve said. As a result, you will most likely back up and define your terms and then continue with the conversation. This

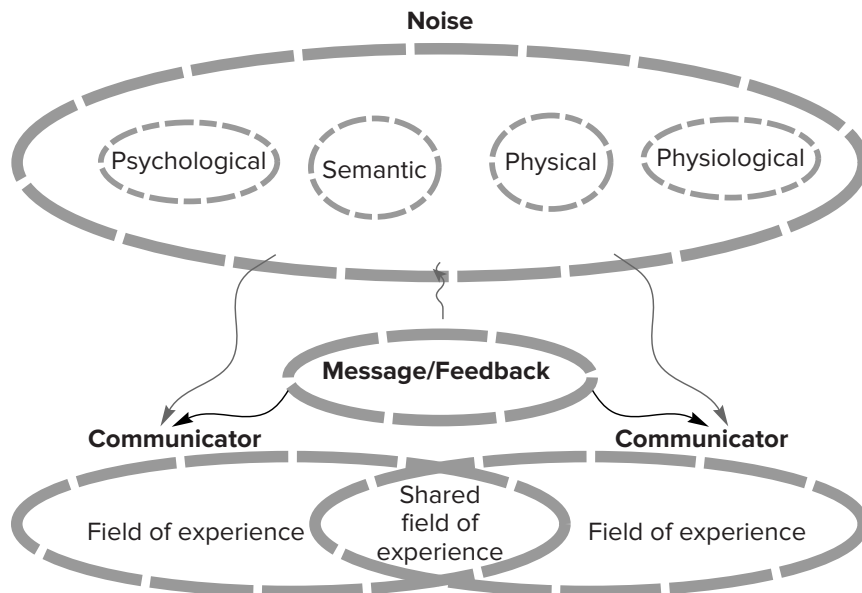


Figure 1.5 Transactional Model of Communication