Interpersonal communication connects people. This unit introduces us to the fascinating nature of that connection. We will look at why interpersonal communication is important, the nature of interpersonal communication, the elements in the interpersonal communication process and the basic principles of interpersonal communication.

Chapter Outline

I. Why study interpersonal communication?

A. Personal and social success – depend largely on our effectiveness as communicators.
   1. Close friendships and romantic relationships are made, maintained and sometimes destroyed through interpersonal interactions.
   2. Family relationships also depend on effective interpersonal communication.
   3. A survey of 1001 people over 18 showed that 53 percent felt that a lack of effective communication was the major cause of marriage failure while only 38 percent cited money and 14 percent cited in-law interference as factors.
   4. Interpersonal communication is also important when interacting with neighbors, acquaintances and people you meet every day.

B. Professional success – is related to interpersonal communication when we interview, intern and attend and lead meetings.
   1. A 2004 study reported that 89 percent of recruiters put "communication and interpersonal skills" at the top of their lists.
   2. Interpersonal skills offer a key advantage for finance professionals as well as all professions.
   3. Interpersonal skills have a role in preventing workplace violence and in improving doctor/patient relationships and preventing medical mishaps.
   4. In one survey, 89 percent of employers felt colleges should place more emphasis on communicating orally and in writing and 84 percent identified communication skills as the element that would most prepare students for success.
   5. Understanding the theory and research in interpersonal communication will help you master the skills of interpersonal communication.
      a. The more skills you have, the more choices for communicating you will have in different situations.
b. More knowledge and more choices will lead to better interpersonal effectiveness.

II. The nature of interpersonal communication.

A. It can be defined as the verbal and nonverbal interaction between two (or sometimes more than two) interdependent people.

B. Interdependent individuals - Interpersonal communication takes place between people who are connected.

1. This could be a father and son, two lovers, two friends, etc…

2. Although mainly dyadic (involving two people), interpersonal communication can also be extended to small intimate groups such as family.

3. Facebook may have changed the definition of interpersonal communication with messaging and collective chats.

4. Individuals in interpersonal communication are interdependent, meaning that they have an impact on one another.

C. Inherently relational - interpersonal communication takes place in a relationship, it impacts the relationship and defines the relationship.

1. The way you communicate is influenced by the type of relationship you have with the other person.

2. You communicate differently with your instructor than you do your best friend.

3. You interact on Facebook and Twitter in ways different than in face-to-face communication.

4. The way you communicate will influence your relationships in both positive and negative ways.

D. Exits on a continuum (Figure 1:1) - from relatively impersonal to highly personal.

1. Role vs. personal information - in the role impersonal example, the people respond to each other according to the roles they play.

2. Societal vs. personal rules - the server and the customer conform to the rules of society while the father and son interact based on personally established rules.
3. Social vs. personal messages - messages exchanged in the server/customer example are inherently impersonal while messages exchanged in the father/son example are highly personal, with more disclosure and emotion.

E. Involves verbal and nonverbal messages - we send and receive interpersonal messages through our facial expressions, eyes, posture, and other nonverbal features as well as through online text, photos and videos.

   1. Silence counts as nonverbal communication.
   2. It is a myth that nonverbal makes up 90 percent of messages.
   3. In some situations, verbal conveys more information.
   4. It's important to focus on how they work together.

F. Takes place in varied forms - both face-to-face and online.

   1. Synchronous forms of communication allow you to communicate in real time such as face-to-face communication.
   2. Asynchronous forms do not take place in real time such as responding to messages left on Facebook.

G. Involves choices - interpersonal messages are a result of the choices we make.

   1. 1. You are presented with choice points, times you have to make a choice as to who to communicate with, what you say, how to phrase what you say, etc…
   2. This text is aimed to help you with these choices.

III. Elements of Interpersonal Communication (Figure1.2)

   A. Source-Receiver – Each person performs both source functions and receiver functions.

      1. Each person’s communication is unique due to his/her values, attitudes, experiences, etc…
      2. Interpersonal competence is your ability to communicate effectively and involves knowing how to adjust your communication to the context and the person with whom you are interacting.
      3. We learn competence by observing others, instruction and trial and error.
      4. There’s a positive relationship between interpersonal competence and success in college and job satisfaction as well as maintaining meaningful relationships.
B. Encoding-Decoding

1. Encoding refers to the act of producing messages.
2. Decoding refers to the act of understanding messages.
3. They are performed in combination by each participant.

C. Messages – Signals that serve as stimuli for a receiver and are received by one of our senses. They can be verbal and nonverbal, intentional and unintentional. Even the photo and background theme you choose for your Twitter page communicates something about you.

1. Metamessages are messages about other messages.
2. Feedback messages -- messages sent back to the speaker concerning reactions to what is communicated. It is important to discern feedback and adjust to it.
3. Feedforward messages – Information you provide before sending your primary messages. It reveals something about the message to come.

D. Channel – the medium through which messages pass.

1. Often we use more than one channel at a time. In online communication, we might send audio and video files in the same message.
2. Channels are considered the means of communication (face-to-face contact, telephone, email, Facebook, film, radio, etc…)
3. Different channels impose different restrictions on your message construction.
4. Sometimes the channel is physiologically damaged.

E. Noise – anything that distorts a message.

1. There are four kinds:
   a. Physical – Interference external to speaker and listener
   b. Physiological – Physical barriers within the speaker or listener
   c. Psychological – Cognitive or emotional interference
   d. Semantic – Problems with the speaker and listener assigning different meanings to symbols
2. Signal-to-noise ratio - what we find useful is called signal, what we find useless is called noise.
3. All communications contain noise.

F. Context – the environment that influences the form and content of messages.

1. Physical dimension – tangible environment in which communication occurs

2. Temporal dimension – where a message fits into the time of day, moment in history, or sequence of communication events

3. Social-psychological dimension – includes norms of a society or group as well as status relationships among the participants.

4. Cultural dimension - refers to the cultural beliefs and customs of people communicating. You lose more information in intercultural situations.

G. Ethics – the moral dimension of communication

1. Communication choices should be guided by ethics.

2. Some ethical principles are universal such as respect, telling the truth, respecting others and not harming the innocent.

3. An objective view of ethics argues that morality is absolute while a subjective view says it is relative to the culture’s values, beliefs and the circumstances.

IV. Principles of Interpersonal Communication

A. Interpersonal communication is a transactional process.

1. Interpersonal communication is a process – It is an ever-changing, circular process.

2. Elements are interdependent -- If one element changes, the others must alter in response.

B. Interpersonal communication is purposeful - to learn, to relate, to influence, to play and to help.

1. To learn - better understand the world and yourself.

2. To relate - communicate friendship and love.

3. To influence – a good deal of our time is spent in interpersonal persuasion.
   a. Some argue that all communication is persuasive.
   b. Social media sites influence us in both direct and indirect ways.
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4. To play – provides balance and gives your mind a break and is important in both face-to-face communication and online.

5. To help - offering guidance through interpersonal interaction.

C. Interpersonal communication is ambiguous – messages can have more than one meaning.
   1. Some degree of ambiguity exists in all interpersonal communication.
   2. It is important not to jump to hasty conclusions because of this ambiguity.
   3. All relationships contain uncertainty.
   4. Improving interpersonal skills can reduce ambiguity.

D. Interpersonal relationships may be symmetrical or complementary.
   1. In a symmetrical relationship, the two individuals mirror each other’s behavior.
   2. In a complementary relationship, the two individuals engage in different behaviors.

E. Interpersonal communication refers to content and relationship.
   1. Content – Messages can refer to the real world.
   2. Relationship – Messages can refer to the relationship between the people communicating.
   3. Problems arise when we fail to recognize the difference between the content and relational dimensions of a message.
   4. Men tend to focus more on content while women focus on relational.
   5. Arguments on the content level are easier to resolve than the relational dimension.

F. Interpersonal communication is a series of punctuated events.
   1. Communicators segment this continuous stream of communication into smaller pieces.
   2. The tendency to divide communication into sequences of stimuli and responses is called punctuation.
   3. Understanding how someone punctuates is essential to understanding and empathy.

G. Interpersonal communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.
   1. Inevitability – It’s impossible to avoid communicating.
2. Irreversibility – You can't take a message back
   a. Electronic messages are impossible to destroy.
   b. They can easily be made public.
   c. They can be accessed by others and used against you.

3. Unrepeatability – You can never repeat exactly a specific message.

Applications and Exercises

Models of Interpersonal Communication

The model presented in this chapter is only one possible representation of how interpersonal communication takes place. And, because it was introduced to explain certain foundation concepts, it was simplified to focus on two people in conversation. Either alone or in groups, construct your own diagrammatic model of the essential elements and processes involved in any one of the following interpersonal situations. Your model’s primary function should be to describe what elements are involved and what processes operate in the specific situation chosen. You may find it useful to define the situation in more specific terms before you begin constructing your model.

1. Sitting silently on the bus while trying to avoid talking with the person seated next to you.
2. Asking for a date on the phone to someone you’ve only communicated with on the net.
3. Meeting a new student in class.
4. Participating in a small work group to decide how to reduce operating costs.
5. Talking with someone who speaks a different language (which you don’t know and who does not know your language) and comes from a culture very different from your own.
6. Arguing with a best friend.
7. Calling someone to try to get him or her to sign up with your telephone service.
8. Talking while eating dinner with your family.

How adequately does your model explain the process of interpersonal communication? Would it help someone new to the field to get a clear picture of what interpersonal communication is and how it operates? On the basis of this model, how might you revise the model presented in this Chapter?

How Would You Give Feedback?

How would you give feedback (positive or negative? person-focused or message focused? immediate or delayed? low monitoring or high monitoring? supportive or critical?) in these varied situations? Write one or two sentences of feedback for each of these situations:

- A friend—who you like but don’t have romantic feelings for—asks you for a date.
- Your instructor asks you to evaluate the course.
- An interviewer asks if you want a credit card.
- A homeless person smiles at you on the street.
- A colleague at work tells a homophobic joke.
How Would You Give Feedforward?
For each of the following situations you feel there is a need to preface your remarks with some kind of Feedforward—some kind of prefatory comments before stating your main or primary message. How do you preface the conversation for each of these situations?

- You see an attractive person in one of your classes and would like to get to know the person a bit more with the possible objective of a date.
- You just saw the posted grades for the mid-term and your close friend failed while you did extremely well. In the cafeteria you meet your friend who asks, How’d I do on the mid-term?
- You have a reputation for proposing outlandish ideas to interject humor into otherwise formal and boring discussions. This time, however, you want to offer a proposal that you fear will at first seem to be one of your standard outlandish and humorous proposals but is actually an idea that you think could work and you want to assure your group members that this is an idea worthy of their serious consideration.
- Your friend is gay and has been active in the Gay Rights Movement on campus and you want to ask his advice on a paper you’re doing in your sociology class on marriage. Specifically, you want to know how a gay male, particularly one who is a dedicated activist, views the topic of marriage.

Ethics in Interpersonal Communication
Here are a few communication situations that raise ethical issues. Consider each of these five questions that others might ask of you. For each question there are extenuating circumstances that may militate against your responding fully or even truthfully. Consider each question and the mitigating circumstances (these are noted under the Thoughts you’re thinking as you consider your possible answer). How do you respond?

Question [A friend asks your opinion] How do I look?
Thought You look terrible but I don’t want to hurt your feelings.

Question [A romantic partner asks] Do you love me?
Thought You don’t want to commit yourself but you don’t want to end the relationship either. You want to allow the relationship to progress further before making any commitment.

Question [An interviewer asks] You seem a bit old for this type of job. How old are you?
Thought I am old for this job but I need it anyway. I don’t want to turn the interviewer off because I really need this job. Yet, I don’t want to reveal my age either.

Question [A parent asks] Did my son (15 years old) tell you he was contemplating suicide? OR Is my daughter (22 years old) taking drugs?
Thought Yes, but I promised I wouldn’t tell anyone.
Question  [A potential romantic partner asks] What’s your HIV status?  
Thought  I’ve never been tested, but now is not the time to talk about this. I'll practice safe-sex so as not to endanger my partner.

What ethical principles did you use in making your decisions? Assume that you asked the question, what response would you prefer? Would your questions and the expected answers differ if you were communicating by computer, say with e-mail or in a chat room? Are your preferred responses, the same responses as you would give? If there are discrepancies, how do you account for them?

**How Can You Respond To Contradictory Messages?**

Compose responses to each of these statements that, let’s assume, seem contradictory or that somehow don’t ring true on the basis of what you know about the person.

- Even if I do fail the course, so what? I don’t need it for graduation.
- I called three people. They all have something to do on Saturday night. I guess I’ll just curl up with a good book or a good movie. It’ll be better than a lousy date anyway.
- My parents are getting divorced after twenty years of marriage. My mother and father are both dating other people now so everything is going okay.
- My youngest child is going to need special treatments if he’s going to walk again. The doctors are going to decide today on what kind of treatment. But all will end well in this, the best of all possible worlds.

**I’d Prefer to Be**

This exercise should enable you to get to know each other better and at the same time get to know yourself better. It’s a useful exercise for getting strangers to talk about themselves and then to talk about their talk. It is best plays in groups of 5 or 6 members.

First, each group member should rank each of the three traits in the 15 groupings listed, using 1 for the most preferred and 3 for the least preferred. After the traits are ranked by each person, discuss your rankings with other group members.

Any member may refuse to reveal his or her rankings for any category by saying “I pass.” The group is not permitted to question the reasons for any member’s passing. When a member reveals rankings for a category, the group members may ask questions relevant to that category. These questions may be asked after any individual member’s response or may be reserved until all members have given their rankings for a particular category.

After all categories have been discussed or after a certain time limit has been reached, consider the following questions:

- How would you rate this experience in terms of enjoyment? In terms of the openness of
group members? Are these related?

- How supportive or accepting was the group of the individual choices of members? Were some choices more acceptable than others?
- Did the gender or culture of the group members influence the choices made? The openness of the discussion?
- What one principle of communication would you draw from this experience?
“I’d Prefer to Be”

1. ___ intelligent
   ___ wealthy
   ___ physically attractive
2. ___ a movie star
   ___ a senator
   ___ a successful businessperson
3. ___ blind
   ___ deaf
   ___ mute
4. ___ on an average date
   ___ reading an average book
   ___ watching average television
5. ___ loved
   ___ feared
   ___ respected
6. ___ bisexual
   ___ heterosexual
   ___ homosexual
7. ___ applying for a job by letter
   ___ applying by face-to-face interview
   ___ applying by telephone interview
8. ___ adventurous
   ___ scientific
   ___ creative
9. ___ successful in social life
   ___ successful in family life
   ___ successful in business life
10. ___ a traitor to my friend
    ___ a traitor to my country
     ___ a traitor to myself
11. ___ angry
    ___ guilty
    ___ fearful
12. ___ an introvert
    ___ an extrovert
    ___ an ambivert
13. ___ the loved
    ___ the lover
    ___ the good friend
14. ___ a leader
    ___ a follower
    ___ a loner
15. ___ more open, more disclosive
    ___ more flexible, more willing to try new things
    ___ more supportive, more giving of myself
Applying the Principles
In introducing these principles, it was noted that they would provide insight into a number of practical issues. How would you use the principles to describe what is happening in each of the following situations? These scenarios are, of course, extremely brief and are written only as aids to stimulate you to think more concretely about the principles. Note too that the objective is not to select the one correct principle (each scenario can probably be described by reference to several principles) but to make use of an opportunity to think about the principles in reference to specific situations.

1. A couple, together for 20 years, argues constantly about the seemingly most insignificant things—who takes the dog out, who does the shopping, who decides where to go to dinner, and so on. It has gotten to the point where they rarely have a day without argument and both are seriously considering a separation.

2. Pat and Chris are a couple who hurt each other regularly. When one makes a negative comment, the other responds with an even more negative comment which is followed by a still more negative one, and so on. This frequently results in extremely serious conflicts. On the hand, when things are good, they are very good.

3. In the heat of a big argument, Harry said he didn’t want to see Peggy’s family ever again. “They don’t like me, and I don’t like them,” he said. Peggy reciprocated and said she felt the same way about his family. Now, weeks later, there remains a great deal of tension between them, especially when they find themselves with one or both families.

4. Grace and Mark are engaged to be married and are currently new executives at a large advertising agency. Recently, Grace made a presentation, which was not received positively by the other members of the team. Grace feels that Tom—in not defending her proposal—created a negative attitude and actually encouraged others to reject her ideas. Tom says that he felt he could not defend her proposal because others in the room would have believed his defense was motivated by their relationship and not by his positive evaluation of her proposal. He concluded it was best to say nothing.

5. Margo has just taken over as vice president in charge of sales for a manufacturing company. Margo is extremely organized and refuses to waste time on nonessentials. In her staff meetings, she is business only. Several top sales representatives have requested to be assigned to other VPs. Their reason: they feel she works them too hard and doesn’t care about them as people.

Analyzing an Interaction
The principles of human communication discussed in Chapter 1 should prove useful in analyzing any communication interaction. To help illustrate these principles and to provide some practice in applying them to a real-life situation, the following interaction is presented. Read it carefully, and analyze each of the principles of communication identified following the interaction.
As an alternative to analyzing this interaction, the entire class may watch a situation comedy show, television drama, or film and explore the communication axioms in these presentations. The questions used in this exercise should prove useful in formulating parallel questions for the television program or film.

Another way of approaching this topic is for all students to watch the same television programs for an entire evening, with groups of students focusing on the operation of different axioms. Thus, one group would focus on examples and illustrations of the impossibility of not communicating, another group would focus on the content and relationship dimensions of messages, and so on. Each group can then report its findings and insights to the entire class.

An Interpersonal Transaction
MARGARET: mother, housewife, junior high school history teacher; 41 years old 
FRED: father, gas station attendant; 46 years old 
DIANE: daughter, receptionist in an art gallery; 22 years old 
STEPHEN: son, college freshman; 18 years old 

Margaret is in the kitchen finishing preparing dinner—lamb chops, Fred’s favorite, though she does not much care for them. Diane is going through some CDs. Stephen is reading one of his textbooks. Fred comes in from work and throws his jacket over the couch; it falls to the floor.

FRED: [Bored but angry, looking at Stephen] What did you do with the car last night? It stunk like hell. And you left all your damn school papers all over the back seat.
STEPHEN: [As if expecting the angry remarks] What did I do now?
FRED: You stunk up the car with your damn pot or whatever you kids smoke, and you left the car looking like hell. Can’t you hear?
[Stephen says nothing; goes back to looking at his book but without really reading.]
MARGARET: Dinner’s almost ready. Come on. Wash up and sit down.

[At dinner]
DIANE: Mom, I’m going to go to the shore for the weekend with some friends from work.
MARGARET: OK. When will you be leaving?
DIANE: Friday afternoon, right after work.
FRED: Like hell you’re going. No more going to the shore with that group.
MARGARET: Fred, they’re nice people. Why shouldn’t she go?
FRED: Because I said so, OK? Finished. Closed.
DIANE: [Mumbling] I’m 22 years old and he gives me problems. You make me feel like a kid, like some stupid little kid.
FRED: Get married and then you can tell your husband what to do.
DIANE: I wish I could.
STEPHEN: But nobody’ll ask her.
MARGARET: Why should she get married? She’s got a good life—good job, nice friends, good home. Listen, I was talking with Elizabeth and Cara this morning, and they both feel they’ve just wasted their lives. They raised a family and what have they got? They got nothing. [To Diane] And don’t think sex is so great either; it isn’t, believe me.
FRED: Well, they’re idiots.
MARGARET: [Snidely] They’re idiots? Yeah, I guess they are.
DIANE: Joanne’s getting married.
MARGARET: Who’s Joanne?
STEPHEN: That creature who lives with that guy Michael.
FRED: Watch your mouth, wiseass. Don’t be disrespectful to your mother or I’ll teach you how to act right.
MARGARET: Well, how do you like the dinner?
[Prolonged silence]
DIANE: Do you think I should be in the wedding party if Joanne asks me? I think she will; we always said we’d be in each other’s wedding.
MARGARET: Sure, why not. It’ll be nice.
FRED: I’m not going to no wedding, no matter who’s in it.
STEPHEN: Me neither.
DIANE: I hope you’ll both feel that way when I get married.
STEPHEN: By then I’ll be too old to remember I got a sister.
MARGARET: How’s school, Stephen?
STEPHEN: I hate it. It’s so big. Nobody knows anyone. You sit in these big lecture halls and listen to some creep talk. I really feel lonely and isolated, like nobody knows I’m alive.
FRED: Listen to that college-talk garbage. Get yourself a woman and you won’t feel lonely, instead of hanging out with those pothead faggots.
[Diane looks to Margaret, giving a sigh as if to say, “Here we go again.”]
MARGARET: [To Diane, in whisper] I know.
DIANE: Mom? Do you think I’m getting fat?
STEPHEN: Yes.
FRED: Just don’t get fat in the stomach or you’ll get thrown out of here.
MARGARET: No, I don’t notice it.
DIANE: Well, I just thought I might be.
STEPHEN: [Pushing his plate away] I’m finished; I’m going out.
FRED: Sit down and finish your damn supper. You think I work all day for you to throw the food away? You wanna go smoke your dope?
STEPHEN: No. I just want to get away from you—forever.
MARGARET: You mean we both work all day; it’s just that I earn a lot more than you do.
FRED: No, I mean I work and you baby-sit.
MARGARET: Teaching junior high school history isn’t baby-sitting.
FRED: What the hell is it then? You don’t teach them anything.
MARGARET: [To Diane] You see? You’re better off single. I should’ve stayed single. Instead ... Oh, well. I was young and stupid. It was my own fault for getting involved with a loser. Just don’t you make the same mistake.

Here are some questions, built around the principles discussed in Chapter 1, to guide your analysis.
1. Interpersonal communication is a transactional process.
   - How is the process nature of communication illustrated in this interaction? For example, why is it impossible to identify specific beginnings and specific endings for any of the varied interactions? Are there instances in which individual characters attempt to deny the process nature of interpersonal interaction?
   - Can you illustrate how the messages of the different characters are interdependent?

2. Interpersonal communication is ambiguous.
   - Can you identify any ambiguities that might cause communication problems?
   - How would you describe the ambiguity present in the various relationships represented in this family?

3. Interpersonal communication may be symmetrical or complementary.
   - What type of relationship do you suppose exists between Fred and Margaret? Between Fred and Diane? Between Fred and Stephen? Between Diane and Stephen? Between Margaret and Stephen?
   - Can any instances of inappropriate complementarity be found? Inappropriate symmetry? What problems might these cause this particular family?

4. Communication involves both content and relationship dimensions.
   - How does each of the characters deal with the self-definitions of the other characters? For example, how does Fred deal with the self-definition of Margaret? How does Margaret deal with the self-definition of Fred?
   - Are any problems caused by failure to recognize the distinction between the content and the relationship levels of communication?
   - Select one topic of conversation and identify both the content and the relationship messages communicated.

5. Interpersonal communication is a series of punctuated events.
   - Select any two characters and indicate how they differ in their punctuation of any specific sequence of events. Do the characters realize that they are each punctuating differently?
   - What problems might a failure to recognize the arbitrary nature of punctuation create?

6. Interpersonal communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.
   - Do the characters communicate significant messages, even though they may attempt not to communicate? For example, in what ways do the characters communicate simply by their physical presence or by the role they occupy in the family? Do the characters make not to communicate? Why do these attempts fail?
   - Are any messages being communicated that you think the characters will later wish they had not communicated? Why do you think so? Do any of the characters try to reverse the communication process—that is, to “uncommunicate”?
   - What evidence can you offer to illustrate that communication is unrepeatable?
In-Class Activities

Small-Group Discussions

These discussions are designed to enable each student in the class to critically encounter chapter concepts in light of his own experience and beliefs. Divide the class into small groups of about four to five people each, and assign each group one of the following questions. (If you wish, they can pick topics to pursue.) Give them about 10 to 15 minutes to discuss each question. Then, have one student from each group stand to report her group’s proceedings. Below are some suggested topics:

- Review the reasons to study interpersonal communication. What areas of your life do you hope to improve by taking this class?
- Think of an embarrassing, happy, sad, or funny incident in your life, and discuss how the principles gave that particular quality to the incident.
- Think of a celebrity, role model, or important person in your life, and describe what specifically he or she does to communicate competently.
- How can social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook be used in both positive and negative ways to enhance as well as harm interpersonal relationships?
- Describe examples of noise in a situation you encountered today. What are ways to alleviate the noise that you mentioned in your examples?
- Why does the channel matter in interpersonal communication? Discuss a time when you felt the wrong channel was used and what happened as a result.
- How can interpersonal communication be ambiguous? Discuss a time when a miscommunication resulted as a result of this principle.

Instant Message

This exercise will demonstrate that meanings depend on the source of the message(s). Instructors can discuss how communication affects the receiver of the message and how the source generates meaning. The following terms will have very different meanings, depending on who says them and how the receiver decodes them.

1. Justice
2. Love
3. Water
4. Food
5. Television
6. Beauty
7. America
8. War
9. Peace
10. Dog

Principles in Action

This exercise is designed to help students recognize the five purposes of interpersonal communication. Allow 5 students to draw a purpose of interpersonal communication (learn, relate, influence, play, help) out of a bag or hat. As they act out the purpose they have drawn, the rest of the class should try to guess what they are trying to convey.
Help Wanted

Have students bring in advertisements for jobs, preferably in their chosen career paths. Arrange them into groups of 4-5 and have them compile a list of desired interpersonal communication skills listed within the advertisements. Have one person from each group report to the class with their findings.

Video Recommendations

- **Cast Away** – A FedEx engineer is stranded on a desert island. So great is his need for someone to talk to, he turns a volleyball into a companion named Wilson.
- **Fight Club** – This film provides background for a discussion of how context and culture affect a source-receiver – and serves as an example for many chapter concepts.
- **Meet the Parents** – This film dramatizes several of the principles of interpersonal communication, especially irreversibility! It should also serve as fodder for a discussion on competency.
- **Pirates of the Caribbean** – is an enjoyable illustration of the universals of interpersonal communication.
- **The Sixth Sense** – This movie should be an interesting vehicle through which students can explore how communicators are simultaneously senders and receivers. Individual scenes provide insight into the dyadic or relational definition of interpersonal communication.

Journal Assignments

- You are just beginning your formal study of interpersonal communication. At this point, what communication behaviors do you consider ethical or unethical?
- Honestly, what do you do competently regarding interpersonal communication? What would you like to improve? How can you do so?
- Have you ever experienced problems decoding online messages such as on Facebook or over email? What can you do to reduce the ambiguity of online messages?
- There are five basic reasons why humans engage in interpersonal communication. Identify five important relationships in your life, and discuss why you conduct them. Give examples where appropriate.
- Has there ever been a time that you wished that interpersonal communication was not irreversible? What happened and what did you learn from the experience?
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1.0.1–1.1 Multiple Choice

1.0.1.1. Using jargon or complex terms can contribute to ________________ noise.
   a. psychological
   b. physical
   c. physiological
   d. semantic

   Difficulty: 1
   Page-Reference: 14
   Skill: Comprehension
   Answer: d. semantic

1.0.1.2. ________________ is the verbal and nonverbal communication that takes place between two interdependent people.
   a. Interpersonal communication
   b. Self-disclosure
   c. Punctuation
   d. Intrapersonal communication

   Difficulty: 1
   Page-Reference: 5
   Skill: Knowledge
   Answer: a. Interpersonal communication

1.0.1.3. According to Chapter 1, effective interpersonal communication can
   a. help prevent workplace violence.
   b. reduce medical mistakes.
   c. improve doctor–patient relationships.
   d. do a, b, and c.

   Difficulty: 2
   Page-Reference: 4
   Skill: Comprehension
   Answer: d. do a, b, and c.

1.0.1.4. Which of the following characteristics does NOT belong to interpersonal communication?
   a. responding to each other as roles instead of individuals
   b. interaction based on personally established rules
   c. the exchange of highly personal information
   d. reacting to each other based on personal information

   Difficulty: 2
   Page-Reference: 6–7
   Skill: Comprehension
   Answer: d. reacting to each other based on personal information
1.0.1.5. **Which of the following is NOT true in relation to interpersonal communication?**

a. Interpersonal communication involves both verbal and nonverbal messages.
b. Silence sends interpersonal messages.
c. Nonverbal communication counts for 90 percent of communication meaning.
d. In some situations, verbal signals communicate more meaning than nonverbal signals.

**Difficulty:** 3  
**Page-Reference:** 7  
**Skill:** Comprehension  
**Answer:** c. Nonverbal communication counts for 90 percent of communication meaning.

1.0.1.6. **Which of the following is NOT an example of interpersonal communication?**

a. chatting with your friend on Facebook  
b. a supervisor teaching an employee  
c. a family of four talking over dinner  
d. all of the above are examples

**Difficulty:** 2  
**Page-Reference:** 5  
**Skill:** Application  
**Answer:** d. all of the above are examples

1.0.1.7. **Which of the following examples of communication falls on the most impersonal side of the continuum?**

a. two neighbors talking  
b. a mother and daughter talking  
c. a bank teller and customer talking  
d. a supervisor and employee talking

**Difficulty:** 2  
**Page-Reference:** 6  
**Skill:** Application  
**Answer:** c. a bank teller and customer talking

1.0.1.8. ____________ refers to the act of producing messages, whereas ____________ is the act of understanding them.

a. Encoding, decoding  
b. Source, receiver  
c. Person-focused, message-focused  
d. Feedforward, feedback

**Difficulty:** 2  
**Page-Reference:** 12  
**Skill:** Comprehension  
**Answer:** a. Encoding, decoding
Chapter One: Foundations of Interpersonal Communication

1.0.1.9. In a _____________________ relationship, the two individuals mirror each other.
   a. complementary  
   b. symmetrical  
   c. dyadic  
   d. convergent

   Difficulty: 1  
   Page-Reference: 21  
   Skill: Knowledge  
   Answer: b. symmetrical

1.0.1.10. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of complementary relationships?
   a. Two individuals engage in different behaviors.  
   b. The behavior of one serves as the stimulus for the other’s complementary behavior.  
   c. Interactions are based on personally established rules.  
   d. The people occupy different positions.

   Difficulty: 2  
   Page-Reference: 22  
   Skill: Comprehension  
   Answer: c. Interactions are based on personally established rules.

1.0.1.11. All of the following are true of punctuation EXCEPT that
   a. you divide communication transactions into stimuli and responses.  
   b. it isn’t an important skill in conflict management.  
   c. it’s a crucial step in interpersonal understanding.  
   d. it’s done to benefit each person’s self-image.

   Difficulty: 2  
   Page-Reference: 23–24  
   Skill: Comprehension  
   Answer: b. it isn’t an important skill in conflict management.

1.0.1.12. Which of the following messages contain ambiguity?
   a. “I’ll see you later.”  
   b. “Let’s just be friends.”  
   c. “The restaurant is not expensive.”  
   d. All of the above contain ambiguity.

   Difficulty: 3  
   Page-Reference: 20–21  
   Skill: Application  
   Answer: d. All of the above contain ambiguity.
1.0.1.13.  Which of the following is NOT an example of communication context?
   a. Ryan and Joann are from different cultural backgrounds.
   b. Bob laughed at the joke.
   c. Angela’s meeting took place in the boardroom.
   d. Susannah’s interview was at 8:00 on a Monday morning.

   Difficulty: 3  
   Page-Reference: 16  
   Skill: Application  
   Answer: b. Bob laughed at the joke.

1.0.1.14.  Which of the following is an example of feedback?
   a. Yawning when an instructor is lecturing
   b. Deciding how to phrase a question
   c. Trying to understand a nonverbal gesture
   d. Being confused by an unfamiliar word in a lecture

   Difficulty: 2  
   Page-Reference: 12–13  
   Skill: Application  
   Answer: a. Yawning when an instructor is lecturing

1.0.1.15.  All of the following are true about the transactional process of interpersonal communication EXCEPT
   a. It’s always changing.
   b. Each person acts as a speaker and a listener.
   c. The elements are interdependent.
   d. It’s a linear process.

   Difficulty: 2  
   Page-Reference: 17–19  
   Skill: Comprehension  
   Answer: d. It’s a linear process.

1.0.1.16.  The principle of __________________ states that messages often have more than one meaning.
   a. Punctuation
   b. Ambiguity
   c. Unrepeatability
   d. Irreversibility

   Difficulty: 1  
   Page-Reference: 20–21  
   Skill: Knowledge  
   Answer: b. Ambiguity
Chapter One: Foundations of Interpersonal Communication

1.0.1.17. A ____________ is a well-established system of knowledge about how things work or how things are related that is supported by research findings.
   a. law
   b. theory
   c. principle
   d. belief

   Difficulty: 1
   Page-Reference: 18
   Skill: Knowledge
   Answer: b. theory

1.0.1.18. A state of mental awareness in which you’re conscious of your reasons for thinking or communicating in a particular way is called
   a. mindlessness.
   b. competence.
   c. mindfulness.
   d. feedforward.

   Difficulty: 1
   Page-Reference: 11
   Skill: Knowledge
   Answer: c. mindfulness.

1.0.1.19. Interpersonal competence refers to
   a. signals that serve as stimuli.
   b. your ability to communicate effectively.
   c. your motive in communicating.
   d. feedforward messages.

   Difficulty: 1
   Page-Reference: 10
   Skill: Comprehension
   Answer: b. your ability to communicate effectively.

1.0.1.20. In the term “signal-to-noise ratio” the word “signal” refers to
   a. what we ignore in a communication situation.
   b. what we find useful in a communication situation.
   c. what we classify as noise in a communication situation.
   d. the gatekeeping function of many people in communication situations.

   Difficulty: 2
   Page-Reference: 14
   Skill: Comprehension
   Answer: b. what we find useful in a communication situation.
1.0.1.21. “You never get a second chance to make a first impression” exemplifies the principle of
a. inevitability.
b. irreversibility.
c. unrepeatability.
d. ambiguity.

Difficulty: 2
Page-Reference: 25
Skill: Evaluation
Answer: c. unrepeatability.

1.0.1.22. Which of the following is an example of psychological noise while in class?
a. someone coughing next to you
b. worrying about your grade on a test
c. having hearing loss
d. being confused by the meaning of a word

Difficulty: 2
Page-Reference: 14
Skill: Application
Answer: b. worrying about your grade on a test

1.0.1.23. Which of the following is NOT true in relation to metamessages?
a. They are rarely used in everyday communication.
b. They are messages about other messages.
c. Feedback is a type of metamessage.
d. Feedforward is a type of metamessage.

Difficulty: 3
Page-Reference: 12
Skill: Comprehension
Answer: a. They are rarely used in everyday communication.

1.0.1.24. Which of the following is NOT a purpose of communication, according to Chapter 1?
a. to learn
b. to adjust
c. to play
d. to help

Difficulty: 1
Page-Reference: 19–20
Skill: Knowledge
Answer: b. to adjust
1.0.1.25. Madison had a bad cell phone connection and couldn’t understand the directions her friend was trying to tell her. This is an example of __________ noise.
   a. psychological  
   b. physical  
   c. physiological  
   d. semantic

   Difficulty: 1  
   Page-Reference: 14  
   Skill: Application  
   Answer: b. physical

1.0.1.26. Which of the following is NOT a guideline for communicating with someone with a visual impairment?
   a. face your listener  
   b. use audible turn-taking cues  
   c. avoid terms like “see”, “look”, or “blind”  
   d. don’t assume the person will recognize your voice

   Difficulty: 2  
   Page-Reference: 15  
   Skill: Comprehension  
   Answer: c. avoid terms like “see”, “look” or “blind.”

1.0.1.27. What are two dimensions of context in interpersonal communication?
   a. temporal and social-psychological  
   b. channel and noise  
   c. cultural and gestural-visual  
   d. social-psychological and semantic

   Difficulty: 1  
   Page-Reference: 16  
   Skill: Knowledge  
   Answer: a. temporal and social-psychological

1.0.1.28. The __________ view of ethics argues that what is or is not ethical depends on the culture’s values and beliefs as well as the particular circumstances.
   a. subjective  
   b. objective  
   c. absolute  
   d. cultural

   Difficulty: 1  
   Page-Reference: 17  
   Skill: Knowledge  
   Answer: a. subjective
1.0.1.29. Which of the following is NOT a similarity between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication?
   a. Communication can be synchronous.
   b. A two-way channel is present.
   c. Messages are permanent.
   d. You control the self you want others to see.

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 9  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** c. Messages are permanent.

1.0.1.30. Messages that refer to the “real world” are called __________ messages.
   a. relationship  
   b. objective  
   c. content  
   d. subjective

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 22  
   **Skill:** Knowledge  
   **Answer:** c. content

1.0.1.31. Terrell responded to an e-mail message that was sent to him the day before. This is an example of __________ communication.
   a. convergent  
   b. synchronous  
   c. asynchronous  
   d. automatic

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 8  
   **Skill:** Knowledge  
   **Answer:** c. asynchronous

1.0.1.32. ____________ context refers to the beliefs and customs of the people communicating.
   a. Cultural  
   b. Personal  
   c. Relational  
   d. Social-psychological

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 16  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** a. Cultural
1.0.1.33. **Poking someone on Facebook serves the purpose of to**
   a. play.
   b. learn.
   c. influence.
   d. relate.

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 19  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** d. relate.

1.0.1.34. **Just one of the reasons it’s so terrifying to tell a romantic partner that you love him or her for the first time is because communication is**
   a. a series of punctuated events.
   b. unrepeatable.
   c. irreversible.
   d. inevitable.

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 25  
   **Skill:** Evaluation  
   **Answer:** c. irreversible.

1.0.1.35. **Which of the following is the LEAST ambiguous?**
   a. The sentence, “I’ll be there in a moment.”
   b. The sentence, “I’ll be there in five minutes.”
   c. The phrase “moving pictures.”
   d. When someone from another culture smiles at you.

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 20-21  
   **Skill:** Evaluation  
   **Answer:** b. The sentence, “I’ll be there in five minutes.”

**1.0.2–1.2 True and False**

1.0.2.1. **One study showed that more people felt like a lack of effective communication was more responsible for marriage failure than money and in-law interference.**
   a. true  
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 3  
   **Skill:** Knowledge  
   **Answer:** a. true
1.0.2.2. **Sending messages to your friends over Facebook is NOT an example of interpersonal communication.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 5  
   **Skill:** Application  
   **Answer:** b. false

1.0.2.3. **Interpersonal communication takes place between two independent people.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 5  
   **Skill:** Knowledge  
   **Answer:** b. false

1.0.2.4. **Research shows that men tend to focus on the relationship dimension of a message, whereas women tend to focus on the content dimension.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 23  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** b. false

1.0.2.5. **Interpersonal communication can take place in small, intimate groups such as families.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 5  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** a. true

1.0.2.6. **A father and son will operate on the basis of personally established rules instead of societal rules.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 6–7  
   **Skill:** Application  
   **Answer:** a. true
1.0.2.7. **You can take back a message.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 25  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** b. false

1.0.2.8. **In computer-mediated-communication it is always your turn and you cannot be interrupted.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 9  
   **Skill:** Knowledge  
   **Answer:** a. true

1.0.2.9. **A key element in practicing mindfulness is to pay attention to first impressions.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 11  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** b. false

1.0.2.10. **Competent communicators communicate the same, regardless of situation or listener.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 2  
   **Page-Reference:** 11  
   **Skill:** Comprehension  
   **Answer:** b. false

1.0.2.11. **Feedforward tells the speaker what effect she or he is having on listeners.**
   a. true
   b. false

   **Difficulty:** 1  
   **Page-Reference:** 12  
   **Skill:** Knowledge  
   **Answer:** b. false
1.0.2.12. Interpersonal communication can occur without messages being encoded and decoded.
a. true  
b. false

Difficulty: 1  
Page-Reference: 12  
Skill: Comprehension  
Answer: b. false

1.0.2.13. George is wondering what Bill meant when he said, “This restaurant is not expensive.” This is an example of encoding.
a. true  
b. false

Difficulty: 2  
Page-Reference: 12  
Skill: Application  
Answer: b. false

1.0.2.14. When Arlene is aggressive toward Ben, Ben is aggressive right back. This is an example of a complementary relationship.
a. true  
b. false

Difficulty: 2  
Page-Reference: 21–22  
Skill: Application  
Answer: b. false

1.0.2.15. You are having trouble hearing your professor because people next to you are talking. This is an example of physical noise.
a. true  
b. false

Difficulty: 1  
Page-Reference: 14  
Skill: Knowledge  
Answer: a. true

1.0.2.16. Signals that serve as stimuli are called communication channels.
a. true  
b. false

Difficulty: 1  
Page-Reference: 12  
Skill: Knowledge  
Answer: b. false
1.0.2.17. Every communication act contains an ethical dimension.
a. true
b. false

**Difficulty:** 1  
**Page-Reference:** 16  
**Skill:** Comprehension  
**Answer:** a. true

1.0.2.18. Some degree of ambiguity exists in all interpersonal communication.
a. true
b. false

**Difficulty:** 1  
**Page-Reference:** 20  
**Skill:** Comprehension  
**Answer:** a. true

1.0.2.19. Arguments over the content dimension of a message are easier to resolve than arguments concerning the relationship dimension.
a. true
b. false

**Difficulty:** 1  
**Page-Reference:** 23  
**Skill:** Knowledge  
**Answer:** a. true

1.0.2.20. It is impossible to not communicate.
a. true
b. false

**Difficulty:** 2  
**Page-Reference:** 24–25  
**Skill:** Comprehension  
**Answer:** a. true

1.0.3–1.3 Essay

1.0.3.1. The study of interpersonal communication can benefit a person in social and professional ways. Discuss three specific benefits you hope to gain from this class, based on the information presented in Chapter 1.

**Difficulty:** 2  
**Page-Reference:** 3–4  
**Skill:** Application  
**Answer:** Answers can refer to how interpersonal communication relates to making and maintaining relationships, how it can improve marriages, workplace relationships, and how it is the main element job recruiters are looking for.
1.0.3.2. Discuss what is meant by the sentence, “Interpersonal communication is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.” Discuss how this is true in both face-to-face and online communication.

Difficulty: 3
Page-Reference: 24–26
Skill: Synthesis
Answer: Interpersonal communication will take place even when we don’t plan it. Once we say/do something, it has already been received by another and has made an impact. You cannot duplicate a message because of ever-changing variables. With online communication, there is more of a permanence.

1.0.3.3. Think back to a time when you had a “miscommunication” with someone else. Using the elements of communication, describe the communication that took place and what element(s) led to the breakdown. What could have been changed to prevent the misunderstanding?

Difficulty: 3
Page-Reference: 8–17
Skill: Application
Answer: The answer should include basic elements in the communication process and should clearly describe the element responsible for the problem as well as a strategy for improvement.

1.0.3.4. Interpersonal communication exists along a continuum that ranges from impersonal to highly personal. Using your own contrasting examples, explain the three characteristics that distinguish an impersonal relationship from an interpersonal one.

Difficulty: 3
Page-Reference: 6–7
Skill: Application
Answer: The answers should reflect the three characteristics of role versus personal information, societal versus personal rules, and social versus personal messages. In impersonal relationships, we respond to roles and rules of society, while in interpersonal ones, we respond to others as unique individuals and we follow personally established rules. In interpersonal communication, we exchange little personal information and in interpersonal relationships, we can exchange highly personal information.

1.0.3.5. Using your own experiences as examples, discuss three differences between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication.

Difficulty: 3
Page-Reference: 9
Skill: Application
Answer: Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is transmitted through visual and auditory channels while all senses are involved in face-to-face (FTF). CMC is unlimited while FTC is limited. FTF involves turn-taking and with CMC, it’s always your turn. With FTF, communication is synchronous while in CMC, it is asynchronous. CMC messages are relatively permanent while FTF usually are not unless recorded.