

EIGHTH EDITION

# Communication

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## IN OUR LIVES



*Julia T. Wood*



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EIGHTH EDITION

*Julia T Wood*

Lineberger Distinguished Professor of Humanities Emerita  
Caroline H. and Thomas S. Royster Distinguished Professor of Graduate Education Emerita  
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



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Julia T. Wood

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Associate Content Developer: Karolina Kiwak

Product Assistant: Madeleine Ohman

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Manufacturing Planner: Doug Bertke

IP Analyst: Ann Hoffman

IP Project Manager: Kathryn B. Kucharek

Production Management, and Composition:  
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Text Designer: Bill Reuter

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**For Carolyn  
For so many reasons**



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# Preface

When I was an undergraduate student, I discovered the field of communication. In my first communication course, I realized that communication was more central to my life than anything else I could study. That feeling grew stronger with each communication course I took during my undergraduate and graduate studies.

I wrote *Communication in Our Lives* to share with students my passion for communication and my belief that it is critically important in our everyday lives as professionals, citizens, and people in personal and social relationships. Because I want this book to engage students, I've tried to make it as interesting and substantive as communication itself. I use a conversational style of writing, and all chapters include examples, reflections from students, and applications that invite students to engage material personally. To help students develop their practical competence as communicators, I emphasize concrete skills and hands-on exercises.

## Distinguishing Features of *Communication in Our Lives*

*Communication in Our Lives* has two distinct conceptual emphases. In addition, it includes a number of pedagogical features designed to highlight the relevance of communication to students' everyday lives and experiences. Some of these features have been retained from the seventh edition, and some are new to this eighth edition.

### Conceptual Emphases

Two conceptual goals guided my writing of this book: (a) to emphasize theories and research developed by scholars of communication and (b) to integrate coverage of social diversity as it relates to communication.

**Emphasis on Communication Theory, Research, and Skills** *Communication in Our Lives* highlights theories, research, and skills developed by scholars of communication. For example, Chapter 7 provides coverage of relational dialectics, a theory primarily developed by Leslie Baxter, a professor of communication at the University of Iowa. Chapter 11 relies on research by scholars of social media to sharpen understanding of how various digital technologies are making our lives ever more connected. Chapters 12 through 16 draw on communication scholars' knowledge of effective public communication. For instance, James McCroskey and Jason Teven (1999) have shown that speakers who demonstrate goodwill toward listeners tend to have higher credibility than those who don't. I emphasize the work of communication scholars both because their research is valuable and because I want students to appreciate the intellectual richness of the communication field.



Although I highlight the work of communication scholars, I also include relevant research conducted by scholars in fields such as sociology, psychology, business, and anthropology.

Communication scholars have long recognized the profoundly ethical dimensions of human communication. I incorporate this tradition in communication scholarship by calling attention to ethical issues and choices in communication. In addition to identifying ethical aspects of communication in each chapter, I include two questions related to ethics at the end of each chapter, signaled with an icon, that focus on ethics.

**Integrated Attention to Social Diversity** I have woven discussion of social diversity into the basic framework of this book. I do not do this to be “politically correct.” Instead, I provide integrated attention to social diversity because it is one of the most significant features of contemporary life in the United States. Our culture includes people of different ethnicities, ages, genders, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, economic classes, and religious and spiritual commitments.

*Communication in Our Lives* encourages students to appreciate social diversity as a fact of cultural life that has important implications for our communication with others. Because social diversity affects interaction in all contexts, I incorporate discussion of diverse cultures and communication practices into all chapters of this book. For example, in discussing personal identity in Chapter 3, I point out how social views of race, economic class, gender, and sexual orientation affect self-concept. In Chapters 12–16, I note that effective speaking requires adapting to diverse audiences with varied experiences, backgrounds, and values.

In addition to weaving social diversity into all chapters, Chapter 10 is devoted exclusively to communication and culture. This chapter provides a sustained and focused exploration of the reciprocal relationship between culture and communication.

## Changes in This Edition

Like communication, books are dynamic—they evolve over time. This edition of *Communication in Our Lives* attempts to retain the strengths of previous editions while also making changes in response to feedback. Before beginning work on this edition, I read feedback from hundreds of faculty members and students who used previous editions. Their suggestions and comments led me to make a number of changes in this new edition.

One significant change in this edition is **greater coverage of digital media** as they affect all forms and contexts of communication. Chapter 11 focuses on media—both mass media and digital media. In addition, in preparing this edition, I wrote a new section on digital media for every chapter other than Chapter 11, which is devoted entirely to media. This section calls students’ attention to the ways in which topics covered in the chapter reflect and are affected by the pervasiveness of digital media.

A second noteworthy change is highlighting of **relationships between communication (theories, concepts, and skills) and careers**. Every chapter includes one or more Communication & Careers features that call attention to the importance of communication in a range of professions.

Third, I have **reorganized the book**. In this edition, Part II, Contexts of Interaction, includes chapters that focus on how the foundations discussed in Part I

apply to communication in interpersonal relationships, group and team work, cultures and social groups, and mass and digital media.

Finally, this edition of *Communication in Our Lives* also reflects changes in scholarship. Those familiar with the sixth edition of this book will notice that the current edition includes **more than 150 new references**.

In making the above changes, I've been mindful of length. Rather than just adding new material to the former edition, I have weeded out dated material to make room for newer research and discussion of currently timely topics. As a result, this edition is the same length as its predecessor.

## Pedagogical Features

In addition to the conceptually distinctive aspects of this book, several features are designed to make it interesting and valuable to students.

First, I adopt a *conversational style of writing* rather than the more distant and formal style often used by textbook authors. I share with students some of my experiences in communicating with others, and I invite them to think with me about important issues and difficult challenges surrounding communication in our everyday lives. The accessible, informal writing style encourages students to personally engage the ideas I present.

A second pedagogical feature is *student commentaries*. Every chapter is enriched by reflections written by students in my classes and other classes around the country who adopted previous editions of this book. The questions, thoughts, and concerns expressed by diverse students invite readers to reflect on their own experiences as communicators. I welcome ideas from students around the country, so students in your class may wish to send their insights to me for inclusion in future editions of this book.

Third, I encourage *students to interact directly with the text* through MindTap. Each chapter opens with a *polling question*, which is designed to prompt students to think about how the chapter's content applies to them individually. By answering these questions online, students immediately engage the chapter's focus. In addition, some of the photos in chapters are captioned with questions that students are prompted to answer online. When they answer, they can read my responses to the questions in MindTap.

*Communication in Our Lives* also includes pedagogical features that promote learning and skill development. Each chapter open with *learning objectives* so that students have a clear sense of how to focus their reading and studying. Within chapters, I've added a *marginal glossary* and *marginal Review It! boxes* that summarize key content. At the end of each chapter, I provide *Sharpen Your Skill* exercises to encourage students to apply concepts and develop skills discussed in the text. Many of these exercises end with a prompt to the book's online resources, which offer additional opportunities for skill application. Each chapter also includes *Communication Highlights*, which call attention to interesting communication research and examples of communication issues in everyday life, and *Communication & Careers*, which focus on connections between communication and professional life.

The chapters conclude with the following features:

A narrative *Chapter Summary* highlights the main themes throughout the chapter. This feature enables students to see whether what they retained from reading the chapter is consistent with the key content.

*Video Case studies* (called *Experiencing Communication in Our Lives*) are another feature that encourages students to engage ideas actively. These brief scenarios and speeches appear at the end of each chapter to bring to life the ideas and principles presented. Rather than using generic case studies, I wrote the ones used in this book so that they would directly reflect chapter content and provide students with representative examples of communication theories and skills. In addition to their presentation in the book, the case studies are featured in the MindTap for *Communication in Our Lives* as short interactive video activities that include questions for discussion and analysis. (See the section on student resources for details about MindTap.) With the multimedia enactments of the scenarios, instructors and students can analyze not only verbal messages but also nonverbal communication.

Each chapter continues with a list of *Key Concepts*, the *Sharpen Your Skill* exercises, and then a series of *For Further Reflection and Discussion* questions that encourage students to reflect on and discuss the chapter's material. Each set of these questions includes at least one question that focuses on ethics.

The final feature, *Beyond the Classroom*, appears at the end of chapters in Parts I and II. This feature offers suggestions for taking the material in the chapter beyond the classroom in three ways: considering the chapter's relevance in the workplace, probing ethical issues raised in the chapter, and connecting chapter material to civic and social engagement with the broader world.

Appendix A provides a collection of *annotated speeches* for student analysis. Appendix B covers interviewing, with emphasis on job interviews.

## Resources for Instructors

Katrina Bodey and I have written an *Instructor's Resource Manual* that describes approaches to teaching the basic course, provides a wealth of class-tested exercises, including new teaching resources for the public speaking segment of your course, and provides suggested journal topics and sample test items.

The password-protected instructor companion website includes Computerized Testing via Cognero®, ready-to-use PowerPoint® presentations (with text, images, that can be customized to suit your course needs), and an electronic version of the Instructor's Manual.

**MindTap** from Cengage Learning represents a new approach to a highly personalized, online learning platform. A fully online learning solution, MindTap combines all of a student's learning tools—readings, multimedia, activities, and assessments—into a singular Learning Path that guides the student through the curriculum. Educators personalize the experience by customizing the presentation of these learning tools to their students; even seamlessly introducing their own content into the Learning Path via “apps” that integrate into the MindTap platform. MindTap can also be deeply integrated into an institution's Learning Management System (LMS) through a service called MindLinks.

Cengage Learning's extensive video library includes the *Student Speeches for Critique and Analysis* and *Communication Scenarios for Critique and Analysis*, which include sample student speeches and the interpersonal and group communication scenarios featured as case studies in this text. These videos provide realistic examples of communication that allow students and teachers to identify specific communication principles, skills, and practices, and to analyze how they work in actual interaction. All these videos can be found in the Speech Video Library located in MindTap.

The speech video library provides instructors an easy way to keyword search, review, evaluate, and assign exemplar student speeches into their classroom & online learning environment. There are over 150 videos, including both famous historical speeches and realistic student classroom speeches as well as communication scenarios. Student speech types include informative, persuasive, invitational, impromptu, and group presentations. All speeches are accompanied by activities to help student refine and develop their speech preparation and critical thinking skills.

With Cengage's **Flex-Text Customization Program**, you can create a text as unique as your course: quickly, simply, and affordably. As part of our flex-text program, you can add your personal touch to *Communication in Our Lives* with a course-specific cover and up to 32 pages of your own content, at no additional cost.

I encourage you to contact your local Cengage Learning representative or <http://www.cengage.com/highered/> for more information, user names and passwords, examination copies, or a demonstration of these ancillary products. Available to qualified adopters.

## Resources for Students

If you want your students to have access to the online resources for *Communication in Our Lives*, please be sure to order them for your course. These resources can be bundled with every new copy of the text or ordered separately. If you do not order them, your students will not have access to these online resources. *Contact your local Cengage Learning sales representative for more details.*

The *Communication in Our Lives* interactive video activities feature videos of the sample speeches and interpersonal and group communication scenarios featured in the book's case studies. This multimedia tool allows students to evaluate the speeches and scenarios, and compare their evaluation with mine.

**MindTap** from Cengage Learning represents a new approach to a highly personalized, online learning platform and brings course concepts to life with online interactive learning, study, and exam preparation tools like the interactive eBook, flashcards, quizzes, tested activities, Communication Highlight Activities and Sharpen Your Skills Activities that support the printed textbook. The Speech Communication MindTap for *Communication in Our Lives* goes beyond the book to deliver what you need!

Many Cengage Learning texts are available through **CengageBrain**, our textbook rental program or also available as an eBook where you can buy by the chapter. Keep CengageBrain in mind for your next Cengage Learning purchase. Visit <http://cengagebrain.com> for details.

*A Guide to the Basic Course for ESL Students* by Esther Yook of Mary Washington College is an aid for nonnative speakers. This guide includes strategies for accent management and overcoming speech apprehension, in addition to helpful website addresses and answers to frequently asked questions.

Finally, *The Art and Strategy of Service Learning Presentations* by Rick Isaacson and Jeff Saperstein is an invaluable resource for students in the basic course that integrates or will soon integrate a service learning component. This handbook provides guidelines for connecting service learning work with classroom concepts and advice for working effectively with agencies and organizations. It also provides model forms and reports and a directory of online resources.

## Acknowledgments

All books reflect the efforts of many people, and *Communication in Our Lives* is no exception. A number of people have helped this book evolve from an early vision to the final form you hold in your hands. I am grateful to my editor, Kelli Striely, for her support and for her management of the team that worked on this book. I am also especially indebted to my content development editor, the invincible Kate Scheinman. From start to finish, she has been an active partner in the project. This book reflects her many insights.

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I could not have written this book without undergraduate students. They have helped me refine ideas and activities that appear in this book. Invariably, my students teach me at least as much as I teach them, and for that I am deeply grateful.

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*Julia T. Wood*  
May 2016  
Chapel Hill, NC



# About the Author

**J**ulia T. Wood is Lineberger Distinguished Professor of Humanities Emerita and the Caroline H. and Thomas S. Royster Distinguished Professor of Graduate Education Emerita at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After completing her Ph.D. (Pennsylvania State University) at age 24, she taught classes, conducted research, and wrote extensively about communication in personal relationships and about gender, communication, and culture. She has published more than 100 articles and chapters, she has authored or coauthored 17 books, and edited or coedited 9 others. The recipient of 12 awards for outstanding teaching and 15 awards for distinguished scholarship, Professor Wood continues to conduct research, write, and mentor students. In addition to her academic pursuits, Professor Wood enjoys volunteering at the Carolina Tiger Rescue where she works with rescued tigers, lions, cougars, servals, caracals, and ocelots. She also cherishes time and conversation with students, friends, and family.

Professor Wood lives with her partner, Robert (Robbie) Cox, who is Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina and who works with the national Sierra Club. Four-footed members of their family are their dog, Cassidy, and two cats, Always Rowdy and Rigby.





Kolett/Shutterstock.com

# Introduction

- A friend comes to you with a problem, and you want to show that you support him.
- A group you belong to is working on recycling programs for the campus, and you're frustrated by the group's inefficiency. You want to make meetings more productive.
- At the end of the term, the person you've been seeing will graduate and take a job in a city 1,000 miles away, and you wonder how to stay connected across the distance.
- You met an interesting person online. At first, you enjoyed interacting with her, but lately she's been texting you incessantly, and you feel she's intrusive.
- The major project in one of your courses is an oral research report, so your grade depends on your ability to present a good speech.

Situations like these illustrate the importance of communication in our lives. Unlike some of the subjects you study, communication is relevant to every aspect of your life. We communicate with ourselves when we work through ideas, psych ourselves up to meet challenges, and rehearse ways to approach someone about a difficult issue. We communicate with others to build and sustain personal relationships, to perform our jobs and advance our careers, to connect with friends and meet new people online, and to participate in social and civic activities. Every facet of life involves communication.

Although we communicate all the time, we don't always communicate effectively. People who have inadequate communication knowledge and skills are hampered in their efforts to achieve personal, professional, and social goals. On the other hand, people who communicate well have a keen advantage in accomplishing their objectives. This suggests that learning about communication and learning how to communicate are keys to effective living.

*Communication in Our Lives* is designed to help you understand how communication works in your personal, professional, and social life. To open the book, I'll introduce myself and describe the basic approach and special features of *Communication in Our Lives*.

## Introduction to the Author

As an undergraduate, I enrolled in a course much like the one you're taking now. In that course, I discovered the field of communication, and my interest in it has endured and grown in the years since I took that class. Communication is the basis of cultural life, and it is a primary tool for personal, social, civic, and professional satisfaction and growth. It is a field that is both theoretically rich and exceptionally practical. I know of no discipline that offers more valuable insights, skills, and knowledge.

Because you will be reading this book, you should know something about the person who wrote it. I am a middle-class, Caucasian heterosexual woman. As is true for all of us, who I am affects what I know and how I think, act, interact, and write. My race, gender, social–economic class, and sexual orientation have given me certain kinds of insight and obscured others. As a woman, I understand discrimination based on sex because I've experienced it personally. I do not have personal knowledge of racial discrimination because Western culture confers privilege on European Americans. Being middle class has shielded me from personal experience with hunger, poverty, and class bias; and my heterosexuality has spared me from being a direct target of homophobic prejudice. Who you are also influences your experiences, knowledge, and ways of communicating.

Although identity limits our personal knowledge and experiences, it doesn't completely prevent insight into people and situations different from our own. From conversations with others and from reading, we can gain some understanding of people and circumstances different from our own. What we learn by studying and interacting with a range of people expands our appreciation of the richness and complexity of humanity. In addition, learning about people different from us enlarges our personal repertoire of communication skills and our appreciation of the range of ways to communicate.

## Introduction to the Book

The aim of *Communication in Our Lives* is to introduce you to many forms and functions of communication in modern life. The title reflects my belief that communication is an important part of our everyday lives. Each chapter focuses on a specific kind of communication or a particular context in which we communicate.

### Coverage

Because communication is a continuous part of life, we need to understand how it works—or doesn't—in a range of situations. Therefore, this book covers a broad spectrum of communication encounters, including communication with yourself, interaction with friends and romantic partners, work in groups and teams, interaction in organizations, mass and social media, interaction between people with diverse cultural backgrounds, and public speaking. The breadth of communication issues and skills presented in this book can be adapted to the interests and preferences of individual classes and instructors.

## Students

*Communication in Our Lives* is written for anyone interested in human communication. If you are a communication major, this book and the course it accompanies will provide you with a firm foundation for more advanced study. If you are majoring in another discipline, this book and the course you are taking will give you a sound basic understanding of communication and opportunities to strengthen your skills as a communicator.

Learning should be a joy, not a chore. I've written this book in an informal, personal style; for instance, I refer to myself as *I* rather than *the author*, and I use contractions (*can't* and *you're* instead of the more formal *cannot* and *you are*), as we do in normal conversation. I also punctuate chapters with concrete examples and insights from students at campuses around the country.

## Theory and Practice

Years ago, renowned scholar Kurt Lewin said, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory." His words remain true today. In this book, I've blended theory and practice so that each draws on and enriches the other. Effective practice is theoretically informed: It is based on knowledge of how and why the communication process works and what is likely to result from different kinds of communication. At the same time, effective theories have pragmatic value: They help us understand experiences and events in our everyday lives. Each chapter in this book is informed by the theories and research generated by scholars of communication.

## Features

Accenting this edition, are the following key features:

### Integrated Attention to Cultural Diversity

Diversity is woven into the fabric of this book. Awareness of diversity is integral to how we communicate and think about communication; it is not an afterthought. I integrate cultural diversity into the text in several ways. First, each chapter includes research on diverse people and highlights our commonalities and differences. Second, the photos I chose for this book include people of different races, ages, religions, and so forth. Likewise, each chapter includes examples from a range of people, walks of life, and orientations.

In addition to incorporating diversity into the book as a whole, in Chapter 10, I focus exclusively on communication and culture. There you will learn about cultures and social communities (distinct groups within a single society) and the ways cultural values and norms shape how we view and practice communication. Just as important, Chapter 10 will heighten your awareness of the power of communication to shape and change cultures. In addition, it will enhance your ability to participate effectively in a culturally diverse world.

To talk about social groups is to risk stereotyping. For instance, a substantial amount of research shows that women, in general, are more emotionally expressive than men, in general. A good deal of research also reports that blacks, in general, speak with greater animation and force than whites, in general. Yet, not all women are emotionally expressive, not all men are emotionally inexpressive, not all blacks communicate forcefully, and not all whites communicate blandly. Throughout this book, I try to provide you with reliable information on social groups while avoiding

stereotyping. I rely on research by members of groups being discussed whenever that is available. I also use qualifying terms, such as *most* and *in general*, to remind us that there are exceptions to generalizations.

### Student Commentaries

In my classes, students teach me and each other by sharing their insights, experiences, and questions. Because I've witnessed how much students learn from one another, I've included reflections written by students at my university and other campuses. As you read the student commentaries, you'll probably identify with some, disagree with others, and be puzzled by still others. Whether you agree, disagree, or are perplexed, I think you'll find that the student commentaries valuably expand the text by adding to the voices and views it represents. In the students' words, you will find much insight and much to spark thought and discussion in your classes and elsewhere. You may have insights about material covered in this book. If so, I invite you to send me your commentaries so that I might include them in the next edition of this book.

### Learning Aids

I've created three features to assist you in identifying and retaining key concepts and ideas as you read. First, each chapter opens with Learning Objectives, which you may use to guide how you read and study the chapter. Second, key terms are highlighted and defined in margins of chapters. Third, you will find Review It! boxes in the margins of the book. These summarize material you've read. By reviewing them, you increase your retention of content.

### Communication and Careers

Each chapter includes one or more "Communication and Careers" features. These highlight the connections between communication principles and practices and professional paths you may pursue. This feature will enlarge your understanding of the role of communication in shaping organizations, the importance of good communication in building and maintaining effective relationships with coworkers, clients, patients, and customers.

### Communication Highlights

Each chapter also includes several "Communication Highlights," which call your attention to especially interesting findings from communication research and news reports involving communication in everyday life. The "Communication Highlights" offer springboards for class discussions.

### Experiencing Communication in Our Lives

Following each chapter is a case study, "Experiencing Communication in Our Lives." With each one, I invite you to think about how principles and skills we discuss in that chapter show up in everyday life. I ask a few questions about the case study that allow you to apply what you have learned in a chapter to analyzing real-life communication and developing strategies for improving interaction. A video of the case study is also available online with your MindTap Speech for *Communication in Our Lives*.

## Beyond the Classroom

Following chapters in Parts I and II is a “Beyond the Classroom” feature. It asks you to take the material in the chapter and extend it in three ways: asking how it applies to the workplace, how it involves ethical issues and choices, and how it applies to civic and social life. By thinking through these three issues for each chapter, you will actively engage the material and understand it more deeply.

## Sharpen Your Skill

At the end of each chapter, you will find two “Sharpen Your Skill” exercises. These bring to life the concepts we discuss by showing you how material in the text pertains to your daily life. They invite you to apply communication principles and skills as you interact with others. Some of the “Sharpen Your Skill” features suggest ways to practice particular communication skills. Others encourage you to notice how a specific communication principle or theory shows up in your interactions. If you do the “Sharpen Your Skill” exercises, you will increase your insight into communication in general and your own communication in particular.

## Research in Our Lives

A final feature, “Research in Our Lives,” is available from your instructor for distribution. This feature answers a question that students often raise: What does academic research have to do with the “real world”? To show you that research conducted by communication scholars has important impact on real life, I offer short summaries of six research studies that are relevant to issues in today’s world and your own life.

I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I’ve enjoyed writing it. I also hope that this book and the class it accompanies will help you develop the skills needed for communication in your life. If so, then both of us will have spent our time well.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia T. Wood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.





# 1

The way we communicate with others and with ourselves ultimately determines the quality of our lives.

**Anthony Robbins**

## The World of Communication

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying the topics in this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Identify the key features that define communication.
2. Distinguish between content-level meaning and relationship-level meaning.
3. Identify the value of studying communication to four aspects of your life: personal, relationship, professional, and cultural.
4. Apply the transactional model of communication to a specific interaction.
5. List the four themes that unify the field of communication.
6. Explain how the definition of communication applies to social media and online communication.

*How does communication affect your life the most?*

### MindTap®

**Review** the chapter's learning objectives and **start** with a quick warm-up activity.



## MindTap®

**Read**, highlight, and take notes online.

Mike pockets his iPhone and shakes his head; staying in touch with Chris is awkward now that they live 800 miles apart. They were buddies in high school but drifted apart after they went to different universities. They text frequently, but it's not the same as hanging out together. Shrugging, he turns on the TV while he finishes dressing for dinner with Coreen. The top news story is about another school shooting. He grimaces, thinking that the world has become pretty violent. Turning his thoughts back to Coreen, Mike hopes she won't want to talk about their relationship again tonight. He can't see the point of analyzing and discussing their relationship unless something is wrong, but she likes to talk about it when everything is fine.

As he dresses, Mike thinks about his oral presentation for Thursday's sociology class. He has some good ideas, but he doesn't know how to turn them into an effective speech. He vaguely remembers that the professor talked about how to organize a speech, but he wasn't listening. Mike also wishes he knew how to deal with a group that can't get on track. He and six other students have worked for three months to organize a student book co-op, but the group can't get its act together. By now everyone is really frustrated, and nobody listens to anyone else. His phone alerts him to a new text message and he reads a message from a member of the group who is angry that nobody seems to be really committed to the co-op project. Mike saves the message for a later reply, turns off the TV, and leaves to meet Coreen.

**L**ike Mike, most of us communicate continually in our daily lives. Effective communication is vital to friendships, romantic relationships, public speaking, participation in civic life, interviewing, classroom learning, and productive group work. Communication opportunities and demands fill our everyday lives.

Long after the college years, Mike—and the rest of us—will rely on communication. You may need to talk with clients or patients, make progress reports, work on teams, and present proposals. You may represent your company at a press conference or team up with colleagues to develop company policies. You will have conflicts with coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates. Beyond your career, you'll communicate with family members, friends, neighbors, and civic and community groups.

## Why Study Communication?

Communication is one of the most popular fields of undergraduate study. One reason for this popularity is that effective communication is important in all aspects of life. In 2015, the Pew Research Center reported that adults rank communication skills as number 1 for getting ahead in life—more important than writing, reading, math, science, and other skills (GooLeave, 2015).

Communication skills can be learned. Some people have a natural aptitude for playing basketball. They become even more effective, however, if they study theories of offensive and defensive play and if they practice skills. Likewise, even if you communicate well now, learning about communication and practicing communication skills can make you more effective (Hargie, 2006).

Another reason to study communication is that theories and principles help us make sense of what happens in our lives, and they help us have personal impact. For instance, if Mike learned about different gender communities, he might understand why Coreen, like many women, enjoys talking about relationships even when there is no problem. If Mike had better insight into the communication that sustains long-distance relationships, he might be able to enrich his friendship with Chris despite the miles between them. If he knew how to develop an agenda, he might be able to get his group on track. Studying public speaking could help Mike design a good presentation for his class report. Learning to listen better would help Mike retain information like his professor's tips on organizing oral reports. Communication theory and skills would help Mike maximize his effectiveness in all spheres of his life.

*Communication in Our Lives* will help you become a more confident and competent communicator. Part One clarifies how communication works (or doesn't work) and explains how perception, personal identity, language, nonverbal communication, and listening affect the overall communication process. In Part Two, we'll look at communication in five contexts: personal relationships, small groups, organizations, cultures, and mediated environments. Part Three focuses on public speaking.

This chapter lays a foundation for your study of communication. We'll first define communication. Next we'll discuss the values of communication in many spheres of your life. Then we'll examine some models of communication to clarify how the process works. In the third section of the chapter, we'll describe the breadth of the communication field and careers for communication specialists.

## Defining Communication

**Communication\*** is a systemic process in which people interact with and through symbols to create and interpret meanings. Let's elaborate the key parts of this definition.

Communication is a **process**, which means it is ongoing and always in motion, moving ever forward and changing continually. It's hard to tell when communication starts and stops because what happened long before we talk with someone may influence interaction, and what occurs in a particular encounter may have repercussions in the future. We cannot freeze communication at any one moment.

Communication is also systemic because it occurs within a **system** of interrelated parts that affect one another. In family communication, for instance, each member of the family is part of the system (Galvin, Dickson, & Marrow, 2006). In addition, the physical environment and the time of day are elements of the system that affect interaction. People interact differently in a formal living room and on a beach, and we may be more alert at certain times of day than at others. If a family has a history of listening sensitively and working out problems constructively, and then when one family member says, "There's something we need to talk about," the comment is unlikely to cause defensiveness. On the other hand, if the family has a record of nasty conflicts, then the same comment might arouse strong defensiveness. A lingering kiss might be an appropriate way to show affection in a private setting, but the same action would raise eyebrows in an office. To interpret communication, we have to consider the system in which it takes place.

\*Boldfaced terms are defined in the margins and also in the glossary at the end of the book.

**communication** A systemic process in which people interact with and through symbols to create and interpret meanings.

**process** Something that is ongoing and continuously in motion, the beginnings and endings of which are difficult to identify. Communication is a process.

**system** A group of interrelated elements that affect one another. Communication is systemic.

Our definition of communication also emphasizes **symbols**, which include all languages and many nonverbal behaviors, as well as art and music. Anything that abstractly signifies something else can be a symbol. We might symbolize love by giving a ring and saying “I love you” or by embracing. Later in this chapter, we’ll have more to say about symbols. For now, just remember that human communication involves interaction with and through symbols.

Finally, our definition focuses on meanings, which are the heart of communication. Meanings are the significance we bestow on phenomena—what they signify to us. Meanings are not in phenomena. Instead, meaning grows out of our interaction with symbols.

There are two levels of meaning in communication. The **content level of meaning** is the literal message. For example, if someone says to you, “Get lost!” the content level of meaning is that you should go away. The **relationship level of meaning** expresses the relationship between communicators. In our example, if the person who says, “Get lost!” is a friend and is smiling, then you would probably interpret the relationship level of meaning as indicating that the person likes you and is kidding around. On the other hand, if the person who says, “Get lost!” is your supervisor, and he or she is responding to your request for a raise, then you might interpret the relationship level of meaning as indicating that your supervisor regards you as inferior and dislikes your work.

## Values of Communication

From birth to death, communication shapes our personal, professional, civic, and social lives as well as the culture in which we live (Galvin, Braithwaite, & Bylund, 2015; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Salas & Frush, 2012). In order to advance a career, you’ll need to know how to present your ideas effectively, build good relationships with colleagues, monitor your perceptions, manage conflicts constructively, and listen carefully. To have healthy, enduring relationships, you’ll need to know how to listen well, communicate support, deal with conflicts, and understand communication styles that are different from your own. To be an engaged citizen, you’ll need to express your points of view articulately, and you’ll need to listen critically to others’ ideas.

### Personal Identity and Health

George Herbert Mead (1934)\* said that humans are “talked into” humanity. He meant that we gain personal identity as we communicate with others. In the earliest years of our lives, family members tell us who we are: “You’re smart.” “You’re strong.” “You’re a clown.” Later, we interact with teachers, friends, romantic partners, and coworkers who communicate how they perceive us. Thus, how we see ourselves reflects the views of us that others communicate.

The profound connection between identity and communication is dramatically evident in children who have been deprived of human contact. Case studies of children who were isolated from others for long periods of time reveal that they lack a healthy self-concept, and their mental and psychological development is severely hindered by lack of language (Shattuck, 1980).

**symbol** An arbitrary, ambiguous, and abstract representation of a phenomenon. Symbols are the basis of language, much nonverbal behavior, and human thought.

**content level of meaning** One of the two levels of meaning in communication. The content level of meaning is the literal, or denotative, information in a message.

**relationship level of meaning** One of the two levels of meaning in communication; expresses the relationship between communicators.

\*I am using the American Psychological Association’s (APA) method of citation. For example, if you see “Mead (1934),” I am referencing a work by Mead that was written in 1934. If you see “Mead (1934, p.10)” or “(Mead, 1934, p. 10),” I am referencing page 10 specifically of Mead’s 1934 work. The full bibliographic citations for all works appear in the References section at the end of the book.

A large body of research shows that communicating with others promotes health, whereas social isolation is linked to stress, disease, and early death (Fackelmann, 2006; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Families that practice good communication are more cohesive and stable (Galvin & Braithwaite, 2015). College students who are in committed relationships have fewer mental health problems and are less likely to be obese (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). Life-threatening medical problems are also affected by healthy interaction with others. Heart disease is more common among people who lack strong interpersonal relationships (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Clearly, healthy interaction with others is important to our physical and mental well-being.

Communication skills are also essential to effective health care. Doctors, nurses, dentists, and others involved in health care need to be able to listen to patients and to communicate in ways patients understand. Equally important, patients need to be able to communicate clearly with health care professionals to explain their concerns and symptoms.

## Relationship Values

Daniel Goleman, author of *Social Intelligence* (2007), says humans are “wired to connect” (p. 4). And communication is the primary way that we connect with others. Marriage counselors have long emphasized the importance of communication for healthy, enduring relationships (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b; Gottman & Carrère, 1994). They point out that the failure of some marriages is not caused primarily by troubles and problems or even by conflict because all marriages encounter challenges and conflict. A major distinction between relationships that endure and those that collapse is effective communication. In fact, results of a national poll showed that a majority of Americans perceive communication problems as the number 1 reason that marriages fail—far surpassing other reasons such as sexual difficulties, money problems, and interference from family members (<http://files.umwblogs.org/blogs.dir/1160/files/2008/05/roper-poll-on-communication.pdf>).

Communication is important for more than solving problems or making disclosures. For most of us, everyday talks and nonverbal interactions are the very essence of relationships (Duck & McMahan, 2012; Goleman, 2011; Wood & Duck, 2006). Unremarkable, everyday interaction sustains intimacy more than the big moments, such as declarations of love. By sharing news about mutual acquaintances and discussing ordinary topics, partners keep up the steady pulse of their relationship (Duck, 2006; Schmidt & Uecker, 2007; Wood, 2006a). For this reason, one of the biggest challenges of long-distance relationships is not being able to share small talks.

**MYCA** *Last year, I did study abroad, and it was really hard to stay connected with my friends and family. I was in the Philippines so it was night here when it was day there—forget texting back and forth or even IMs. Plus, the Internet was spotty so sometimes I couldn't get on to share something cool that was happening in the moment. That was the hardest part—not being able to share the little things when they happened.*

## Professional Values

One reason that communication is among the most popular majors is that communication skills are closely linked to professional success. The importance of

## Poor Communication = Preventable Death

As many as 98,000 preventable deaths each year have been traced to poor communication among doctors, nurses, and other members of health care teams (Harris, 2011). This disturbing fact has made effective team work a priority in training health care providers (Salas & Frush, 2012).

As a result, a number of medical schools, including those at Stanford, Los Angeles, and Cincinnati, now base admissions to medical school not only on academic record but also on the ability to collaborate with others. In addition, they require students to take courses in teamwork.

communication is obvious in professions such as patient care, teaching, business, law, sales, and counseling, in which talking and listening are prominent.

In other fields, the importance of communication is less obvious but nonetheless present. Most employers list communication skills as one of the top qualities in job candidates (Hart Research, 2013; Rhodes, 2010; Selingo, 2012). Leaders at organizations such as the *New York Times*, FedEx, and GlaxoSmithKline list communication as vital to their organizations' success (O'Hair & Eadie, 2009). Doctors who do not listen well are less effective in treating patients, and they're more likely to be sued than doctors who listen well (Levine, 2004; Milia, 2003). The pivotal role of communication in health care makes it unsurprising that an increasing number of medical schools base admissions, in part, on applicants' communication skills, especially their ability to communicate empathy to patients (Rosenbaum, 2011).

In the workplace, poor communication means that errors and misunderstandings occur, messages must be repeated, productivity suffers, and—sometimes—people lose jobs. No matter what your career goals are, developing strong communication skills will enhance your professional success.

## Cultural Values

Communication skills are important to the health of our society. To be effective, citizens in a democracy must be able to express ideas and evaluate the ideas of others. One event typical of presidential election years is a debate between or among candidates. To make informed judgments, viewers need to listen critically to candidates' arguments and their responses to criticism and questions. We also need listening skills to grasp and evaluate opposing points of view on issues such as abortion, environmental policies, and health care reform. To be a good community member, you need skills in expressing your point of view and responding to those of others.

Living in our era means living with people who have diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In 2000, 64% of Americans were Caucasian, but the prediction is that there will be no single majority race by 2043 (Milbank, 2014). Nearly half of first-year students at colleges and universities think that learning about other cultures is essential or very important (Hoover, 2010). In addition, there is great value in interacting with people from different cultures. The number of international students who enroll in U.S. colleges and universities is at an all-time high: 723,277 (McMurtrie, 2011). U.S.-born students appreciate the presence of peers




 Communication  
Highlight

## U.S. Demographics in the Twenty-First Century

Demographics in the United States are changing rapidly. Currently, one in three U.S. residents is a minority, but that number is growing quickly. The latest Census reports that for the first time ever, there are more births of minorities in the United States (Yen, 2012). The following table shows demographic shifts from 2010 to projections for 2050 (“Demographics,” 2009; Milbank, 2014; Yen, 2012):

	2010 (Percentage)	2050 (Percentage)
African Americans	13	13
Asians	4	8
White, not Hispanic	64	46
Hispanics or Latino/a	16	30
Other	3	5

*All figures are rounded off.*

More and more people are convinced that a key function of higher education is to prepare people to function effectively and comfortably in a diverse society. Two-thirds of Americans polled by the Ford Foundation (1998) say it is very important for colleges and universities to prepare students to live and work in a society marked by diversity. Fully 94% of Americans polled say that it is more important now than ever before for all of us to understand people who are different from us, and the majority of respondents believe that every college student should be required to study different cultures and social groups to graduate.

Go to the book’s online resources for this chapter to learn more about diverse groups and their impact on the United States.

from around the globe. In fact, exposure to students from a range of backgrounds is one of the best predictors of whether first-year college students return for a second year (Berrett, 2011).

**AVA** *There are so many people from different cultures on this campus that you can’t get by without knowing how to communicate in a whole lot of ways. In my classes and my dorm, there are lots of Asian students and some Hispanic ones, and they communicate differently than people raised in the United States. If I don’t learn about their communication styles, I can’t get to know them or learn about what they think.*

Ava is right. When she was a student in one of my courses, she and I talked several times about the concern she expresses in her commentary. Ava realized she needed to learn to interact with people who differ from her if she is to participate fully in today’s world. She has learned a lot about communicating with diverse people, and no doubt she will learn more in the years ahead. Like Ava, you can improve your ability to communicate effectively with the variety of people who make up our society.

### Review It!

Values of Studying Communication:

- Personal
- Relationship
- Professional
- Cultural

Communication, then, is important for personal, relationship, professional, and cultural reasons. Because communication is a cornerstone of human life, your choice to study it will serve you well. To understand what's involved in communication, let's now define the process.

## Models of Communication

Over the years, scholars in communication have developed a number of models, which reflect increasingly sophisticated understandings of the communication process.

### Linear Models

One of the first models (Laswell, 1948) described communication as a linear, or one-way, process in which one person acted on another person. This model consisted of five questions that described early views of how communication worked:

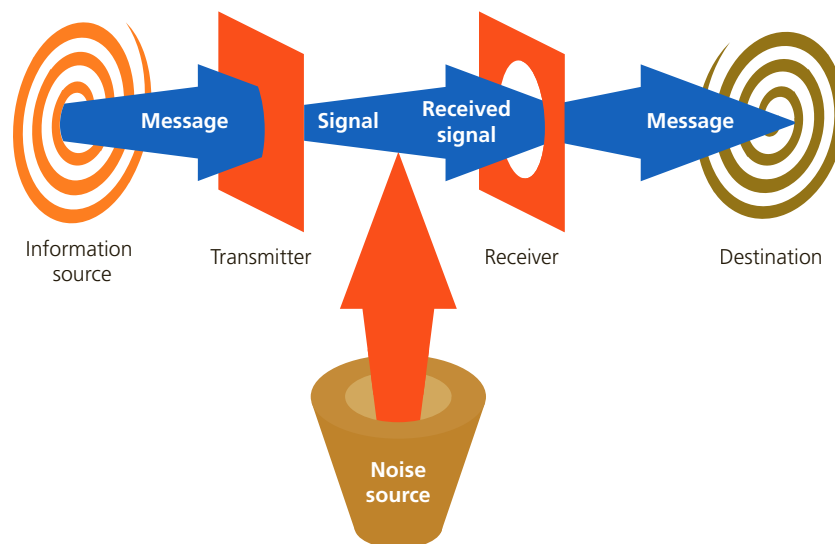
Who?  
Says what?  
In what channel?  
To whom?  
With what effect?

A year later, Shannon and Weaver (1949) advanced a model that included **noise**, which is anything that can interfere with the intended message. Figure 1.1 shows two versions of the Shannon and Weaver's model. Although linear models were useful starting points, they were too simple to capture the complexity of most kinds of human communication.

### Interactive Models

The major shortcoming of linear models was that they portrayed communication as flowing in only one direction, from a sender to a receiver. This suggests that speakers only speak and never listen and that listeners only listen and never send messages.

**noise** Anything that interferes with intended communication.



**FIGURE 1.1**

A Linear Model of Communication

Source: Adapted from Shannon, C., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.





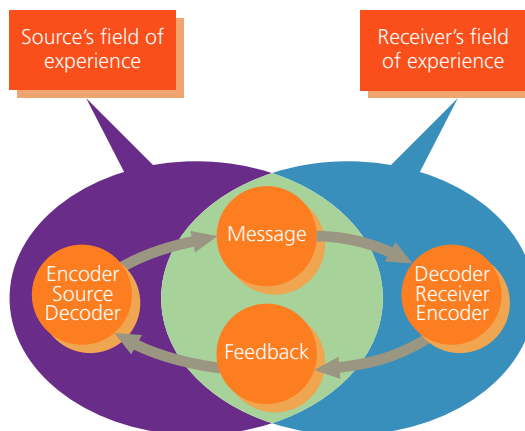
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Verbal and nonverbal communication reflect cultural backgrounds and understandings.

Realizing that receivers respond to senders and senders attend to receivers led communication theorists (Schramm, 1955) to adapt models to include **feedback**. Feedback may be verbal, nonverbal, or both, and it may be intentional or unintentional. Research has confirmed Schramm's insight that feedback is important. Supervisors report that communication accuracy and on-the-job productivity rise when they encourage their subordinates to give feedback: ask questions, comment on supervisors' messages, and respond to supervisory communication (Deal & Kennedy, 1999).

The interactive model also shows that communicators create and interpret communication within their personal fields of experience. This recognizes communication as an interactive process in which both senders and receivers participate actively (Figure 1.2).

**feedback** Response to a message; may be verbal, nonverbal, or both. In communication theory, the concept of feedback appeared first in interactive models of communication.



**FIGURE 1.2**  
An Interactive Model of Communication

Source: Adapted from Schramm, W. (1955). *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.