

1

UNDERSTANDING INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN...

When you have finished the chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 1.1 Define interpersonal communication.
- 1.2 Describe the various components within a transactional model of communication.
- 1.3 Describe the different codes/elements of nonverbal and verbal communication.
- 1.4 Be able to describe different types of communication and behavior and how they vary in terms of intent and reception.
- 1.5 Explain what it means to be a competent communicator.

Sydney is nervous and excited as she waits to be checked into her dorm room at her new university. She looks around at the other new students in line. Are they as nervous as she is? Some of them are quiet and look a little anxious, but others are already chatting and getting to know one another. Sydney doesn't want anyone to think she is nervous, so she tries to look calm. At one point she pulls her cell phone out and sends a couple of messages to friends from high school so that she isn't just standing there looking around. When Sydney gets to the front of the line, a friendly looking young woman smiles and asks for her name. "Sydney Coleman," she replies. The woman introduces herself as Hannah and tells her that she is one of the residence hall assistants. Hannah looks Sydney's name up, hands her a small envelope with a key, and then starts giving her directions to her room. There is so much noise behind them, however, that Sydney can't hear the directions. Seeing the confusion on Sydney's face, Hannah pauses, leans forward, and repeats the directions a little more loudly. Sydney thanks Hannah and heads off to find her room, excited to start a new adventure in her life.

Humans are social creatures. Indeed, one of the primary ways humans differ from the rest of the animal kingdom is that people can communicate with one another in highly sophisticated ways, such as being able to provide one another with detailed directions or flash someone a meaningful look. The ability to communicate effectively is a highly developed skill that improves people's lives by affording them more opportunities and better relationships. For Sydney, her new life as a college student is likely to be a more positive experience if she has the communication skills necessary to meet new people, get along with her dormmates, and develop new friendships. Ironically, however, the average person receives very little, if any, formal training on how to communicate verbally and nonverbally. Think of all the time you have spent in classrooms learning to read and write. In comparison, you have probably had little, if any, education regarding how to communicate verbally and nonverbally during interactions with others. Yet most people spend as much time communicating with others as they do reading and writing, and much of people's writing is done in the context of communicating via sources such as text messaging or email.

In the 21st century, communication has, in some ways, become even more complicated because of all the technology people have at their disposal. Being a good communicator not only entails being able to converse with others in face-to-face contexts, but it also requires being able to understand the art of communicating via channels such as text messaging, social media, and email. Various means of communication are literally at people's fingertips. The prevalence and availability of different forms of communication can lead people to take their skills for

granted and to see communication as simple and intuitive rather than complicated and in need of practice.

Whether people are interacting face-to-face or through technology, communication makes things happen. If you want to meet someone, start a relationship, join a group, persuade someone to do something, obtain a new job, understand someone from a different culture, or change something you don't like in a relationship, you need communication to reach your goal. Sydney will need communication to navigate through her new environment, make new friends, and succeed as a student. This is why this book takes a functional approach to interpersonal communication. A functional approach is grounded in the idea that communication makes things happen; this approach focuses on how people use communication to fulfill goals and accomplish everyday tasks. The functional approach also examines what nonverbal and verbal messages mean in a given context (Burgoon et al., 2013; Patterson, 1983).

The remaining chapters in this book focus on different functions of interpersonal communication, such as how communication helps people display identity, make positive impressions, develop relationships, maintain relationships, express and manage emotion, and engage in constructive conflict management, among other topics. To provide a foundation for these topics, this chapter describes the general process of communication.

WHAT IS INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION?

At a basic level, **interpersonal communication** involves the exchange of nonverbal and verbal messages between people who have some level of personal or social connection with one another. There are three key ideas embodied in this definition. First, messages are at the heart of the communication process. **Messages** are the information that is being exchanged. Messages can be verbal or nonverbal. In fact, people can use verbal and nonverbal communication at the same time or in sequences to send particular messages. For example, imagine that upon meeting her dormmate, Sydney smiles shyly and glances downward before looking up at her and saying, "Hi. It's nice to finally meet you in person." How would you interpret Sydney's communication? You might surmise she is a little shy or anxious but also excited to meet her new dormmate. Notice that it is the package of verbal and nonverbal messages that creates meaning in situations such as this.

Second, the term **exchange** is critical within this definition. For communication to occur, some scholars believe that the minimum requirement is that a sender must intentionally direct a message toward a receiver (Motley, 1990). Other scholars argue that the minimum requirement is that a receiver must attend to or interpret a message (Andersen, 1991). The idea of exchange captures this. For interpersonal communication to occur, there must be some level of exchange that includes a sender and a receiver. Either a sender must direct a message toward a receiver, or a receiver must attend to something another person says or does and interpret that message. Many behaviors go unnoticed by others or, even if they are noticed, no meaning is attached to them. Think about all the behaviors you engage in while sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture. You probably take notes, get restless and fidget, rearrange your legs under your desk, or stretch at some point. If no one notices any of these behaviors or attaches meaning to them, you are not communicating with anyone.

Third, not all communication between people qualifies as interpersonal communication; interpersonal communication occurs between those who have (or would like to have) some type of social or personal connection with each other. So, hitting the chat button on Amazon's website and asking a customer service representative about the process for exchanging a defective

item would not be classified as interpersonal communication in most situations. Instead, this is a business transaction where you would simply be exchanging basic and impersonal information with no intention of ever interacting again or building any type of real connection with the representative.

As this example illustrates, interpersonal communication involves exchanging information that is personal rather than impersonal. This is what helps distinguish interpersonal communication from more generic forms of communication. For instance, when you buy groceries, you interact with the cashier. Pleasantries such as, “Did you find everything you needed?” and “Yes, thank you,” might be exchanged, but the interaction is likely to follow a typical script for how people act when checking out at a grocery store. Now imagine instead that you know something personal about the cashier. The last time you were in her line you saw a bunch of kids excitedly waving at her and calling out, “Hi, Miss Jada!” This prompted a short conversation where you learned that in addition to being a cashier, Jada babysits a group of kids after school for a couple of hours every day and also takes a couple of night classes at the university. The next time Jada rings up your purchases, you ask her if she is still babysitting and how her classes are going. Then you both disclose that you are struggling to balance everything in your lives. When she hands you your receipt, she says “Good luck with everything.” You reply “You too,” and then you take your bags and go. Most people would agree that there is a qualitative difference between this interaction and the typical way most people communicate with a cashier at a grocery store—it is more interpersonal and less scripted.

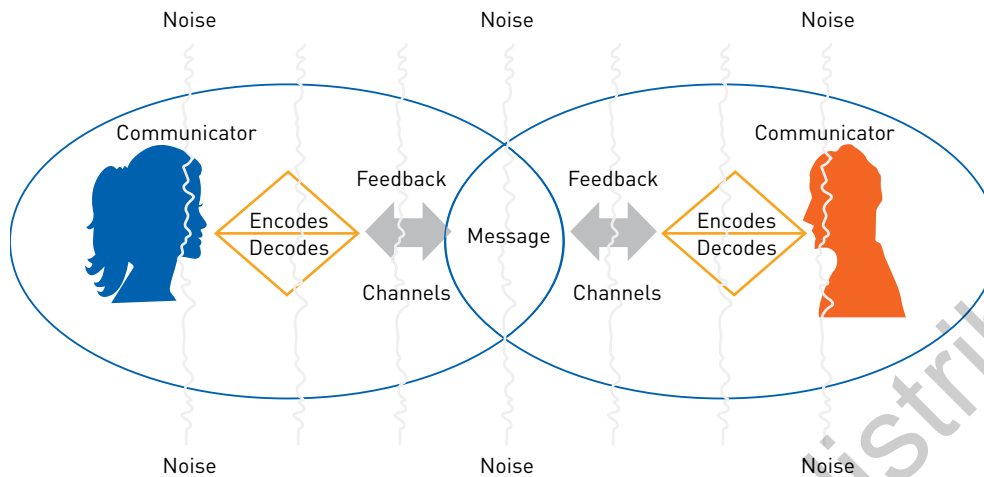
As this scenario shows, communication is more personal when it involves going outside of the traditional script for a given interaction, usually because people have gained personal knowledge of one another. This makes the communication unique. When people have a unique relational history, including shared experiences, inside jokes, or knowledge of private information, their history shapes how they communicate with each other, much as in the example with Jada.



Your unshared thoughts are considered intrapersonal rather than interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication involves an exchange of messages between a sender and a receiver. If no receiver is present, interpersonal communication cannot take place.

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FIGURE 1.1 ■ The Process of Communication



Another way that personal communication differs from impersonal communication is the type of influence people have on one another. The more people influence one another's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, the more personal the interaction is. Think about the interactions in the checkout line described earlier. In the first interaction, only behavior would be affected. The cashier would greet you, you would respond, they would eventually hand you the receipt, and you would probably say "thanks" and leave. In the second interaction, you might feel anxious when talking about trying to balance everything in your life but then feel a sense of comfort knowing that Jada is in a similar situation. Indeed, you might think that Jada is even busier than you are, which could motivate you to do better. This second interaction is clearly more personal than the first.

The definition of interpersonal communication as "an exchange of messages between people" still leaves some room for interpretation. Traditionally, communication with oneself, such as Sydney thinking, "I'm nervous but I'll get through this," has been defined as **intrapersonal communication**. There is little disagreement regarding this definition. There is, however, some disagreement about *how many people* are involved in interpersonal communication. Some communication researchers believe interpersonal communication involves two people, group communication involves three or more people, and public communication involves one person talking to many. While this might be an easy way to classify different levels of communication, using the number of people involved in the interaction misses what truly distinguishes interpersonal communication from other types of communication—the personal nature of the communication. Think about this: If you are having a personal conversation with a close friend and another close friend walks over and joins you, how does the situation change? Rather than communicating within a dyad, you are now communicating within a small group. Does this mean that the conversation among these three friends is no longer considered interpersonal communication? We would suggest that it is still interpersonal communication because of the types of messages being exchanged, but it is interpersonal communication within a small group rather than within a dyad. From this perspective, communication within a family, friend group, or broader social network can be considered interpersonal communication.

A MODEL OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

When interpersonal communication was first studied in college classrooms, most students were introduced to a linear model of communication that included a sender, a receiver, and a message that is delivered through a specific channel, such as through written or spoken words (Berlo, 1960; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). While these elements of the communication process are still important, they are no longer considered separate from one another. Communicators are both sender and receiver in most interactions, and the message one person sends may provide feedback to another person. Thus, communication is best viewed as a dynamic process that involves a series of moves and countermoves between people who are (sometimes simultaneously) sending and receiving multiple messages. The **transactional model of communication** (Barnlund, 2008; Watzlawick et al., 1967) is based on these ideas. This model (see Figure 1.1) includes the following elements: communicators, encoding and decoding, message, feedback, channel, field of experience, and noise.

Communicators: Encoding and Decoding

During the communication process, **communicators** are actively involved in sending and receiving messages. Being a sender involves **encoding** messages. To encode a message, you need to take an idea or information and translate it into a code that you can use to communicate that message. Codes include words as well as nonverbal behaviors, such as smiling, gesturing, or using a sarcastic tone of voice. Some messages are encoded strategically. In these cases, you may carefully plan what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Other messages are encoded



In this instance, who appears to be in the sending role and who appears to be in the receiving role? How might this change throughout the interaction?

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spontaneously, as a natural reaction to something. You might laugh at a friend's funny remark or yell out an obscenity when you stub your toe.

Being a receiver involves **decoding** messages. To decode a message, you attend to and interpret the words or behaviors of another person. Put another way, you make sense of and attach meaning to the messages produced by someone. When a message has a clear meaning within a given context, the decoding process can be straightforward. For example, messages such as telling someone to turn left at a stop sign, smiling when receiving an especially nice gift, and speaking in a nervous-sounding voice are likely to be interpreted similarly by most receivers. Other messages are more ambiguous and difficult to interpret correctly. Extended eye contact can be intended to show affection or to intimidate someone. Asking an acquaintance "Are you talking to anyone right now?" could be interpreted as a simple question, an attempt at small talk, or a sign of romantic interest. During the communication process, decoding is hit and miss. You are likely to interpret a lot of messages correctly, but you are also likely to misinterpret some messages. A classic study by Noller (1980) helps illustrate this point. In this study, husbands tended to interpret their wives' vocal tones as unpleasant or hostile when the wives actually considered their tones to be neutral. When husbands overestimated the amount of negativity in their wives' voices, both husbands and wives reported being less satisfied in their relationships.

Sometimes the roles of sender and receiver, and the activities of encoding and decoding, are distinguishable, but more often they overlap. Think about what the communication process would look like if you could freeze it by taking a photo. In the photo, would one person be encoding and the other person be decoding? Sometimes, but not always. You can probably think of a time when these roles were, at least temporarily, distinct. For example, one friend might be listening carefully as the other friend is talking about something distressing. But even in a case like this, the friend who is in the listening (or receiving) role may also be sending nonverbal messages by trying to look empathetic and concerned. The sending and receiving roles are most distinct when communication is delayed. Snapchatting and texting are examples of this. When you send



People can communicate through multiple channels simultaneously. This mother and daughter are using their faces, hands, webcam, and laptop to video chat with someone.

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a snap or compose a text, you are in the sender role; when you look at a snap or read a text, you are in the receiver role. However, during most communication transactions, these roles overlap; people send and receive messages at the same time. For example, when Sydney walks into her new dormitory, she smiles so that she appears friendly and relaxed rather than nervous (encoding) while looking around at others to see how they are acting and reacting to her (decoding). This is why the transactional model uses the more general term "communicators" to refer to the people in the model rather than classifying one person as a sender and the other as a receiver, as the linear model did. The transitional model emphasizes that most interpersonal communication involves simultaneous sending and receiving.

Messages

Messages are at the heart of the communication process because they contain the information that people exchange during an interaction. Multiple messages are often exchanged during an interaction. In her brief interaction with Sydney, Hannah sent messages related to friendliness (by smiling), authority (by saying she was a residence hall assistant), and competence (by adjusting her message so Sydney would understand the directions).

Notice that messages can be either verbal or nonverbal. The information people exchange through verbal and nonverbal messages allows people to share thoughts, emotions, and ideas. Of course, not all messages are exchanged in ways that produce shared meaning between communicators. For example, directions may not be fully comprehended or a friendly smile may be interpreted as condescending. This is one reason why people commonly give and look for feedback from others. **Feedback** refers to the messages you receive from others in response to your communication as well as the messages you send to others in response to their communication. In the interaction between Sydney and Hannah, feedback plays a critical role in creating shared meaning. Hannah sees that Sydney looks confused and adjusts her communication by leaning forward and repeating the directions. The confusion on Sydney's face provided valuable feedback that Hannah used to communicate more effectively. Sydney then responds by thanking her, which provides further feedback that Hannah has accomplished her goal of helping Sydney. Many of the messages people send provide this type of feedback.

The other essential component related to messages is the **channel** of communication. The channel is the means by which a message is sent from sender to receiver. When most people think about interpersonal communication, they envision face-to-face communication between people. However, communication can occur in many other channels, including writing, talking on the phone, texting, Snapchatting, emailing, Facetimeing, and posting messages on social media, just to name a few channels. When technology is part of the channel, the communication is referred to as **mediated communication**.

The channel of communication matters. Think about how you might wish a friend a happy birthday. Do you post a message on your friend's Facebook or Twitter page? Is this different than sending your friend a card or calling your friend on the phone to say happy birthday? Or perhaps you decide to post something on Instagram or to Facetime your friend. Most people would agree that you would choose the channel based on a number of different factors, including convenience, how close you are to the friend, and what you wanted to communicate beyond just saying "Happy Birthday." Indeed, the channel can shape the kind of message you send. For a friend's birthday, you might post a collage of photos showcasing some of your memories together on your Instagram story. Or you could post a video on your Twitter account with a song in the background and a happy birthday message. These types of messages are public and show others that you are close. On the other hand, you could send a direct message to your friend, keeping it

private. Or you could Facetime and have an extended private conversation that could get highly personal. The choices people make about the channels they use are influenced by the type of messages they wish to exchange.

It is important to recognize that verbal and nonverbal messages are embedded within broader channels of communication. For example, in face-to-face interaction and some mediated forms of communication, such as Facetime, people say words and display facial expressions. When communicating via other forms of mediated communication, such as email and text messaging, people type words and use emoticons (such as winking or smiling faces). Thus, both verbal and nonverbal channels are present whether communication is face-to-face or through technology.

The difference is not as much about the distinction between face-to-face and mediated communication as it is about the degree to which people see one another while interacting and the degree to which messages are synchronous. During face-to-face communication and when communicating using technologies that allow partners to see one another, a wider variety of nonverbal cues are available for both encoding and decoding. Communication is also more synchronous when people can see and/or hear one another, meaning that it occurs in real time with the possibility of continuous feedback. Face-to-face communication where people are physically present, live interactions using media (such as Facetime, Zoom, or Skype), and voice-to-voice conversations on the telephone are all examples of synchronous communication. On the other hand, when people communicate using computer-mediated channels such as email, text messaging, and Snapchatting, as well as social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, they have more control over the interaction. They can carefully compose and revise a message before sending it, they can decide what photos (if any) to post, and they can delay responding to someone if they are not sure what to write or what picture to send.

Field of Experience and Noise

Finally, two other components of the transactional model are field of experience and noise. Every person brings a unique set of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and experiences to the communication table, which is sometimes referred to as a **field of experience**. This helps explain why two people might interpret the same message differently. Imagine that when Hannah paused, leaned forward, and repeated the directions, Sydney took this behavior as an indication that Hannah thought she was stupid and needed to hear the directions twice. Based on her experiences, this interpretation may make sense. Perhaps Sydney had a parent who always repeated everything because she thought Sydney would not get the message the first time. As a result, Sydney would be prone to misinterpret Hannah's message that way, whereas another person with a different set of experiences would be grateful that Hannah repeated the message.

Field of experience also includes (1) your cultural background and history of interactions with specific people and (2) your interactional partner's culture and history of interactions with you. Imagine going to the airport to pick up a business associate who is from a different country. When you extend your hand to shake hers, there is an awkward pause, after which she smiles awkwardly and shakes your hand. If she is from a culture where people bow rather than shake hands, she may have interpreted your handshake as overly forward. On the other hand, if she is from a culture where people commonly hug or kiss cheeks upon greeting, she may have regarded your handshake as too formal. Either way, her field of experience impacts how she interprets and responds to your handshake.

Words can also be interpreted very differently depending on culture. To illustrate this, Agar (2012) gave an example of a conversation he had with a friend from Austria. She asked him what a “date” was. It became clear that she understood how people in the United States used the

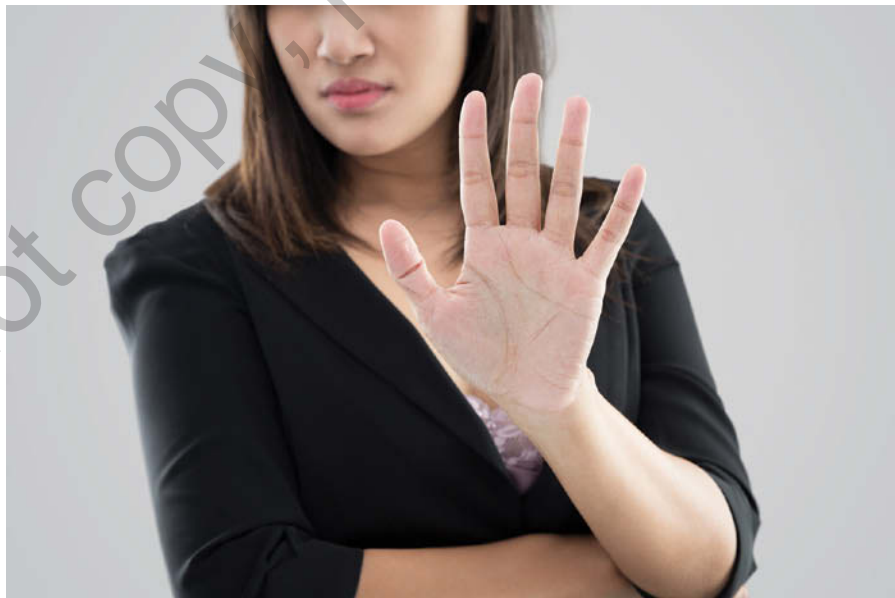
word in sentences, such as saying they were going on date, and that she also understood that the word "date" could refer to a day or a piece of fruit, but she still did not grasp the full meaning of the word as used by people from the United States. Agar (2012) explained that despite his best efforts, it was challenging to explain the US concept of a date to her. As he put it:

I started to answer, and the more I talked the more lost I became in how Americans see men and women, how they see relationships, intimacy—a host of connected assumptions that I'd never put into words before. And I was only trying to handle straight dates. It was quite different from her Austrian understanding of men and women and what they are to each other. For a while she looked at me as if I'd just stepped out of a flying saucer, until she finally decided I was serious. (p. 15)

Even within the United States, the words "date" and "dating" differ in meaning depending on a person's background. For example, there are generational differences in what it means to be "dating." For younger generations, this can mean that you are in a relationship; for older generations, it can mean that you are casually going out with someone and seeing where things go. The point is that people's backgrounds heavily influence how verbal and nonverbal messages are decoded.

Similarly, your history of interactions influences how you interpret messages. If one of your friends is acting shy and not talking much at a party, you might think nothing of it because this is how your friend normally acts. With a different friend, however, you might correctly assume that he is upset or depressed since he is usually outgoing at parties. Sometimes, field of experience helps people interpret messages more accurately; other times, it leads to messages being misinterpreted.

Noise can lead people to either misinterpret or completely miss messages. **Noise** occurs when something interferes with the sending or receiving of messages, often reducing the degree to



The same kinesic behavior can be classified in different ways. For example, this hand gesture is an emblem that means "stop," but the woman in the picture is also using it as a regulator to stop an interaction and an affect display to show her negative emotion.

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These two women are communicating within the intimate zone and might easily touch. What assumptions might you make about their relationship based on this? What other nonverbal cues are they displaying that affect how you would perceive their relationship?

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These shoppers in Peru are following social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 by standing within Hall's social zone, at around 6 feet apart. How do you think this spacing affects the shopping experience? How different would spacing have looked if this was taken prior to the pandemic?

Sebastian Enriquez/AFP via Getty Images

which there is shared meaning between communicators. Noise can be external, such as when fans are cheering at a football game and you cannot hear what your friends are saying, or when you get distracted and cannot concentrate on the lecture after seeing people walking outside from your classroom window. Noise can also be internal, such as when you have trouble listening

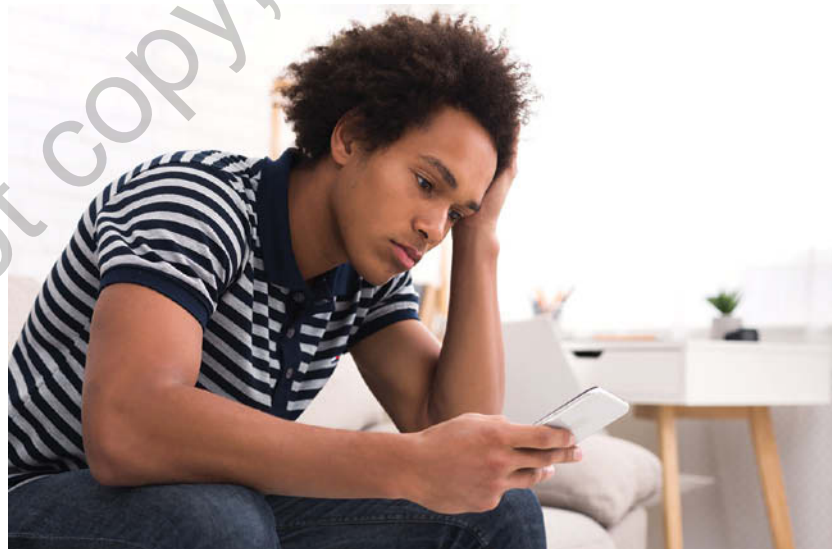
or comprehending messages because you have a headache, are preoccupied with something (such as a speech you have to give), or are daydreaming about a loved one. In sum, anything that distracts you from the messages you are sending or receiving is a form of noise that can reduce shared meaning during an interaction.

TYPES OF MESSAGES

As you already learned, communication is composed of both nonverbal and verbal messages. But you may not know that nonverbal messages often constitute more of the meaning in a given interaction than do verbal messages. One reason for this is that nonverbal communication is **multimodal**. This means that we can communicate through more than one nonverbal mode or channel simultaneously. For example, you can wave, smile, and move toward someone all at the same time. In contrast, we can only say one word at a time. Next, we define nonverbal communication and review the various channels or “codes” that make up nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Messages

Nonverbal communication has been defined various ways (Burgoon et al., 2022). When people hear the term “nonverbal communication,” they typically think of body language. However, nonverbal communication includes much more than this. **Nonverbal communication** comprises nonlinguistic behaviors that are sent or received during the communication process. The key concept here is “nonlinguistic.” While it might be tempting to think that nonverbal communication includes all messages that are not spoken, this is too simplistic. Instead, it is more accurate to think of nonverbal messages as behaviors that are not directly related to words, whether spoken or unspoken. For instance, American Sign Language is an unspoken language, but it is based on words. Therefore, many people consider it language rather than nonverbal communication.



People sometimes read a lot into time. If someone is not answering your messages, you might wonder what it means to the point of continually looking at your phone to see if a new message is there or even checking someone’s Snapchat score to see if they have been on the phone.

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Language is a method of human communication that uses words. Nonverbal communication, in contrast, uses nonlinguistic forms of communication.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

THE ROLE NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR PLAYS IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

As we grow up, we spend a considerable portion of our time in school learning the rules for speaking and writing language. In contrast, most people never get any formal training in how to communicate effectively nonverbally. Therefore, it might surprise you to learn that in many interactions, nonverbal communication carries more meaning than verbal communication. If this fact does not surprise you, you may have heard the estimate that 93 percent of all meaning in communication is derived from nonverbal cues, leaving only 7 percent of the meaning residing in verbal cues. A more conservative estimate is that around 66 percent (or two-thirds) of the meaning in most interactions is gleaned from nonverbal as opposed to verbal cues (Burgoon et al., 2022).

So which estimate is right? The answer is that it depends on the context. When people are trying to figure out a person's emotions, they are much more likely to look at nonverbal cues such as facial expressions than verbal statements. Similarly, when people are making first impressions, verbal communication is often scripted and superficial, so impressions are formed largely based on nonverbal cues such as appearance and facial expression. However, there are also times when verbal communication is dominant. For example, when you are listening to a lecture in class, you key in on what the professor is saying so that you understand the information. Regardless, nonverbal messages play a vital role in creating meaning across interactions. So, the next time you hear someone say that nonverbal communication is trivial, you can tell that person that nonverbal cues actually communicate as much or more than words do in many situations.

Another way to define nonverbal communication is to look at the codes that constitute it. A **code** is a set of signals that is transmitted through a particular medium or channel. Nonverbal communication consists of the following codes: kinesics, vocalics, proxemics, haptics, appearance and adornment, artifacts and environmental cues, and chronemic cues. Next, we define each of these codes and discuss some of the key research related to them.

Kinesics

This code is similar to what people commonly refer to as body language. **Kinesics** includes facial expressions, body movements, and eye behavior, such as smiling, posture, and pupil dilation. Researchers have classified kinesic behavior into five categories: emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). **Emblems** are behaviors that substitute for words. Examples include waving to say “hello” and crossing one's fingers to say “good luck.” **Illustrators** are kinesic behaviors that describe or emphasize something. You might pretend to swing a bat, point left while giving directions, or indicate how tall something is by reaching into the air. **Affect displays** show emotion. Smiling to show happiness, slumping when depressed, and clenching your fist when angry are all examples. **Regulators** help manage interaction and include behavior such as raising your hand when you want to speak, avoiding eye contact when you want someone else to speak, and leaning backward when you are content to let someone else do the talking. Finally, **adaptors** are idiosyncratic behaviors that people engage in, often by habit, when they are nervous or restless. Tapping a pencil on a desk, playing with one's hair or jewelry, and shaking one's leg nervously are all adaptors.



Slang and acronyms, which are abbreviations such as GOAT in this photo, tend to be understood by certain groups and not others. Identify the slang in this text message exchange. What are some of the common terms you and your friends use that are unique to your group or generation?

Courtesy of Laura Guerrero

Vocalics

The **vocalics** code includes the way words are spoken, along with pauses and silences that occur during an interaction. Vocalic behaviors such as vocal pitch, loudness, accent, tone, and speed have all been studied, as have vocalizations such as crying and sighing. Researchers have studied baby talk as a form of flirtation and have shown that softer, higher-pitched voices communicate affection and intimacy (Burgoon et al., 2022). Vocalized pauses, such as saying “um” when nervous, are also part of the vocalic code. Research has shown that vocalic behaviors are difficult to control and, therefore, might provide useful information when trying to determine how a person feels.

Proxemics

The **proxemics** code revolves around the use of space, including conversational distances and territory. People have been shown to guard and defend their territories, especially their personal belongings and private spaces, such as their bedrooms. You might mark your territory with a “do not disturb” sign or put your backpack on your desk to reserve it. These are territorial markers that help you regulate your privacy. People also use different conversational distances depending on the type of interaction they are having (Hall, 1990). In the United States, the **intimate zone** stretches from 0 to 18 inches. This close distancing is typically reserved for interactions with close friends and loved ones or conversations about very personal issues. The edge of the intimate zone also demarcates your **personal space bubble**, which is an invisible, adjustable bubble of space that you carry around with you. People usually respect this space and do not enter it unless they are invited to or have a particularly close relationship with you. The **personal zone** in the United States ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. This is where most of our social interactions with casual friends, acquaintances, and sometimes co-workers occur. The

social zone runs from 4 to 12 feet and is the distance at which many impersonal conversations take place. The idea of social distance took on a new meaning in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic when people were asked to keep a distance of at least 6 feet between themselves and others in public places. The social zone became the “new norm” in many ways. Finally, the **public zone** starts at 12 feet and expands out from there. This zone is where public forms of communication, such as a professor lecturing or a boss giving a presentation, frequently occur. Keep in mind that these conversational zones are specific to the United States. In other parts of the world, these zones can either be larger or smaller, so it is important not to assume that proxemic norms within one given culture translate to another culture.

Haptics

The **haptics** code references touch as a form of communication. Touch and proxemics are related to each other; the distancing between people helps define whether touch will or should occur. Considerable research has shown that touch is an essential ingredient for healthy social and physical development. Early work demonstrated that children in orphanages tended to get sicker and engage in more antisocial behavior if they were not touched (Montagu, 1978). Recent work has shown that affectionate touch, such as hugging and kissing, is related to a number of health benefits, such as decreases in stress hormones, increases in oxytocin (a hormone that promotes

FIGURE 1.2 ■ Types of Communication and Behavior

	<i>Message Not Interpreted</i>	<i>Message Interpreted Inaccurately</i>	<i>Message Interpreted Accurately</i>
<i>Message Sent With Intent</i>	Attempted communication	Miscommunication	Successful communication
<i>Message Sent Without Intent</i>	Unattended behavior	Misinterpretation	Accidental communication

a positive mood), and decreases in blood pressure and blood sugar (Floyd, 2006; Floyd et al., 2005, 2009). Touch is a particularly powerful nonverbal code. On the one hand, touch can communicate messages related to intimacy, affection, and support; on the other hand, touch can be violent.

Appearance and Adornment

Physical attributes such as height, weight, and attractiveness, as well as adornments such as clothing, perfume, and tattoos, all fall under the appearance and adornment code. Research has shown that people make judgments based on appearance cues. For example, as discussed in Chapter 3, when people are especially good-looking, others tend to attribute all sorts of positive internal characteristics to them (outgoing, fun, intelligent) but also some negative characteristics (superficial, conceited). Fortunately, how people communicate also makes a difference (Albada et al., 2002). If you have a fun, positive interaction with someone, you are likely to rate that person as more attractive than you would if your interaction with them had been awkward or boring. Additionally, other aspects of our appearance, such as the clothing we choose to wear, can communicate messages about the type of person we are.

Artifacts and Environmental Cues

The environment and objects in the environment, such as furniture and pictures, can set the tone for certain times of interaction. Think about the difference between going to a football game with friends versus a play. The game is likely noisy and crowded, so you and your friends are more likely to talk loudly. Whether your team is winning or losing will also affect your moods and therefore your communication. At the play, you will likely be focused on the stage. You and your friends might exchange looks or whisper a comment or two. Sometimes, we intentionally manipulate the environment to create a particular atmosphere for interaction, such as lighting a fire in the fireplace and playing soft music to make a date more romantic.

Chronemic Cues

The use of time to communicate messages, or **chronemics**, is one of the less obvious nonverbal codes. Nonetheless, time can send powerful interpersonal messages. Think about how you feel if someone shows up really early to the party you are hosting or really late for a date. What if someone starts taking longer than usual to reply to your Snapchat messages or leaves you on “read” for a while before answering your text? Such behavior can cause uncertainty or conflict within relationships. Other chronemic behaviors, such as spending extra time with someone or cutting a visit short, also send strong messages about the type of relationship we have with someone.

Verbal Messages

Verbal communication comprises spoken or written words that are sent or received during the communication process. Language organizes words so that they represent things, thoughts, emotions, and abstract ideas. Specifically, **language** is a system of words that is made up of letters or symbols that work together in a structured way to convey meaning. Several types of rules govern the way language is structured and understood. **Constitutive rules** tell us what words represent (Searle, 1969). For example, a tree could be called an “oogley” but in the English language, a tree (or a thing with a trunk, branches, and leaves) is called a “tree.” This also illustrates the arbitrary nature of most words. There is no reason why a tree is called “tree” instead of “oogley.” Over time, the word “tree” emerged. Notice also that the words used to describe a tree—such as “trunk,” “branches,” and “leaves”—are also arbitrary. **Phonological rules** tell people how to pronounce words within a given language. The word “branch” is pronounced differently in the United States versus Scotland, for example.

Syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic rules also govern language. **Syntax** involves the way words are arranged to form sentences. Different languages have different syntactic rules. In English, for example, adjectives come before nouns. So English speakers say “the green tree.” But in some languages, such as Spanish and French, the adjective follows the noun, so speakers would say “el árbol verde” or “l’arbre vert,” which translates to “the tree green.” This is just one example of many syntactic differences among languages.

Semantics refers to the way people interpret and attach meaning to words and sentences. Importantly, when applying semantic rules, meaning is determined by looking at the other words and phrases within a conversation. Some words can have multiple meanings, such as a branch referring to the branch of a tree or a bank branch, or the idea that a person needs to “branch” out. The other words in a sentence help people know the correct interpretation. Connotation and denotation are also related to semantics. The **denotative meaning** of a word is its basic dictionary definition. For example, words like mansion, castle, and hovel could all be defined as dwellings where people live. The **connotative meaning** of a word is more subjective and contextual, and it includes feelings and states that we associate with a particular word. A mansion might be associated with wealth, a castle with royalty, and a hovel with poverty.

Finally, **pragmatics** is also associated with meaning, but in this case, meaning is gleaned through context, such as the situation or place where the interaction is occurring, the person who is speaking, or the relationship between the communicators. So if Su Lin tells James, “You seem cold,” she could be referring to his body temperature or his attitude toward her. Based on the situation, James may be able to interpret Su Lin’s comment correctly. If the room is cold and James is shivering, he might say “yeah” and then get himself a blanket. If he and Su Lin had an argument and he has been giving her the cold shoulder, he should know that she is talking about his behavior toward her.

These rules govern all language. Some types of language, however, are specific to certain relationships. Personal idioms and slang are examples of this. These, and other types of language that reflect and define interpersonal interaction, are discussed next.

Personal Idioms

Idioms are words or groups of words that have a special meaning that is not readily deducible. For example, English phrases such as “in a New York minute” or “you can’t judge a book by its



Spontaneous expressions may not be directed to anyone, yet these unintentional actions can still send very clear messages about how someone is feeling.

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cover” have meaning beyond what the words themselves mean. When bilingual or multilingual speakers hear such phrases in English, they are often confused because the literal meaning does not make sense and they are not privy to the special meaning. **Personal idioms** are a subcategory of idioms that have special meaning known only to those in certain relationships or social groups. Common examples are nicknames, expressions of affection, and special names for others (Hopper et al., 1981). For example, Sydney might call her boyfriend “Boo,” tell her best friend that she looks especially good by simply saying “slay,” or refer to a guy that she and another friend dislike as “the snake.” Outsiders are unlikely to understand the meaning of these terms (or know who “the snake” is); therefore, the use of these types of personal idioms signifies that people have unique relationships.

Slang

Like personal idioms, **slang** encompasses informal words and phrases that are used more in speech than in writing and are only understood by certain people. However, while the meaning attached to personal idioms comes from within a relationship, circle of friends, or family members, the meaning attached to slang is understood by a broader group, such as those from the same generation or cultural group. Sydney and her college friends will likely understand what it means when one of them says, “I’m low-key down for that” or “That party was lit,” but their parents or grandparents may not. Slang is typically temporary in nature and can change rapidly. Because of this, using and understanding slang indicates that people belong to a particular group, which can help create feelings of connectedness.

By the same token, slang can also create division and misunderstanding. Even people within the same generation sometimes define slang terms differently, as a perusal of *Urban Dictionary* will tell you. One study conducted at a high school found that slang reinforced some social and

racial divisions between students. For example, many Black students said the term “jock” was a verb that meant to “hit on” or “flirt,” whereas white students saw it as a noun to mean “athlete” (Bucholtz, 2012, p. 284). Black students also tended to interpret the term “notch” as something you would call someone who is attractive, making it a compliment, whereas white girls thought the term was derogatory. As you are reading these, you may or may not be familiar with these slang terms because they change quickly. This is part of why adolescents and young adults see slang as part of being cool; you have to be current to understand it (Bucholtz, 2012).

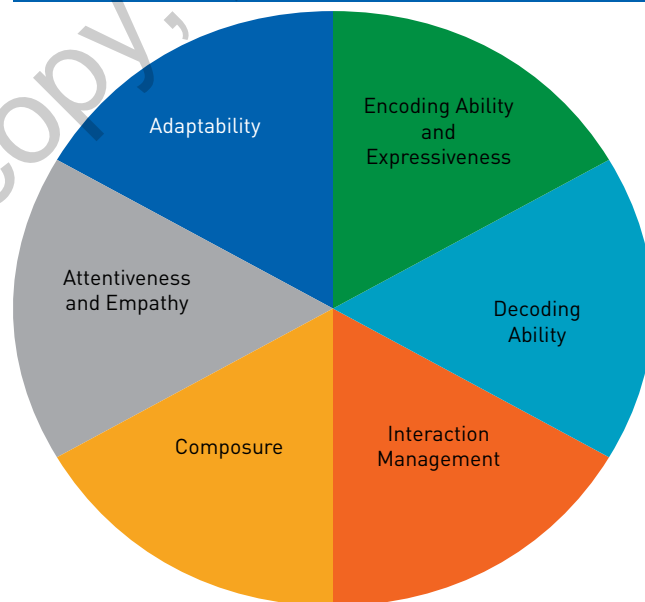
Storytelling

Verbal communication is also used to tell stories about people’s relationships. These “stories are vehicles through which individuals link themselves as relational partners and characterize their joint relational identity” (Burlison et al., 2000, p. 253). People tell stories about how they first met, endured hardships, went on vacation, broke up and got back together again, attended a special event, and so forth. Sharing these stories with others and referring to elements of these stories within conversations with one another creates a sense of uniqueness and relational history that helps people define their relationships.

Verbal Tense

Storytelling is one way to remember and honor the history of a relationship. The use of past, present, and future tense can also do so. Talking in the past tense about what “we used to do” can showcase the stability of a relationship. Using present tense indicates that people are currently connected. Even simple statements, such as “I’m having so much fun right now,” can express

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Six Skills for Competent Communication





Listening attentively and providing support are cornerstones for being a competent communicator.

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positive sentiments about how a current interaction is going. Finally, using future tense can be a significant indicator that a relationship is moving in a positive trajectory or that two people are (or are moving toward being) committed to one another or being long-term friends. For example, if Sydney's new dormmate starts talking about going to a concert in November, this statement shows a commitment to keep their new friendship in good standing until then.

Pronoun Use

Even the simple use of pronouns can reflect or affect the type of relationship that people share (Bartlett Ellis et al., 2016; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). One distinction is between “you” and “I.” The context matters here. Using the “you” pronoun when making positive statements about another person makes the message personal. For example, Sydney might tell her new roommate, “You are really pretty,” which would be perceived more positively than “I think you are really pretty.” On the other hand, there are times when using the “I” pronoun allows people to take ownership of their statements rather than blaming the other person. Think about someone telling you that “you are so frustrating” versus “I feel so frustrated.” When people hear the first statement, they are likely to feel insulted and get defensive. By contrast, the second statement is less threatening and may even prompt empathy.

SKILL BUILDER

USING "I" VERSUS "YOU" PRONOUNS

Sometimes it is better to use "I" pronouns. This is especially the case when you are discussing negative feelings or behaviors. If you own the behavior, it comes across as less critical and threatening, plus you "own" your thoughts and feelings rather than blaming your partner for them. By using "I" pronouns in these cases, you may also prompt your partner to feel empathy for you. This could lead to a conversation about how to fix the issues that are causing your negative thoughts or feelings.

"You" Statements That Show Blame	"I" Statements That Show Ownership
You make me feel really bad.	I feel really bad.
You are always so judgmental.	I feel like I'm being judged.
You are so confusing.	I am confused.
You are ruining everything.	I feel like everything is ruined.

There are cases, however, when using "you" statements is more effective than using "I" statements. These situations generally involve giving compliments and validating the other person. Look at the following statements. When you compliment someone directly by using the "you" pronoun, the statement comes across as a fact. When you change it to an "I" statement, this qualifies it. In other words, the person may think, "Okay, you think I'm kind but that doesn't mean others do, too." "You" statements are also especially effective when they give a person credit for something positive, such as making you feel happy.

"You" Statements That Give Direct Credit	"I" Statements That Fail to Give Direct Credit
You are so kind.	I think you are really kind.
You are good at that.	I think you are good at that.
You make me happy.	I am happy.
You make me feel so much better.	I feel so much better.

"We" is another pronoun that is significant within interpersonal interaction. When friends, couples, and family members use the pronoun "we," it not only symbolizes that they are a unit but also reflects that they are close and share a satisfying relationship (Dreyer et al., 1987; Honeycutt, 1999). In workplace relationships, "we" statements can create a sense of teamwork and community. Similarly, imagine one of your teachers saying, "We are going to talk about effective communication today" versus "I am going to talk about effective communication today." The first statement implies that the class is a unit and encourages discussion. The second statement implies that the teacher is in charge and will be lecturing without as much input from the class. Think of times when it would be more appropriate to use the "I" pronoun and others when it would be more appropriate to use the "we" pronoun. Can you think of a time when using one of these pronouns made you feel blamed or left out?

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

As noted previously, encoding and decoding are important components within the communication process. Messages must either be encoded or decoded for communication to occur. In fact, researchers have debated what types of messages count as communication, in part by looking at issues related to encoding and decoding (Andersen, 1991; Motley, 1990). One of these issues is whether a message was encoded with intent. In other words, did someone send a message with the intent that someone would see and interpret it? The other issue is whether a message was actually received and interpreted by someone. When these two issues are considered, six possibilities emerge, as shown in Figure 1.2 (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006).

Note that although these forms of communication are presented in isolation as if only one message occurs between two people in sending and receiving roles, the process of communication is more complex than this, with multiple messages being exchanged and people occupying the dual roles of sender and receiver. Nonetheless, understanding these types of communication helps describe the different types of messages that constitute the communication process. This model also suggests that there are things that people do and say that do not qualify as a message and instead are unattended behaviors.

Attempted Communication

Attempted communication occurs when a message that is sent with intent is not received. Sometimes this happens because the intended receiver simply misses the message. Have you ever tried to signal to someone that you wanted to end an interaction or leave a party, but the person didn't get the hint? Perhaps you used leave-taking behaviors such as looking at the time on your cell phone and saying something like "it's getting late" but the person just kept on talking. If the person was oblivious to the fact that you wanted to go, then your attempt at communication failed. Communication can fail for other reasons. You might call to your roommate and not get a response because he or she is listening to music with earphones on, or a room might be so noisy that you can't hear a message, as was the case when Hannah was trying to give Sydney directions.

Miscommunication

Miscommunication occurs when a message is sent with intent but is interpreted inaccurately. This form of communication occurs quite frequently. Perhaps a smile that you meant to be merely polite is interpreted as flirtatious, or a question that you posed out of interest is taken as a challenge. These are examples of miscommunication. Sometimes miscommunication occurs because people are too quick to jump to conclusions or because they think they know someone better than they do. Gottman (1994) discussed the concept of **mindreading** as a potential problem in relationships. Mindreading occurs when people assume they know how their partner is thinking or feeling. Oftentimes, these kinds of assumptions are wrong and can lead to miscommunication.

Successful Communication

Successful communication occurs when a person sends a message with intent and a receiver attends to and interprets that message correctly. This type of communication is often considered ideal because there is shared meaning. In other words, the sender and receiver agree regarding the meaning of a message. When Sydney thanks Hannah, both women interpret Sydney's words as a polite expression of gratitude. Since this is what Sydney meant to convey, the words have

shared meaning and successful communication has occurred. Most interactions do not result in 100 percent shared meaning since communicators cannot get inside one another's heads, but people sometimes get close to that goal. Successful communication is the prototypical type of communication and is what most people think of as "good" communication.

Unattended Behavior

Unattended behavior is not considered important within the communication process because it does not involve encoding or decoding. With unattended behavior, people emit behaviors unintentionally, and no one notices or interprets those behaviors as meaningful. As you are reading this chapter, you are blinking but you probably didn't even realize that until now. Behaviors such as normal blinking are unintentional, automatic behaviors that neither senders nor receivers tend to notice. Similarly, behaviors that are not directed at anyone and go unnoticed, such as stretching your legs under your desk where no one can see them, are unattended behaviors that are not part of the communication process. At a minimum, then, verbal and nonverbal behaviors need to be either encoded or decoded for them to count as communication. This is why the terms "behavior" and "communication" are not synonymous; many behaviors go unnoticed and do not constitute communication.

Misinterpretation

Misinterpretation occurs when a sender does not intentionally send a message, yet something the sender says or does is interpreted incorrectly by a receiver. If you are having a bad day and some of the negativity that you are feeling shows in your face, a friend might think you are mad at them when you are not. Similarly, if you are tired and having trouble paying attention to what others are saying, people might think that you are uninterested in the topic at hand when you would actually be excited about the topic if you weren't so tired. The key here is that the sender did not mean to send a message, but the receiver attached meaning to the sender's behavior anyway, and the meaning they attached was wrong.

Accidental Communication

Accidental communication occurs when a sender does not intend to send a message, yet a receiver still notices and correctly interprets the sender's behavior. In the scenario at the beginning of this chapter, Sydney tries to cover up her nervousness by looking calm and keeping herself busy by sending messages on her cell phone. Her intention is to send out the message that she is composed and confident. However, suppose that a few of the other students see the worry in her eyes and notice that she is a little fidgety before reaching for her cell phone. They correctly interpret her behavior as reflecting nervousness. In this case, Sydney did not intend to show people she was nervous, yet some people still interpreted her behavior that way. Such is the case with accidental communication.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Take another look at the boxes in Figure 1.2. Which type of communication is likely considered most competent? Most people would say successful communication because the message was decoded accurately and shared meaning was created. Shared meaning is often the primary goal of communication because people usually need to get their point across to reach other goals,

including self-presentational goals, relational goals, and instrumental goals (Clark & Delia, 1979). **Self-presentational goals** revolve around presenting yourself in a positive way so people accept and like you. **Relational goals** involve being able to successfully navigate relationships, including being able to initiate, develop, maintain, and end relationships. Finally, **instrumental goals** involve being able to get tasks done, including getting someone to help you with something, changing someone's opinion, and resisting someone else's attempts to influence you. In many cases, reaching these goals requires at least some degree of shared meaning between sender and receiver.

Within the context of interpersonal interaction, **communication competence** refers to the degree to which a person successfully uses communication to meet goals. Moreover, competent communication is characterized as effective and appropriate. Communication is *effective* when it achieves the goal or task it is directed toward (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2012). Sometimes goals are simple, such as appearing friendly by saying “hi” to an acquaintance. Other times, goals are complex, such as managing conflict with a co-worker or telling someone you would rather stay friends than start a romantic relationship. Communication is *appropriate* when it is tactful and polite and does not violate social norms, rules, or expectations (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2012). So, forcing someone to do something they do not want to do is effective but not appropriate. On the other hand, being too polite to stand up for yourself during a conflict situation may be appropriate, but it is not effective.

To better understand the process of communication competence, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) advanced the component model of competence. This model includes *motivation*, *knowledge*, and *skill*. Motivation and knowledge are precursors to being able to communicate competently (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, 1989). To be competent communicators, people must be motivated to approach people and situations and then act. They must also have the knowledge to be competent communicators. Just being motivated to communicate is not enough; you have to know *how* to communicate. Having knowledge about social norms as well as personal knowledge about the person with whom you are communicating is part of this. Such knowledge helps a communicator make good decisions about how to act in effective and appropriate ways. Skill is then necessary to carry out those actions. People who have communication skills know how to adapt their communication so that they say and do the right things within a given situation.

Different skills are also relevant based on the situation. Thus, throughout this book, we will be discussing various skills related to particular topics. For example, we will discuss emotional intelligence in Chapter 6 on emotions and conflict management skills in Chapter 10 on conflict. For now, we review six fundamental skills that help communicators be more competent: encoding ability and expressiveness, decoding ability, interaction management, composure, attentiveness and empathy, and adaptability (see Figure 1.3).

Encoding Ability and Expressiveness

Some people are especially good at expressing themselves in ways that show their feelings and allow them to connect with others (Riggio, 1986). Good encoders also manage their expressions to hide feelings that might be seen as inappropriate. People who are high in encoding ability tend to be extroverted and expressive and have large social networks. They are also adept at monitoring their behavior and influencing others (Burgoon et al., 2022). Encoding ability is related to the broader skill of expressiveness, which includes being open, articulate, nonverbally dynamic, and likeable (Spitzberg, 2015).

Decoding Ability

People who are skilled in decoding are observant and able to interpret the behaviors of others correctly. They are good at sizing up people and making favorable first impressions, and they also tend to be highly sociable (Burgoon et al., 2022). Being able to decode communication accurately leads to less miscommunication and misinterpretation. Research suggests that encoding and decoding abilities are related and that, on average, women are better at encoding and decoding nonverbal behavior than are men (Burgoon et al., 2022). As you will learn later in this book, it is also important to recognize that messages have different meanings depending on culture and context. Good decoders try to look beyond their own field of experience when interpreting messages and check for understanding.

Interaction Management

Being able to manage or coordinate interaction is another critical communication skill (Backlund & Morreales, 2015; Capella, 1994). This includes engaging in smooth turn-taking, speaking when appropriate, and knowing when to listen to others. Individuals with this skill can also direct the flow of an interaction by introducing new topics and shifting away from old ones, asking questions, interrupting when necessary, using an appropriate amount of talk time, and changing the intonation of one's voice (Spitzberg, 2015; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Being able to manage interaction in these ways helps people facilitate the type of communication that helps them reach their goals.

Composure

Most people have been in situations where it was difficult to stay composed. You can probably recall times when you were nervous, uncomfortable, or angry, and the people around you could readily see those feelings despite your efforts to look calm and composed. Although there are times when nervousness is endearing and anger is justifiable, there are also times when it is in people's best interest to look composed. Behaviors such as speaking in a calm and confident voice, having an open posture, speaking fluently, and using expressive rather than nervous gestures (such as fidgeting) give an impression of composure and confidence (Spitzberg, 2015). People who display such behaviors, especially when under stress or pressure, are rated as good leaders and seen as assertive and persuasive.

Attentiveness and Empathy

Competent communicators make other people feel valued. They act interested in what others are saying and are supportive and empathetic (Backlund & Morreales, 2015; Spitzberg, 2015). People show attentiveness through listening, nodding to show agreement, using backchanneling cues such as "Aha!" being expressive and animated, leaning forward, and giving eye contact (Coker & Burgoon, 1987; Spitzberg, 2015). These behaviors show that a person is an active participant in a conversation. They also validate the other communicator by making them feel like what they have to say is important. Empathy, which is a "social and emotional skill that helps us feel and understand the emotions, circumstances, intentions, thoughts, and needs of others, such that we can offer sensitive, perceptive, and appropriate communication and support" goes a step further (McLaren, 2013, p. 27). There are two specific components of empathy—**affective** and **cognitive** (Lawrence et al., 2004). **Affective empathy** involves feeling what others feel, whereas **cognitive empathy** involves being able to put oneself in another person's place to

understand that person's perspective. When people experience empathy, they better understand others, which makes them better at decoding as well as crafting appropriate messages that lead to shared meaning.

Adaptability

Finally, being able to adapt one's communication based on context is a highly important communication skill. Context involves a number of factors, including (a) the situation, (b) the other communicator's personality, (c) the type of relationship you have with the other communicator, and (d) culture. The best communicators are flexible and mindful in how they communicate based on these factors (Backlund & Morreale, 2015; Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2015). They look for feedback from receivers so they can adjust their behavior as necessary. Having empathy and being skilled in decoding contribute to adaptability, which shows how the different aspects of communication competence work together.

PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

At the end of each chapter in this book, we provide principles that help tie together or expand on some of the key concepts within the chapter. The principles discussed next all focus on some aspect of the process of communication that highlights the nature of interpersonal interaction.

Principle 1. Communication is a dynamic process that is irreversible and unrepeatable.

Communication involves much more than a simple exchange of information. It is a complex process filled with moves and countermoves, with communicators simultaneously engaging in the sending and receiving of messages. Communication within a given interaction is constantly changing, as are people's interpretations of one another. Yet despite the dynamic nature of communication, once words have been spoken or behaviors have been displayed, they cannot be taken back. This shows the irreversible nature of communication. Everyone has encountered a situation where they wish they could take something they said or did back, but it cannot be done. Communication is also unrepeatable. The exact circumstances of any interaction, including people's thoughts, moods, and feelings, cannot be repeated. In addition, reactions will be different if something has been communicated previously. Therefore, it is impossible to completely recreate any communication situation.

Principle 2. The channel of communication affects communication.

In this chapter, we have emphasized that interpersonal communication is composed of both nonverbal and verbal messages that can be exchanged through face-to-face or mediated channels. Nonverbal and verbal messages can work together or separately to create meaning. Sometimes these messages are consistent, making it relatively easy to determine their meaning. Other times, nonverbal messages contradict one another or are at odds with verbal messages, making it more challenging to determine the meaning behind them. The distinction between face-to-face and mediated communication is also important, although the more important distinctions are based on the degree to which people see one another while interacting and the degree to which messages are synchronous.

Principle 3. Communication can be intentional or unintentional.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, some forms of message exchange—such as those classified as attempted communication, miscommunication, and successful communication—involve intentional encoding. In these cases, a message is directed toward a receiver. Other forms of

message exchange—such as misinterpretation and accidental communication—occur when people attach meaning to behaviors that were emitted spontaneously, without any intention to direct them to a receiver. Ignoring any of these types of message exchange would paint an incomplete picture of the communication process. Attempted communication may lead to frustration, which could then lead to conflict. Miscommunication could lead people to be at cross-purposes. Misinterpretation could lead a receiver to engage in behavior that is unwanted by the sender. And accidental communication could increase understanding between people. Thus, both intentional and unintentional communication play important roles in the communication process.

Principle 4. Not all behavior is communication.

It may be tempting to think that since communication can be intentional or unintentional, all behavior is communication. Sometimes people misinterpret Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson's famous statement that "one cannot not communicate" as meaning exactly that (Watzlawick et al., 1967). However, the statement that "one cannot not communicate" actually refers to the idea that if you are interacting with someone, that person is going to attach meaning to something you do or say, even if you do not intend to send a message. This is different from saying everything we do is communication. Indeed, take another look at Figure 1.2. Unattended behavior occurs when people engage in spontaneous behavior that no one notices or attaches meaning to. This is not communication. Communication involves either sending a message with intent by directing it toward a potential receiver or having a message interpreted by someone.

Principle 5. Communication varies in terms of competence.

As mentioned previously, competent communication is effective and appropriate. Effective communication helps people reach their goals. Appropriate communication is polite and conforms to norms. Creating shared meaning is often a prerequisite for competent communication to occur. Think again about the boxes in Figure 1.2. Both successful communication and accidental communication are high in shared meaning because the receiver interpreted the message correctly. In some cases, accidental communication may inadvertently help people reach goals. For example, if Sydney is nervous about meeting her new dormmates, she might have the goal of looking and feeling less nervous. Her new dormmates could pick up on her nervousness and try to make her feel more at home. As a result of their friendly interaction, Sydney then feels more comfortable.

CONCLUSION

Communication will help Sydney flourish in her new environment. Sydney will likely use a wide variety of communication channels to make new friends and maintain contact with her old ones. Face-to-face communication may be the typical form of communication with her dormmates, whereas snapping and texting may be common with other students she meets on campus as well as with old friends she does not want to lose touch with. For Sydney to maximize her communication competence in her new environment, she needs knowledge of the rules and rituals within her dormitory and her university. Having skills related to encoding, decoding, conversational management, conversational interest, empathy, and adaptability are all key ingredients in the recipe for Sydney to be a competent communicator.

CHAPTER 1 STUDY GUIDE

KEY TERMS

Identify and explain the meaning of each of the following key terms.

accidental communication	language
adaptors	mediated communication
affect displays	messages
affective empathy	mindreading
attempted communication	miscommunication
channel	misinterpretation
chronemics	multimodal
code	noise
cognitive empathy	nonverbal communication
communication competence	personal idioms
communicators	personal space bubble
connotative meaning	personal zone
constitutive rules	phonological rules
decoding	pragmatics
denotative meaning	proxemics
emblems	public zone
encoding	regulators
exchange	relational goals
feedback	self-presentational goals
field of experience	semantics
haptics	slang
illustrators	social zone
instrumental goals	successful communication
interpersonal communication	syntax
intimate zone	transactional model of communication
intrapersonal communication	unattended behavior
kinesics	vocalics

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think of all the ways you communicate on a daily basis, including face-to-face and on your phone. How does the channel of communication (for example, texting vs. face-to-face vs. social media) influence the communication process? Are certain channels better for some types of communication than others? Explain.
2. How powerful do you think nonverbal communication is in everyday interaction? Think about the interactions you have had over the past 24 hours. How did you use nonverbal communication in both your face-to-face and phone interactions?
3. Think about the forms of communication and behavior in Figure 1.2. Give an example of each of these. How often do you think communication would be classified as “successful”

according to this figure? What are some common causes of miscommunication and misinterpretation?

4. Imagine that a friend finds out you are taking a communication class and wants some tips for how to be a better communicator. What would you tell your friend? Be specific.

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