

Chapter 7: Interpersonal Communication

Think about the last interaction you had with a friend. What did you talk about? How did you talk about it? Did any miscommunication occur? If you are like most people, you've probably had positive and negative interactions with your friend throughout the time you've known them. These interactions are referred to as interpersonal communication.

In this chapter you will learn about interpersonal communication. You will learn various elements of interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, as well as speaking and listening. This will provide you with communication skills to engage in positive interpersonal interactions.

7.1 Elements of Interpersonal Communication

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the differences between the sender and receiver of a message.
- Describe the skills associated with effective interpersonal skills.
- Identify several different ways to create better intercultural interactions.

Interpersonal communication focuses on the exchange of messages between two people. Our days are full of interpersonal communication. When you wake up, roll over, and say good morning to your significant other, you've had your first interpersonal interaction of the day. You meet your best friend for coffee before work and discuss the ins and outs of children's lives; you're engaging in interpersonal communication again. At work you collaborate with a coworker on a project; once again, you're engaging in interpersonal communication. You then shoot off an email to your babysitter, reminding him to drop by the house at seven so you and your partner can have a night out. Yep, this is interpersonal communication too. You drop by your doctor's office for your annual physical, and the two of you talk about any health issues, this is also a form of interpersonal communication. You text your child to remind him that he has play practice at 5:00 pm and then needs to come home immediately afterward, you've engaged in interpersonal interaction. Hopefully, you're beginning to realize that our days are filled with many interpersonal interactions.

Interpersonal communication is also referred to as dyadic communication because it involves two people or a dyad. As you read above, the type of dyad can range from intimate partners, to coworkers, to doctor-patient, to friends, to parent-child, and many other dyadic partnerships. Now we can engage in these interactions through verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and mediated communication. When we use words during our interaction to convey specific meaning, then we're engaging in **verbal communication**. **Nonverbal communication**, on the other hand, refers to a range of other factors that can impact how we understand each other. For example, the facial expressions you have. You could be talking to your best friend over coffee about a coworker and "his problems" while rolling your eyes to emphasize how overly dramatic and nonsensical you find your coworker. A great deal of how we interpret the verbal message of someone is based on the nonverbal messages sent at the same time. Lastly, we engage in interpersonal interactions using **mediated communication** through the use of various technologies, like the cellphone, emailing, texts, Facebook posts, Tweets, etc. Your average professional spends a great deal of her day responding to emails that come from one person, so the email exchange is a form of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal Communication can be informal (the checkout line) or formal (lecture classroom) (Figure 7.1) Often, interpersonal communication occurs in face-to-face contexts. It is usually unplanned, spontaneous, and ungrammatical. Think about the conversations that you have with your friends and family. These are mainly interpersonal in nature. It is essential to learn about interpersonal communication because this is the type of communication that you will be doing for most of your life. At most colleges, public speaking is a required course. Yet, most people will not engage in making a public speech for the majority of their life, but they will communicate with one other person daily, which is interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication can help us achieve our personal and professional goals. In this chapter, you will learn the concepts associated with interpersonal communication and how certain variables can help you achieve your goals.



Figure 7.1 Interpersonal communication happens in all of our informal and formal interactions with other people. a) [Checkout line for grocery store](#) – [Sonny Doe](#) – [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)
b) [ADFA Lecture Theatres](#) – [Kurt Barnett](#) – [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Elements of Interpersonal Communication

You may think that communication is easy. However, at moments in your life, communicating with others might be challenging. We can study communication similar to the way we study other systems. There are elements to the communication process that are important to understand. Each interaction that we have will typically include a sender, receiver, message, channel, feedback, and noise. Let's take a closer look at each one.

Sender

Humans encode messages naturally, and we don't often consider this part of the process. However, if you have ever thought about the exact words that you would use to get a later curfew from your parents/guardians and how you might refute any counterpoints,

then you intuitively know that choosing the right words – “encoding” – weighed heavily in your ability to influence your parents/guardians successfully. The language you chose mattered.

The **sender** is the encoder or source of the message. The sender is the person who initiates the communication and decides the intent of the message. The source may decide to send messages to entertain, persuade, inform, include, or escape. Often, the source will create a message based on their feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and past experiences. For instance, if you have feelings of affection towards someone but never communicate those feelings toward that person, they will never know. The sender can withhold or release information.

Receiver

The **receiver** is the individual who decodes the message and tries to understand the source of the message (Figure 7.2). Receivers have to filter messages based on their attitudes, beliefs, opinions, values, history, and prejudices. People will encode messages through their five senses. We have to pay attention to the source of the message to receive the message. If the receiver does not get the message, then communication did not occur. The receiver needs to obtain a message.

Daily, you will receive several messages. Some of these messages are intentional and some of these messages will be unintentional. For instance, a person waving in your direction might be waving to someone behind you, but you accidentally think they are waving at you.

Message

Messages include any type of textual, verbal, and nonverbal aspects of communication, in which individuals give meaning. People send messages intentionally (texting a friend to meet for coffee) or unintentionally (accidentally falling asleep during lectures). Messages can be verbal (saying hello to your parents/guardians), nonverbal (hugging your parents/guardians), or text (words on a computer screen) (Figure 7.2). Essentially, communication is how messages create meaning. Yet, meanings differ among people. For instance, a friend of yours promises to repay you for the money they borrowed, and they say “sorry” for not having any money to give you. You might think they were insincere, but another person might think that it was a genuine apology.



Figure 7.2 This woman is receiving a message on her tablet.
[Woman Holding Tablet](#) – [PourquoiPas](#) – [Pixabay License](#)

Channel

The **channel** is the medium in which we communicate our message and learn about information. With advances in technology, cell phones act as many different channels of communication at once. Consider that smartphones allow us to talk and text. Also, we can receive communication through Facebook, Twitter, Email, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, etc. All of these channels are in addition to our traditional channels, which were face-to-face communication, letter writing, telegram, and the telephone. The addition of these new communication channels has changed our lives forever (Figure 7.3). Think about breaking up a romantic relationship. Would you rather do it via face-to-face or via a text message? Why did you answer the way that you did? The channel can impact the message.

Now, think about how you hear important news. Do you learn about it from the Internet, social media, television, newspaper, or others?

It may seem like a silly thing to talk about channels, but a channel can make an impact on how people receive the message. For instance, a true story tells about NFL athlete, Roy Williams, who proposed marriage to his girlfriend, Brooke Daniels, by sending her the ring through the postal mail service. He sent her a ring and a recorded message asking her to marry him. She declined his proposal and refused to return the ring (NFL.com, 2011). In this case, the channel might have been better if he asked her face-to-face.

Just be mindful of how the channel can affect the way that a receiver reacts and responds to your message. For instance, a handwritten love letter might be more romantic than a typed email. On the other hand, if there was some tragic news about your family, you would probably want someone to call you immediately rather than sending you a letter.

Overall, people have cultural and social expectations that impact which channel they might use to send a message. In a research study focused on channels, college students were asked about the best channels for delivering messages (O’Sullivan, 2000). College students said that they would communicate face-to-face if the message was positive, but use mediated channels if the message was negative.



Figure 7.3 Modern channels of communication utilize various social media platforms. [Social Media Apps](#) – [Pixelkult](#) – [Pixabay License](#).

Feedback

Feedback is the response to the message. If there is no feedback, communication would not be effective. Feedback is important because the sender needs to know if the receiver got the message. Simultaneously, the receiver usually will give the sender some sort of message that they comprehend what has been said. If there is no feedback or if it seems that the receiver did not understand the message, then it is **negative feedback**.

However, if the receiver understood the message, then it is positive feedback. **Positive feedback** does not mean that the receiver entirely agrees with the sender of the message, but rather the message was comprehended. Sometimes feedback is not positive or negative; it can be ambiguous. Examples of ambiguous feedback might include saying “hmmm” or “interesting.” Based on these responses, it is not clear if the receiver of the message understood part or the entire message. It is important to note that feedback doesn’t have to come from other people. Sometimes, we can be critical of our own words when we write them in a text or say them out loud. We might correct our words and change how we communicate based on our internal feedback.

Environment

The context or situation where communication occurs and affects the experience is referred to as the **environment**. We know that the way you communicate in a

professional context might be different than in a personal context. In other words, you probably won't talk to your boss the same way you would talk to your best friend. (An exception might be if your best friend was also your boss). The environment will affect how you communicate. For instance, in a library, you might speak more quietly than normal so that you don't disturb other library patrons. However, in a nightclub or bar, you might speak louder than normal due to the other people talking and loud music. Hence, the environment makes a difference in the way in which you communicate with others.

It is also important to note that environments can be related to fields of experience or a person's past experiences or background. For instance, a town hall meeting that plans to cut primary access to lower socioeconomic residents might be perceived differently by individuals who use these services and those who do not. Environments might overlap, but sometimes they do not. Some people in college have had many family members who attended the same school, but other people do not have any family members that have ever attended college.

Noise

Anything that interferes with the message is called **noise**. Noise keeps the message from being completely understood by the receiver. If noise is absent, then the message would be accurate. However, usually, noise impacts the message in some way. Noise might be physical (e.g., television, cell phone, fan, etc.), or it might be psychological (e.g., thinking about your parents/guardians or missing someone you love). Noise is anything that hinders or distorts the message.

There are four types of noise. The first type is **physical noise**. This is noise that comes from a physical object. For instance, people talking, birds chirping, a jackhammer pounding concrete, a car revving by, are all different types of physical noise.

The second type of noise is **psychological noise**. This is the noise that no one else can see unless you are a mind reader. It is the noise that occurs in a person's mind, such as frustration, anger, happiness, or depression. When you talk to a person, they might act and behave like nothing is wrong, but deep inside their mind, they might be dealing with a lot of other issues or problems. Hence, psychological noise is difficult to see or understand because it happens in the other person's mind.

The third type of noise is **semantic noise**, which deals with language. This could refer to jargon, accents, or language use. Sometimes our messages are not understood by others because of the word choice. For instance, if a person used the word "lit," it would probably depend on the other words accompanying the word "lit" and or the context. To say that "this party is lit" would mean something different compared to "he lit a cigarette." If you were coming from another country, that word might mean something different. Hence, sometimes language-related problems, where the receiver can't understand the message, are referred to as semantic noise.

The fourth and last type of noise is called **physiological noise**. This type of noise is because the receiver's body interferes or hinders the acceptance of a message. For instance, if the person is blind, they are unable to see any written messages that you might send. If the person is deaf, then they are unable to hear any spoken messages. If the person is very hungry, then they might pay more attention to their hunger than any other message.

Interpersonal Communication Skills

In this section, we have learned about different aspects of interpersonal communication. Overall, some skills can make you a better interpersonal communicator. We will discuss each one in more detail below.

Listening Skills

The most important part of communication is not the actual speaking, but the listening part. If you are not a good listener, then you will not be a good communicator. One must engage in mindful listening. **Mindful listening** is when you give careful and thoughtful attention to the messages that you receive. People will often listen mindfully to important messages or to people that matter most. Think about how happy you get when you are talking to someone you really love or maybe how you pay more attention to what a professor says if they tell you it will be on the exam. In each of these scenarios, you are giving the speaker your undivided attention. Most of our listening isn't mindful, but there will be times where it will be important to listen to what others are telling us so that we can fulfill our personal and/or professional goals.

People Skills

People skills are a set of characteristics that will help you interact well with others (Thompson, 2015). These skills are most important in group situations and where cooperation is needed. These skills can also relate to how you handle social situations. They can make a positive impact on career advancement but also in relationship development (Hopkins, 2005). One of the most essential people skills to have is the ability to understand people. Being able to feel empathy or sympathy to another person's situation can go a long way. By putting yourself in other people's shoes and understanding their hardships or differences, you can put things into perspective. It can help you build a stronger and better interpersonal relationship.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotionally intelligent people can label their feelings appropriately and use this information to guide their behavior. EQ is highly associated with the ability to empathize with others. Furthermore, EQ can help people connect interpersonally. Research has demonstrated that people with higher levels of EQ are more likely to succeed in the

workplace and have better mental health. They are often better leaders and effective managers of conflict.

Appropriate Skill Selection

The best interpersonal communicators are the ones who can use the appropriate skill in certain contexts. For instance, if it is a somber event, then they might not laugh. Or if it is a joyful occasion, they might not cry hysterically, unless they are tears of joy. The best politicians can sense the audience and determine what skills would be appropriate for which occasion. We know that humor can be beneficial in certain situations. However, humor can also be inappropriate for certain people. It is essential to know what skill is appropriate to use and when it is necessary to use it.

Communicating Ethically

The last interpersonal skill involves communication ethics. We have seen several people in the business world that have gotten in trouble for not communicating ethically. It is important to be mindful of what you say to others. You do not want people to think you are deceptive or that you are lying to them. Trust is a hard thing to build. Yet, trust can be taken away from you very quickly. It is essential that every time you communicate, you should consider the ethics behind your words. Words matter! So, what does it mean to communicate ethically interpersonally? Thankfully, the National Communication Association has created a general credo for ethical communication listed below (National Communication Association, 2017):

1. We advocate truthfulness, accuracy, honesty, and reason as essential to the integrity of communication.
2. We endorse freedom of expression, diversity of perspective, and tolerance of dissent to achieve the informed and responsible decision making fundamental to a civil society.
3. We strive to understand and respect other communicators before evaluating and responding to their messages.
4. We promote access to communication resources and opportunities as necessary to fulfill human potential and contribute to the well-being of individuals, families, communities, and society.
5. We promote communication climates of caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individual communicators.
6. We condemn communication that degrades individuals and humanity through distortion, intimidation, coercion, and violence, and through the expression of intolerance and hatred.
7. We are committed to the courageous expression of personal convictions in pursuit of fairness and justice.

8. We advocate sharing information, opinions, and feelings when facing significant choices while also respecting privacy and confidentiality.
9. We accept responsibility for the short- and long-term consequences for our own communication and expect the same of others.

Intercultural Communication Skills

One of the latest buzz-words in the business world is “cultural intelligence,” which was initially introduced by Earley and Ang (2003). In the past decade, a wealth of research has been conducted examining the importance of cultural intelligence during interpersonal interactions with people from other cultures. **Cultural intelligence (CQ)** is defined as an “individual’s capability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity” (Ang and VanDyne, 2008a).

Become Culturally Intelligent

In their original study on the topic, Earley and Ang (2003) argued that cultural intelligence is based on four distinct factors: cognitive, motivational, metacognitive, and behavioral dimensions.

Cognitive CQ

First, cognitive CQ involves knowing about different cultures (intercultural knowledge). Many types of knowledge about a culture can be relevant during an intercultural interaction: rules and norms, economic and legal systems, cultural values and beliefs, the importance of art within a society, etc.... All of these different areas of knowledge involve facts that can help you understand people from different cultures. For example, in most of the United States, when you are talking to someone, eye contact is very important. You may have even been told by someone to “look at me when I’m talking to you” if you’ve ever gotten in trouble. However, this isn’t consistent across cultures. Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Native American cultures often view direct eye contact when talking to someone superior as a sign of disrespect. Knowing how eye contact functions across cultures can help you know more about how to interact with people from various cultures (Morrison and Conaway, 2006).

Motivational CQ

Second, we have motivational CQ, or the degree to which an individual desires to engage in intercultural interactions and can easily adapt to different cultural environments. Motivation is the key to effective intercultural interactions. You can have all the knowledge in the world, but if you are not motivated to have successful intercultural interactions, you will not have them.

Metacognitive CQ

Third, metacognitive CQ involves being consciously aware of your intercultural interactions in a manner that helps you have more effective interpersonal experiences with people from differing cultures (intercultural understanding). All of the knowledge about cultural differences in the world will not be beneficial if you cannot use that information to understand and adapt your behavior during an interpersonal interaction with someone from a differing culture. As such, we must always be learning about cultures but also be ready to adjust our knowledge about people and their cultures through our interactions with them.

Behavioral CQ

Lastly, behavioral CQ is the next step following metacognitive CQ, which is behaving in a manner that is consistent with what you know about other cultures (Ang and VanDyne, 2008b). We should never expect others to adjust to us culturally. Instead, culturally intelligent people realize that it's best to adapt our behaviors (verbally and nonverbally) to bridge the gap between people culturally. When we go out of our way to be culturally intelligent, we will encourage others to do so as well.

As you can see, developing cultural intelligence involves a lot of work. As such, it's important to spend time and build your cultural intelligence if you are going to be an effective communicator in today's world.

Engaging Culturally Mindful Interactions

Admittedly, being culturally competent takes a lot of work and a lot of practice. Even if you're not completely culturally competent, you can engage with people from other cultures in a mindful way. We will now examine how the three-component model of mindfulness: attention, intention, and attitude, can aid us in becoming culturally competent (Shapiro and Carlson, 2017).

First, when it comes to engaging with people from other cultures, we need to be fully in the moment and not think about previous interactions with people from a culture or possible future interactions with people from a culture. Instead, it's essential to focus on the person you are interacting with. You also need to be aware of your stereotypes and prejudices that you may have of people from a different culture. Don't try to find evidence to support or negate these stereotypes or prejudices. If you focus on evidence-finding, you're just trying to satisfy your thoughts and feelings and not mindfully engaging with this other person. Also, if you find that your mind is shifting, recognize the shift and allow yourself to re-center on your interaction with the other person.

Second, go into an intercultural interaction knowing your intention. If your goal is to learn more about that person's culture, that's a great intention. However, that may not be the only intention we have when interacting with someone from another culture. For

example, you may be interacting with someone from another culture because you're trying to sell them a product you represent. If your main intention is sales, then be aware of your intention and don't try to deceive yourself into thinking it's something more altruistic.

Lastly, go into all intercultural interactions with the right attitude. Remember, the goal of being mindful is to be open, kind, and curious. Although we often discuss mindful in terms of how we can be open, kind, and curious with ourselves, it's also important to extend that same framework when we are interacting with people from other cultures. So much of mindful relationships is embodying the right attitude during our interactions with others.

Overall, the goal of mindful intercultural interactions is to be present in the moment in a nonjudgmental way. When you face judgments, recognize them, and ask yourself where they have come from. Interrogate those judgments. At the same time, don't judge yourself for having these ideas. If we have stereotypes about another a specific culture, it's important to recognize those stereotypes, call them out, understand where they came from in the first place, and examine them for factualness.

For example, imagine you're talking to someone from the Republic of Kiribati. Chances are, you've probably never heard of the Republic of Kiribati, but it's a real country in Oceania. Let's say that all you know about the people from the Republic of Kiribati is that they like European-style football (or Soccer in the U.S.). During your interaction, you say, "So, what's your favorite football team?" In this moment, you've taken the one stereotype you had and used it to help engage in an interaction. However, if the person comes back and says, "I really don't care. Sports just aren't my thing." How do you respond? First, recognize that you attempted to use a stereotype that you had and call it out for what it was. That doesn't make you a bad person, but we must learn from these encounters and broaden our world views. Second, call out the stereotype in your mind. Before that moment, you may not have even realized that you had a stereotype of people from the Republic of Kiribati. Labeling our stereotypes of other people is important because it helps us recognize them faster, the more we engage in this type of mindful behavior. Third, figure out where that stereotype came from. Maybe you had been in New Zealand and saw a match on the television and saw the Kiribati national football team. In that one moment, you learned a tiny bit about an entire country and pocketed it away for future use. Sometimes it's easy to figure out where our stereotypes evolved from, but sometimes these stereotypes are so ingrained in us through our own culture that it's hard to really figure out their origin. Lastly, it's time to realize that your stereotype may not be that factual. At the same time, you may have found the one resident of the Republic of Kiribati who doesn't like football. We can often make these determinations by talking to the other person.

At the same time, it's important also to be mindfully open to the other person's stereotypes of people within your own culture. For example, someone from the Republic of Kiribati may have a stereotype that Americans know nothing about football (other than American football). If you're a fan of what we in the U.S. call soccer, then you correct that stereotype or at least provide that person a more nuanced understanding of your own culture. Sure, American football still is the king of sports in the U.S., but media trends for watching football (soccer) are growing, and more and more Americans are becoming fans.



Figure 7.4 Culturally mindful interactions can aid in positive workplace relationships. [Wikimedia Diversity Conference 2017](#) – [Walaa](#) – [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Summary

- Communication fulfills our physical, personal, and social needs.
- Communication is a process because senders and receivers act as senders and receivers simultaneously, with the receiver's feedback serving as a key element to continuing the process.
- The components of the communication process involve the source, sender, channel, message, environment, and noise.
- Skills associated with effective interpersonal communication are listening skills, people skills, emotional intelligence, appropriate skill selection, and ethical communication.
- Cultural intelligence involves the degree to which an individual can communicate competently in varying cultural situations. Cultural intelligence consists of four distinct parts: knowledge, motivation, understanding, and behavior.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of your most recent communication with another individual. Write down this conversation and, within the conversation, identify the components of the communication process.
2. Think about the different types of noise that affect communication. Can you list some examples of how noise can make communication worse?
3. We all do something well in relation to communication. What are your best communication skills? In what areas would you like to improve?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Small editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course.
- Remix combining [2.2 Elements of Interpersonal Communication](#), [2.5 Interpersonal Communication Skills](#), and [6.4 Improving Intercultural Communication Skills](#) (Interpersonal Communication – Milne Publishing) into one chapter on interpersonal communication.
- Added all images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Reformatted in-text citations and references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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7.2 Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the motives and needs for interpersonal communication.
- Describe motives for self-disclosure.
- Compare and contrast the different types of listening.
- Discuss different types of listening responses.

We are constantly interacting with people. We interact with our family and friends. We interact with our teachers and peers at school. We interact with customer service representatives, office coworkers, physicians/therapists, and so many other different people in average day. Humans are inherently social beings, so speaking and listening to each other is a huge part of what we all do day-to-day.

The Importance of Everyday Conversations

Most of us spend a great deal of our day interacting with other people through what is known as a conversation. According to Judy Apps, the word “conversation” is comprised of the words *con* (with) and *versare* (turn): “conversation is turn and turnabout – you alternate” (Apps, 2014, p. 12). As such, a conversation isn’t a monologue or singular speech act; it’s a dyadic process where two people engage with one another in interaction that has multiple turns. Conversation is an important part of the interpersonal experience. Through conversations with others, we can build, maintain, and terminate relationships.

Coming up with an academic definition for the term “conversation” is not an easy task. Instead, Donald Allen and Rebecca Guy offer the following explanation: “Conversation is the primary basis of direct social relations between persons. As a process occurring in real-time, conversation constitutes a reciprocal and rhythmic interchange of verbal emissions. It is a sharing process which develops a common social experience” (Allen and Guy, 1974, p. 11). From this explanation, a conversation is how people engage in social interaction in their day-to-day lives. From this perspective, a conversation is purely a verbal process. For our purposes, we will use a definition provided by Brennan (2013, p. 202): “**Conversation** is a joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively.”

There is growing concern that in today’s highly mediated world, the simple conversation is becoming a thing of the past. Sherry Turkle is one of the foremost researchers on how humans communicate using technology. She tells the story of an 18-year-old boy who uses texting for most of his fundamental interactions. The boy wistfully told Turkle, “Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I’d like to learn how to have a conversation.”

(2012). When she asks Millennials across the nation what's wrong with holding a simple conversation:

I'll tell you what's wrong with having a conversation. It takes place in real-time and you can't control what you're going to say." So that's the bottom line. Texting, email, posting, all of these things let us present the self as we want to be. We get to edit, and that means we get to delete, and that means we get to retouch, the face, the voice, the flesh, the body—not too little, not too much, just right.

We should not take communication for granted. Communication is a vital component of our lives. A few years ago, a prison decided to lessen the amount of communication inmates could have with each other. The prison administrators decided that they did not want inmates to share information. Yet, over time, the prisoners developed a way to communicate with each other using codes on walls and tapping out messages through pipes. Even when inmates were not allowed to talk to each other via face-to-face, they were still able to find other ways to communicate (Duck, 2007).

Types of Conversations

Angel (2016) states that conversations can be categorized based on directionality (one-way or two-way) and tone/purpose (cooperative or competitive). One-way conversations are conversations where an individual is talking *at* the other person and not *with* the other person. Although these exchanges are technically conversations because of the inclusion of nonverbal feedback, one of the conversational partners tends to monopolize the bulk of the conversation while the other partner is more of a passive receiver. Two-way conversations, on the other hand, are conversations where there is mutual involvement and interaction. In two-way conversations, people are actively talking, providing nonverbal feedback, and listening.

In addition to one vs. two-way interactions, conversations can be broken down on whether they are cooperative or competitive. Cooperative conversations are marked by a mutual interest in what all parties within the conversation have to contribute. Conversely, individuals in competitive conversations are more concerned with their points of view than others within the conversation. Angel (2016) further breaks down his typology of conversations into four distinct types of conversation (Figure 7.5).



Figure 7.5 Four Types of Conversations

Discourse

The first type of conversation, discourse, is one-way cooperative. The purpose of a **discourse** conversation is for the sender to transmit information to the receiver (Angel, 2016). For example, a professor delivering a lecture or a speaker giving a speech.

Dialogue

The second type is what most people consider to be a traditional conversation: the **dialogue** (two-way, cooperative). The purpose of a dialogue is to establish rapport and build relationships through information exchange (Angel, 2016). On a first date, the general purpose of most of our conversations in this context is dialogue (Figure 7.6).



Figure 7.6 If the dialogue is successful, two people might agree to another date. [Dinner Date](#) – [StockSnap](#) – [Pixabay License](#).

Debate

The third type of conversation is the two-way, competitive conversation, referred to as a debate. The **debate** conversation occurs when the ultimate goal of the conversation is to win an argument or persuade someone to change their thoughts, values, beliefs, and behaviors (Angel, 2016). Imagine you're sitting in a study group and you're trying to advocate for a specific approach to your group's project. In this case, your goal is to persuade the others within the conversation to your point-of-view.

Diatribes

Lastly, Angel (2016) discusses the diatribe (one-way, competitive). The goal of the **diatribe** conversation is "to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspires those that share the same perspective." For example, imagine that your best friend has come over to your dorm room, apartment, or house to vent about the grade they received on a test.

Communication Needs

There are many reasons why we communicate with each other, but what are our basic communication needs? The first reason why we communicate is for physical needs. People who communicate their problems, feelings, and thoughts with others are less likely to hold grudges, anger, hostility, which in turn causes less stress on their minds and their bodies.

Another reason why we communicate with others is that it shapes who we are or our identity needs. Perhaps you never realized that you were funny until your friends told you that you were quite humorous. Sometimes, we become who we are based on what others say to us and about us.

The third reason we communicate is for social needs. We communicate with others to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships with others. These relationships may be personal or professional. In either case, we have motives or objectives for communicating with other people.

The last reason we communicate is for practical needs. To exchange information or solve problems, we need to talk to others. Communication can prevent disasters from occurring. To create and/or sustain a daily balance in our lives, we need to communicate with other people. Hence, there is no escaping communication. We do it all the time.

Sharing Personal Information

One of the primary functions of conversations is sharing information about ourselves. Berger and Calabrese (1975) believed that when we meet new people, we are fraught with uncertainty about the new relationship and will seek to reduce this uncertainty and its resulting anxiety. As verbal communication increases between people when they first

meet, the level of uncertainty decreases. Specifically, the type of verbal communication generally discussed in initial interactions is called self-disclosure (Sprecher, Treger, Wondra, Hilaire, & Wallpe, 2013). **Self-disclosure** is the process of purposefully communicating information about one's self. We can also think of self-disclosure as permitting one's "true self" to be known to others (Jourard, 1971).

As we introduce the concept of self-disclosure in this section, it's important to realize that there is no right or wrong way to self-disclose. People self-disclose for a wide range of reasons and purposes. Ignatius and Kokkonen (2007) list several influences on the ways that people self-disclose including:

- Personality traits (shy people self-disclose less than extraverted people)
- Cultural background (Western cultures disclose more than Eastern cultures)
- Emotional state (happy people self-disclose more than sad or depressed people)
- Biological sex (women self-disclose more than men)
- Psychological gender (androgynous people were more emotionally aware, topically involved, and invested in their interactions; feminine individuals disclosed more in social situations, and masculine individuals generally did not demonstrate meaningful self-disclosure across contexts)
- Status differential (lower status individuals are more likely to self-disclose personal information than higher-status individuals)
- Physical environment (soft, warm rooms encourage self-disclosure while hard, cold rooms discourage self-disclosure)
- Physical contact (touch can increase self-disclosure, unless the other person feels that their personal space is being invaded, which can decrease self-disclosure)
- Communication channel (people often feel more comfortable self-disclosing when they're not face-to-face; e.g., on the telephone or through computer-mediated communication)

As you can see, there are quite a few things that can impact how self-disclosure happens when people are interacting during interpersonal encounters. So, what ultimately motivates someone to self-disclose? There are two basic reasons for self-disclosure: social integration and impression management (Ignatius and Kokkonen, 2007).

Social Integration

The first reason people self-disclose information about themselves is simply to develop interpersonal relationships. Part of forming an interpersonal relationship is seeking to demonstrate that we have commonality with another person (Figure 7.7). For example, let's say that it's the beginning of a new semester, and you're sitting next to someone

you've never met before. You quickly strike up a conversation while you're waiting for the professor to show up. During those first few moments of talking, you're going to try to establish some kind of commonality. Self-disclosure helps us find these areas where we have similar interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. As humans, we have an innate desire to be social and meet people. And research has shown us that self-disclosure is positively related to liking (Collins and Miller, 1994). The more we self-disclose to others, the more they like us and vice versa.



Figure 7.7 Students engage in self-disclosure before and after class. [Students Talking](#) – [Pasqualon](#) – [Pixabay License](#)

However, when we first meet someone, we do not expect that person to start self-disclosing their deepest darkest secrets. When this happens, then we experience an expectancy violation. **Expectancy violation theory (EVT)** analyzes what happens when individuals communicate nonverbally in a manner that was unexpected, such as standing too close while talking (Burgoon and Jones, 1976; Burgoon and Hale, 1988). Over the years, EVT has been expanded by many scholars to look at a range of different situations when communication expectations are violated. As a whole, EVT predicts that when individuals violate the norms of communication during an interaction, the interaction will be evaluated negatively. However, this does depend on the nature of the initial relationship. If we've been in a relationship with someone for a long time or if it's someone we want to be in a relationship with, we're more likely to overlook expectancy violations (Bachman and Guerrero, 2006).

So, how does this relate to self-disclosure? Mostly, there are ways that we self-disclose that are considered "normal" during different types of interactions and contexts. What you disclose to your best friend will be different than what you disclose to a stranger at the bus station. What you disclose to your therapist will be different than what you disclose to your professor. When you meet a stranger, the types of self-disclosure tend to

be reasonably common topics: your major, sports teams, bands, the weather, etc. If, however, you decide to self-disclose information that is overly personal, this would be perceived as a violation of the types of topics that are normally disclosed during initial interactions. As such, the other person is probably going to try to get out of that conversation pretty quickly. When people disclose information that is inappropriate to the context, those interactions will generally be viewed more negatively (Frisby and Sidelinger, 2013).

From a psychological standpoint, finding these commonalities with others helps reinforce our self-concept. We find that others share the same interests, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc., which demonstrates that how we think, feel, and behave are similar to those around us (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991).

Impression Management

The second reason we tend to self-disclose is to portray a specific impression of who we are as individuals to others. **Impression management** involves the use of verbal and nonverbal techniques of self-presentation to create as favorable of an impression of ourselves as possible (Ignatius and Kokkonen, 2007). Basically, we want people to view us in a specific way, so we communicate with others in an attempt to get others to see us that way. We commonly use six impression management techniques during interpersonal interactions: self-descriptions, accounts, apologies, entitlements and enhancements, flattery, and favors (Gardner and Martinko, 1988; Schlenker, 1980; Ignatius and Kokkonen, 2007).

Self-Descriptions

The first type of impression management technique we can use is **self-descriptions**, or talking about specific characteristics of ourselves. For example, if you want others to view you professionally, you would talk about the work that you've accomplished. If you want others to see you as someone fun to be around, you may talk about the parties you've thrown. In both of these cases, the goal is to describe ourselves in a manner that we want others to see.

Accounts

The second type of impression management is accounts. **Accounts** are explanations that attempt to minimize the severity of events (Schlenker, 1980). Accounts occur when an individual is attempting to explain something that their interactant may already know. However, they may try to deny that the event occurred or offer excuses or justifications for what occurred (Gardner and Martinko, 1988).

For the purposes of initial interactions, imagine that you're on a first date and your date has heard that you're a bit of a "player." An account may be given to downplay your previous relationships or explain away the rumors about your previous dating history.

Apologies

The third type of impression management tactics is apologies. According to Barry Schlenker, **Apologies** occur when someone admits that they have done something wrong while attempting to downplay the severity of the incident or the outcomes (Schlenker, 1980).

Imagine you just found out that a friend of yours told a personal story about you during class as an example. Your friend could offer an apology, admitting that they shouldn't have told the story, but also emphasize that it's not like anyone in the class knows who you are. In essence, the friend admits that they are wrong, but also downplays the possible outcomes from the inappropriate disclosure of your story.

Entitlements and Enhancements

The fourth type of impression management tactic is the use of entitlements and enhancements. **Entitlements** aid in emphasizing someone's role or responsibility for an event occurring (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). For example, imagine that you're talking to a new peer in class and they tell you about how they single-handedly organized a wildly popular concert that happened over the weekend. In this case, the individual is trying to maximize their responsibility for the party in an effort to look good.

Enhancements aid in emphasizing the favorability of an event itself (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). For example, imagine that in the same scenario, the individual talks less about how they did the event single-handedly and talks more about how amazing the event itself was. In this case, they're aligning themselves with the event, so the more amazing the event looks, the better you'll perceive them as an individual.

Flattery

The fifth impression management tactic is the use of **flattery**, or the use of compliments to get the other person to like you more. In this case, there is a belief that if you flatter someone, they will see you in a better light. Imagine there's a new player on your basketball team. Almost immediately, they start complimenting you on your form and how they wish they could be as good as you are. In this case, that person may be completely honest, but the use of flattery will probably get you to see that person more positively as well.

Favors

The last tactic that researchers have described for impression management is favors. **Favors** involve an attempt to gain another person's approval by doing something nice for them (Gardner and Martinko, 1988). One way that we get others to like us is to do things for them. If we want our peers in class to like us, then maybe we'll share our notes with them when they're absent. We could also volunteer to let someone use our washer and dryer if they don't have one. There are all kinds of favors that we can do for others.

Although most of us don't think of favors as tactics for managing how people perceive us, they have an end result that does.

Listening

When it comes to daily communication, we spend about 45% of our communication listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing.³⁶ However, most people are not entirely sure what the word “listening” is or how to do it effectively.

Hearing refers to a passive activity where an individual perceives sound by detecting vibrations through their ears (Figure 7.8a). Hearing is a physiological process that is continuously happening. We are constantly hearing sounds in the world around us, unless we are hearing impaired. Even in a sound-proof room, other sounds that are normally not heard like a beating heart or breathing will become more apparent as a result of the blocked background noise.

Listening, on the other hand, is generally seen as an active process. **Listening** involves focusing attention on the words of a speaker to understand the intended meanings of their speech (Wrench, Goding, Johnson, & Attias, 2017). From this perspective, hearing is more of an automatic response when we perceive sound; whereas, listening is what happens when we purposefully attend to different messages to understand their meanings.

We can even take this a step further and differentiate normal listening from critical listening. **Critical listening** involves using systematic and careful reasoning to determine whether a message is logical based on factual evidence (Wrench, Goding, Johnson, & Attias, 2017). From this perspective, it's one thing to attend to someone's message, but something very different to analyze what the person is saying based on known facts and evidence to determine if the message is accurate or trustworthy.



Figure 7.8 Hearing is the perceptual processing and interpretation of sound, whereas listening is an active process involving paying attention to someone's words. a) [Hearing](#) – [RobinHiggins](#) – [Pixabay License](#) b) [Shimer College Susan Henking listening 2013](#) – [Shimer College](#) – [CC BY 2.0](#)

Listening Styles

Now that we have a better understanding of how listening works, let's talk about four different styles of listening. **Listening styles** involve our beliefs and attitudes about the various aspects of receiving and encoding information such as who, what, where, when, and how (Watson, Barker, & Waver, 1995). There are four different styles of listening; people, content, action, and time.

People-Oriented

The first listening style is the people-oriented listening style. **People-oriented** listeners tend to be more focused on the person sending the message than the content of the message. As such, people-oriented listeners focus on the emotional states of senders of information. One way to think about people-oriented listeners is to see them as highly compassionate, empathic, and sensitive, which allows them to put themselves in the shoes of the person sending the message.

People-oriented listeners often work well in helping professions where listening to the person and understanding their feelings is very important (e.g., therapist, counselor, social worker, etc.). People-oriented listeners are also very focused on maintaining relationships, so they are good at casual conversation where they can focus on the person.

Action-Oriented

The second listening style is the action-oriented listener. **Action-oriented** listeners are focused on what the source wants. The action-oriented listener wants a source to get to the point quickly. Instead of long, drawn-out lectures, the action-oriented speaker would prefer quick bullet points that get to what the source desires. Action-oriented listeners appreciate speakers who are direct and organized (Bodie and Worthington, 2010).

When dealing with an action-oriented listener, it's important to realize that they want you to be logical and get to the point. One of the things action-oriented listeners commonly do is search for errors and inconsistencies in someone's message, so it's important to be organized and have your facts straight.

Content-Oriented

The third type of listener is the content-oriented listener. **Content-oriented** listeners focus on the content of the message and process that message in a systematic way. Of the four different listening styles, content-oriented listeners are more adept at listening to complex information. Content-oriented listeners focus on the entire message before forming an opinion about the content of the message, whereas action-oriented listeners display frustration if they believe the speaker is wasting time (Bodie and Worthington, 2010). When it comes to analyzing messages, content-oriented listeners really want to dig into the message itself. They want as much information as possible in order to make the best evaluation of the message.

Time-Oriented

The final listening style is the time-oriented listening style. **Time-oriented** listeners are sometimes referred to as “clock watchers” because they’re always in a hurry and want a source of a message to speed things up a bit. Time-oriented listeners are vocal about the amount of time they have available to listen and are likely to interrupt the speaker or display nonverbal signals of disinterest (Bodie, Worthington, & Gearhart, 2013).

Time-oriented listeners often feel that they are overwhelmed by so many different tasks that need to be completed (whether real or not), so they usually try to accomplish multiple tasks while they are listening to a source. Of course, multitasking often leads to someone’s attention being divided, and information being missed.

Hopefully, this section has helped you further understand the complexity of listening. Many people do not only engage in one listening style or another. It’s possible to be a combination of different listening styles. However, some of the listening style combinations are more common. For example, someone who is action-oriented and time-oriented will want the bare-bones information so they can make a decision. On the other hand, it’s hard to be a people-oriented listener and time-oriented listener because being empathic and attending to someone’s feelings takes time and effort.

Types of Listening Responses

Who do you think is a great listener? Why did you name that particular person? How can you determine that someone is a good listener? You probably recognize a good listener based on the nonverbal and verbal cues that they display. We don’t all listen in the same way. Different contexts often require a distinct listening response that is appropriate for that situation. Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor II, (2013) found different types of listening responses: silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising (Figure 7.9). We will examine each of these.

Silent Listening	
Questioning	Asking questions to understand the situation better.
Paraphrasing	Rephrasing in your own words what the speaker said.
Empathizing	Putting yourself in the same situation to understand what the speaker means.
Supporting	Showing that you endorse the speaker.
Analyzing	Considering possible solutions to what the speaker has said.
Evaluating	Assessing the best courses of action.
Advising	Counseling, recommending, and offering information that will help the speaker.

Figure 7.9. Types of Listening Responses

Silent Listening

Silent listening occurs when you say nothing. It is ideal in certain situations and awful in other situations. However, when used correctly, it can be very powerful. If misused, you could give the wrong impression to someone. It is appropriate to use when you don't want to encourage more talking. It also shows that you are open to the speaker's ideas. Sometimes people get angry when someone doesn't respond. They might think that this person is not listening or trying to avoid the situation. But it might be due to the fact that the person is just trying to gather their thoughts, or perhaps it would be inappropriate to respond. There are certain situations such as in counseling, where silent listening can be beneficial because it can help that person figure out their feelings and emotions.

Questioning

In situations where you want to get answers, it might be beneficial to use questioning. You can do this in a variety of ways. There are several ways to question in a sincere, nondirective way (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Five Reasons to use Questioning as a Listening Response

Reason	Example
To clarify meanings	A young child might mumble something and you want to make sure you understand what they said.
To learn about others' thoughts, feelings, and wants (open/closed questions)	When you ask your partner where they see your relationship going in the next few years.
To encourage elaboration	Nathan says "That's interesting!" Jonna has to ask him further if he means interesting in a positive or negative way.
To encourage discovery	Ask your parents how they met because you never knew.
To gather more facts and details	Police officers at the scene of the crime will question any witnesses to get a better understanding of what happened.

You might have different types of questions. **Sincere questions** are ones that are created to find a genuine answer. **Counterfeit questions** are disguised attempts to send a message, not to receive one. Sometimes, counterfeit questions can cause the listener to be defensive. For instance, if someone asks you, "Tell me how often you used crystal meth." The speaker implies that you have used meth, even though that has not been established. A speaker can use questions that make statements by emphasizing specific words or phrases, stating an opinion or feeling on the subject. They can ask questions that carry hidden agendas, like "Do you have \$5?" because the person would like to borrow that money. Some questions seek "correct" answers. For instance, when a friend says, "Do I look fat?" You probably have a correct or ideal answer. There are questions that are based on unchecked assumptions. An example would be, "Why aren't you listening?" This example implies that the person wasn't listening, when in fact they are listening.

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is defined as restating in your own words, the message you think the speaker just sent. There are three types of paraphrasing. First, you can change the speaker's wording to indicate what you think they meant. Second, you can offer an example of what you think the speaker is talking about. Third, you can reflect on the underlying theme of a speaker's remarks. Paraphrasing represents mindful listening in

the way that you are trying to analyze and understand the speaker's information. Paraphrasing can be used to summarize facts and to gain consensus in essential discussions. This could be used in a business meeting to make sure that all details were discussed and agreed upon. Paraphrasing can also be used to understand personal information more accurately. Think about being in a counselor's office. Counselors often paraphrase information to understand better exactly how you are feeling and to be able to analyze the information better.

Empathizing

Empathizing is used to show that you identify with a speaker's information. When you are able to view the information from the speaker's perspective, you can gain a better understanding of the meaning of their message. However, you are not empathizing when you deny others the rights to their feelings. Examples of this are statements such as, "It's really not a big deal" or "Who cares?" This indicates that the listener is trying to make the speaker feel a different way and passing judgment.

Supporting

Sometimes, in a discussion, people want to know how you feel about them instead of a reflection on the content. Several types of supportive responses are: agreement, offers to help, praise, reassurance, and diversion. The value of receiving support when faced with personal problems is very important. This has been shown to enhance psychological, physical, and relational health. To effectively support others, you have to make sure that your expression of support is sincere, be sure that other person can accept your support, and focus on "here and now" rather than "then and there."

Analyzing

Analyzing is helpful in gaining different alternatives and perspectives by offering an interpretation of the speaker's message. However, this can be problematic at times. Sometimes the speaker might not be able to understand your perspective or may become more confused by accepting it. To avoid this, steps must be taken in advance. These include tentatively offering your interpretation instead of as an absolute fact. By being more sensitive about it, it might be more comfortable for the speaker to accept. You can also make sure that your analysis has a reasonable chance of being correct. If it were inaccurate, it would leave the person more confused than before. Also, you must make sure the person will be receptive to your analysis and that your motive for offering is to truly help the other person. An analysis offered under any other circumstances is useless.

Evaluating

Evaluating appraises the speaker's thoughts or behaviors. The evaluation can be favorable ("That makes sense") or negative (passing judgment). Negative evaluations can

be critical or non-critical (constructive criticism). Two conditions offer the best chance for evaluations to be received: if the person with the problem requested an evaluation, and if it is genuinely constructive and not designed as a putdown.

Advising

Advising differs from evaluations. It is not always the best solution and can sometimes be harmful. In order to avoid this, you must make sure four conditions are present: be sure the person is receptive to your suggestions, make sure they are truly ready to accept it, be confident in the correctness of your advice, and be sure the receiver won't blame you if it doesn't work out.

Summary

- There are six communication motives: control, affection, relaxation, pleasure, inclusion, and escape. There are four communication needs: physical, identity, social, and practical.
- We self-disclose to share information with others. It allows us to express our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- The listening process includes: having the motivation to listen, clearly hearing the message, paying attention, interpreting the message, evaluating the message, remembering and responding appropriately.
- There are many types of listening styles: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented.
- The different types of listening responses are silent listening, questioning, paraphrasing, empathizing, supporting, analyzing, evaluating, and advising.
- Questioning can be to clarify meanings, encourage elaboration, learn about others, increase discovery, or obtain more information.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on how you introduce yourself in a new situation. Write down what you typically say to a stranger. You can role play with a friend and then switch roles. What did you notice? How many of those statements are habitual? Why?
2. For the next week, do a listening diary. Take notes of all the things you listen to and analyze to see if you are truly a good listener. Do you ask people to repeat things? Do you paraphrase?
3. Write down an example of each of the listening responses and why it is appropriate for that situation. Why did you write down what you did?

Remix/Revisions featured in this section

- Editing revisions to tailor the content to the Psychology of Human Relations course, as well as follow APA 7th edition in-text citation formatting.
- Remix of [Chapter 7: Talking and Listening](#) (Interpersonal Communication – Milne Publishing).
- Added images and provided links to locations of images and CC licenses.
- Added doi links to references to comply with APA 7th edition formatting reference manual.

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