Communication in the Real World

COMMUNICATION IN THE REAL WORLD

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The content of this book is designed to help you be a more competent communicator. The four major objectives are:

1. Explain the fundamental processes that significantly influence communication.
2. Construct messages consistent with the diversity of communication purpose, audience, context, and ethics.
3. Respond to messages consistent with the diversity of communication purpose, audience, context, and ethics.
4. Utilize information literacy skills expected of ethical communicators.

Each section of this text is designed to help you recognize what you should be gaining from the text in support of our goal to help you be an effective communicator. The first thing you will see is an introduction of what will be covered in each subsequent chapter, followed by content that will offer you the opportunity to click on bolded terms for definitions, and finally, links to external resource materials (e.g., videos or other content).

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1.

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Introduction

How did humans develop the ability to communicate? Are humans the only creatures on earth that communicate? What purpose does communication serve in our lives? Answers to these historical, anthropological, and social-scientific questions provide part of the diversity of knowledge that makes up the field of communication studies (Simonson, Peck, Craig, & Jackson, Jr., 2013). As a student of communication, you will learn that there is much more to the field than public speaking, even though the origins of communication studies are traced back thousands of years to ancient Greek philosophers and teachers like Plato and Aristotle who were the first to systematically study and write about speech. Communication students and scholars also study basic communication processes like nonverbal communication, perception, and listening, as well as communication in various contexts, including interpersonal, group, intercultural, and media communication (Hawes, 1973).

1.1 Communication: History and Forms

Before we dive into the history of communication, it is important that we have a shared understanding of what we mean by the word *communication*. For our purposes, we will define **communication** as the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts (Hawes, 1973). This definition builds on other definitions of communication that have been rephrased and refined over many years. In fact, since the systematic study of communication began in colleges and universities a little over one hundred years ago, there have been more than 126 published definitions of communication (Dance & Larson, 1976). In order to get a context for how communication has been conceptualized and studied, let's look at a history of the field.

A Brief History of Communication

Aristotle is a logical person to start with when tracing the development of the communication scholarship. His writings on communication, although not the oldest, are the most complete and systematic. Ancient Greek philosophers and scholars such as Aristotle theorized about the art of **rhetoric**, which refers to speaking well and persuasively (Swearingen, 2013). Today, we hear the word *rhetoric* used in negative ways. A politician, for example, may write off his or her opponent's statements as "just rhetoric." This leads us to believe that *rhetoric* refers to misleading, false, or unethical communication, which is not at all in keeping with the usage of the word by ancient or contemporary communication experts. While rhetoric does refer primarily to persuasive communication messages, much of the writing and teaching about rhetoric conveys the importance of being an ethical *rhetor*, or communicator. So, when a communicator, such as a politician, speaks in misleading, vague, or dishonest ways, he or she isn't using rhetoric; he or she is being an unethical speaker.The study of rhetoric focused on public communication, primarily oratory used in discussions or debates regarding laws and policy, speeches delivered in courts, and speeches intended to praise or blame another person (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019). The connections among rhetoric, policy making, and legal proceedings show that communication and citizenship have been connected since the study of communication began. Throughout this course, we will continue to make connections between communication, ethics, and civic engagement.

Ancient Greek rhetoricians like Aristotle were followed by Roman orators like Cicero. Cicero contributed to the field of rhetoric by expanding theories regarding the five canons of rhetoric, which include **invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory.** *Invention* refers to the use of evidence and arguments to think about things in new ways and is the most studied of the five canons. *Arrangement* refers to the organization of speech, *style* refers to the use of language, and *delivery* refers to the vocal and physical characteristics of a speaker. *Memory* is the least studied of the five canons and refers to the techniques employed by speakers of that era to retain and then repeat large amounts of information (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019).

Even though Aristotle and other ancient rhetoricians and philosophers had theorized the connection between rhetoric and citizenship, the role of the communicator became the focus instead of solely focusing on the message. James A. Winans, one of the first modern speech teachers and an advocate for teaching communication in higher education, said there were "two motives for learning to speak. Increasing one's chance to succeed and increasing one's power to serve" (Keith, 2008). Later, as social psychology began to expand in academic institutions, speech communication scholars saw places for connection to further expand definitions of communication to include social and psychological contexts.

Today, you can find elements of all these various aspects of communication being studied in communication departments. If we use U. S. Presidents as a case study, we can see the breadth of the communication field. Within one department, you may have fairly traditional rhetoricians who study the speeches of presidential speeches in comparison with other presidential rhetoric. Others may study debates between presidential candidates, dissecting the rhetorical strategies used. Expanding from messages to channels of communication, scholars may study how different media outlets cover presidential politics. At an interpersonal level, scholars may study what sorts of conflicts emerge within families that have liberal and conservative individuals. At a cultural level, communication scholars could study how the election of an African American president creates a narrative of post racial politics. Now let's turn to a discussion of the five major forms of communication.

Forms of Communication

Forms of communication vary in terms of participants, channels used, and contexts. The main forms of communication, all of which will be explored in much more detail in this course, are intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, public, and mass communication. If you find one of these forms particularly interesting, you may be able to take additional courses that focus specifically on it. You may even be able to devise a course of study around one of these forms as a communication major. The following is a discussion of the similarities and differences among each form of communication, including its definition, level of intentionality, goals, and contexts.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking (Vocate, 1994). Like other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication is triggered by some internal or external stimulus. We may, for example, communicate with our self about what we want to eat due to the internal stimulus of hunger, or we may react intrapersonally to an event we witness. Unlike other forms of communication, intrapersonal communication takes place only inside our heads (Vocate, 1994).

Figure 1.1: Intrapersonal communication.

The other forms of communication must be perceived by someone else to count as communication. So what is the point of intrapersonal communication if no one else even sees it?

Interpersonal Communication

Figure 1.2: Interpersonal communnication.

Interpersonal communication is communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another (Hartley, 1999). Interpersonal communication builds, maintains, and ends our relationships, and we spend more time engaged in interpersonal communication than the other forms of communication. Interpersonal communication occurs in various contexts and is addressed in subfields of study within communication studies such as intercultural communication, organizational communication, health communication, and computer-mediated communication. After all, interpersonal relationships exist in all those contexts.

Interpersonal communication can be planned or unplanned, but since it is interactive, it is usually more structured and influenced by social expectations than intrapersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is also more goal oriented than intrapersonal communication and fulfills instrumental and relational needs. In terms of instrumental needs, the goal may be as minor as greeting someone to fulfill a morning ritual or as major as conveying your desire to be in a committed relationship with someone. Interpersonal communication meets relational needs by communicating the uniqueness of a specific relationship. Since this form of communication deals so directly with our personal relationships and is the most common form of communication, instances of miscommunication and communication conflict most frequently occur here (Dance & Larson, 1972). Couples, bosses and employees, and family members all have to engage in complex interpersonal communication, and it doesn't always go well. In order to be a competent interpersonal communicator, you need conflict management skills and listening skills, among others, to maintain positive relationships.

Group Communication

Group communication is communication among three or more people interacting to achieve a shared goal (Powell, 1996). You have likely worked in groups in high school and college, and if you're like most students, you didn't enjoy it. Even though it can be frustrating, group work in an academic setting provides useful experience and preparation for group work in professional settings. Organizations have been moving toward more team-based work models, and whether we like it or not, groups are an integral part of people's lives. Therefore, the study of group communication is valuable in many contexts.

Group communication is more intentional and formal than interpersonal communication. Unlike interpersonal relationships, which are voluntary, individuals in a group are often assigned to their position within a group. Additionally, group communication is often task focused, meaning that members of the group work together for an explicit purpose or goal that affects each member of the group (Powell, 1996). Goal-oriented communication in interpersonal interactions usually relates to one person; for example, you may ask your friend to help you move this weekend. Goal-oriented communication at the group level usually focuses on a task assigned to the whole group; for example, a group of people may be tasked to figure out a plan for moving a business from one office to another.

You know from previous experience working in groups that having more communicators usually leads to more complicated interactions. Some of the challenges of group communication relate to task-oriented interactions, such as deciding who will complete each part of a larger project. But many challenges stem from interpersonal conflict or misunderstandings among group members. Since group members also communicate with and relate to each other interpersonally and may have preexisting relationships or develop them during the course of group interaction, elements of interpersonal communication occur within group communication too. Part of this course deals with group communication, you will learn how to be a more effective group communicator by learning about group theories and processes as well as the various roles that contribute to and detract from the functioning of a group (Powell, 1996).

Public Communication

Public communication is a sender-focused form of communication in which one person is typically responsible for conveying information to an audience (Beebe & Beebe, 2021). Public speaking is something that many people fear, or at least don't enjoy. But, just like group communication, public speaking is an important part of our academic, professional, and civic lives. When compared to interpersonal and group communication, public communication is the most consistently intentional, formal, and goal-oriented form of communication we have discussed so far.

Public communication, at least in Western societies, is also more sender focused than interpersonal or group communication. It is precisely this formality and focus on the sender that makes many new and experienced public speakers anxious at the thought of facing an audience. One way to begin to manage anxiety toward public speaking is to begin to see connections between public speaking and other forms of communication with which we are more familiar and comfortable. Despite being formal, public speaking is very similar to the conversations that we have in our daily interactions. For example, although public speakers don't necessarily develop individual relationships with audience members, they still have the benefit of being face-to-face with them so they can receive verbal and nonverbal feedback (Beebe & Beebe, 2021).

Mass Communication

Figure 1.3: Instagram is a form of mass communication.

Public communication becomes **mass communication** when it is transmitted to many people through print or electronic media (Bryant & Miron, 2004). Print media such as newspapers and magazines continue to be an important channel for mass communication, although they have suffered much in the past decade due in part to the rise of electronic media. Television, websites, blogs, and social media are mass communication channels that you probably engage with regularly. Radio, podcasts, and books are other examples of mass media. The technology required to send mass communication messages distinguishes it from the other forms of communication (Bryant & Miron, 2004). A certain amount of intentionality goes into transmitting a mass communication message since it usually requires one or more extra steps to convey the message. This may involve pressing "Enter" to send a Facebook message or involve an entire crew of camera people, sound engineers, and production assistants to produce a television show. Even though the messages must be intentionally transmitted through technology, the intentionality and goals of the person actually creating the message, such as the writer, television host, or talk show guest, vary greatly. The President's State of the Union address is a mass communication message that is very formal, goal oriented, and intentional, but a president's verbal gaffe during a news interview is not.

1.2 The Communication Process

Communication is a complex process, and it is difficult to determine where or with whom a communication encounter starts and ends (Simonson, Peck, Craig, & Jackson, Jr., 2013). Models of communication simplify the process by providing a visual representation of the various aspects of a communication encounter (Narula, 2006). Some models explain communication in more detail than others, but even the most complex model still doesn't recreate what we experience in even a moment of a communication encounter. Models still serve a valuable purpose for students of communication because they allow us to see specific concepts and steps within the process of communication, define communication, and apply communication concepts (Narula, 2006). When you become aware of how communication functions, you can think more deliberately through your communication encounters, which can help you better prepare for future communication and learn from your previous communication. The three models of communication we will discuss are the transmission, interaction, and transaction models.

Although these models of communication differ, they contain some common elements. The first two models we will discuss, the transmission model and the interaction model, include the following parts: participants, messages, encoding, decoding, and channels. In communication models, the **participants** are the senders and/or receivers of messages in a communication encounter. The **message** is the verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. For example, when you say "Hello!" to your friend, you are sending a message of greeting that will be received by your friend. The internal cognitive process that allows participants to send, receive, and understand messages is the encoding and decoding process. **Encoding** is the process of turning thoughts into communication (Hall, 1980). As we will learn later, the level of conscious thought that goes into encoding messages varies. **Decoding** is the process of turning communication into thoughts (Hall, 1980). For example, you may realize you're hungry and encode the following message to send to your roommate: "I'm hungry. Do you want to get pizza tonight?" As your roommate receives the message, he decodes your communication and turns it back into thoughts in order to make meaning out of it. Of course, we don't just communicate verbally—we have various options, or channels for communication. Encoded messages are sent through a **channel**, or a sensory route on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. While communication can be sent and received using any sensory route (sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound), most communication occurs through visual (sight) and/or auditory (sound) channels. If your roommate has headphones on and is engrossed in a video game, you may need to get his attention by waving your hands before you can ask him about dinner.

Transmission Model of Communication

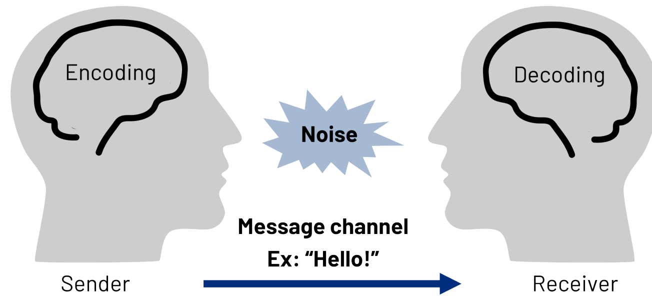

Figure 1.4: The transmission model of communication.

The **transmission model of communication** describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver (Ellis & McClintock, 1990). This model focuses on the sender and message within a communication encounter. Although the receiver is included in the model, this role is viewed as more of a target or end point rather than part of an ongoing process. We are left to presume that the receiver either successfully receives and understands the message or does not. The scholars who designed this model extended on a linear model proposed by Aristotle centuries before that included a speaker, message, and hearer.

They were also influenced by the advent and spread of new communication technologies of the time such as telegraphy and radio, and you can probably see these technical influences within the model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Think of how a radio message is sent from a person in the radio studio to you listening in your car. The sender is the radio announcer who encodes a verbal message that is transmitted by a radio tower through electromagnetic waves (the channel) and eventually reaches your (the receiver's) ears via an antenna and speakers in order to be decoded. The radio announcer doesn't really know if you receive his or her message or not, but if the equipment is working and the channel is free of static, then there is a good chance that the message was successfully received.

Since this model is sender and message focused, responsibility is put on the sender to help ensure the message is successfully conveyed. This model emphasizes clarity and effectiveness, but it also acknowledges that there are barriers to effective communication. **Noise** is anything that interferes with a message being sent between participants in a communication encounter. Even if a speaker sends a clear message, noise may interfere with a message being accurately received and decoded. The transmission model of communication accounts for environmental and semantic noise (Shannon, 1984). **Environmental noise** is any physical noise present in a communication encounter. Other people talking in a crowded diner could interfere with your ability to transmit a message and have it successfully decoded. While environmental noise interferes with the transmission of the message, **semantic noise** refers to noise that occurs in the encoding and decoding process when participants do not understand a symbol. To use a technical example, FM antennae can't decode AM radio signals and vice versa. Likewise, most French speakers can't decode Swedish and vice versa. Semantic noise can also interfere in communication between people speaking the same language because many words have multiple or unfamiliar meanings.

Although the transmission model may seem simple or even underdeveloped to us today, the creation of this model allowed scholars to examine the communication process in new ways, which eventually led to more complex models and theories of communication that we will discuss more later. This model is not quite rich enough to capture dynamic face-to-face interactions, but there are instances in which communication is one-way and linear, especially computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is integrated into many aspects of our lives now and has opened up new ways of communicating and brought some new challenges (McMurdo, 1995). Think of text messaging for example. The transmission model of communication is well suited for describing the act of text messaging since the sender isn't sure that the meaning was effectively conveyed or that the message was received at all. Noise can also interfere with the transmission of a text. If you use an abbreviation the receiver doesn't know or the phone autocorrects to something completely different than you meant, then semantic noise has interfered with the message transmission. A friend enjoys bargain hunting at thrift stores, and recently sent a text to a friend asking if she wanted to go thrifting over the weekend. After she replied with "What?!?" the friend reviewed his text and saw that his "smart" phone had autocorrected *thrifting* to *thrusting*! You have likely experienced similar problems with text messaging, and a quick Google search for examples of text messages made funny or embarrassing by the autocorrect feature proves that many others do, too.

Interaction Model of Communication

The **interaction model of communication** describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts (Schramm, 1997). Rather than illustrating communication as a linear, one-way process, the interaction model incorporates feedback, which makes communication a more interactive, two-way process. **Feedback** includes messages sent in response to other messages. For example, your instructor may respond to a point you raise during class discussion or you may point to the sofa when your

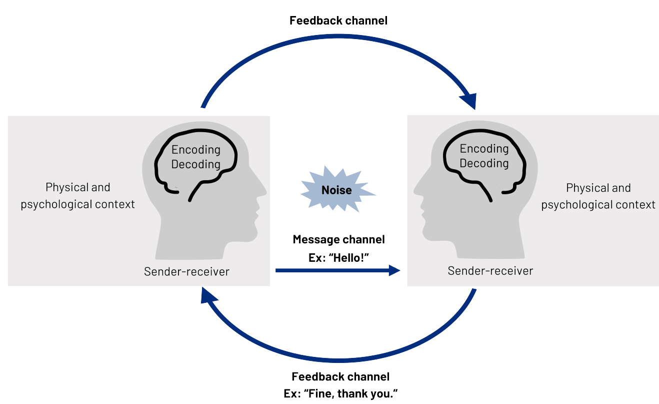

Figure 1.5: The interaction model of communication.

roommate asks you where the remote control is. The inclusion of a feedback loop also leads to a more complex understanding of the roles of participants in a communication encounter. Rather than having one sender, one message, and one receiver, this model has two sender-receivers who exchange messages. Each participant alternates roles as sender and receiver in order to keep a communication encounter going. Although this seems like a perceptible and deliberate process, we alternate between the roles of sender and receiver very quickly and often without conscious thought.

The interaction model is also less message focused and more interaction focused. While the transmission model focused on how a message was transmitted and whether or not it was received, the interaction model is more concerned with the communication process itself (Lindblom, 1990). In fact, this model acknowledges that there are so many messages being sent at one time that many of them may not even be received. Some messages are also unintentionally sent. Therefore, communication isn't judged effective or ineffective in this model based on whether or not a single message was successfully transmitted and received.

The interaction model takes physical and psychological context into account. **Physical context** includes the environmental factors in a communication encounter. The size, layout, temperature, and lighting of a space influence our communication. Imagine the different physical contexts in which job interviews take place and how that may affect your communication.

Psychological context includes the mental and emotional factors in a communication encounter. Stress, anxiety, and emotions are just some examples of psychological influences that can affect our communication (Gallois, 1994). Seemingly positive psychological states, like experiencing the emotion of love, can also affect communication. During the initial stages of a romantic relationship individuals may be so "love struck" that they don't see incompatible personality traits or don't negatively evaluate behaviors they might otherwise find off-putting. Feedback and context help make the interaction model a more useful illustration of the communication process, but the transaction model views communication as a powerful tool that shapes our realities beyond individual communication encounters.

Transaction Model of Communication

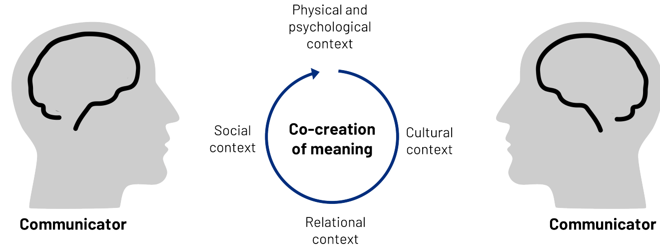

Figure 1.6: Transaction model of communication.

As the study of communication progressed, models expanded to account for more of the communication process. Many scholars view communication as more than a process that is used to carry on conversations and convey meaning. We don't send messages like computers, and we don't neatly alternate between the roles of sender and receiver as an interaction unfolds. We also can't consciously decide to stop communicating, because communication is more than sending and receiving messages. The transaction model differs from the transmission and interaction models in significant ways, including the conceptualization of communication, the role of sender and receiver, and the role of context (Barnlund, 1970).

The **transaction model of communication** describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts (Barnlund, 2013). In this model, we don't just communicate to exchange messages; we communicate to create relationships, form intercultural alliances, shape our self-concepts, and engage with others in dialogue to create communities. In short, we don't communicate about our realities; communication helps to construct our realities.

The roles of sender and receiver in the transaction model of communication differ significantly from the other models (Barnlund, 2013). Instead of labeling participants as senders and receivers, the people in a communication encounter are referred to as *communicators*. Unlike the interaction model, which suggests that participants alternate positions as sender and receiver, the transaction model suggests that we are simultaneously senders and receivers. For example, on a first date, as you send verbal messages about your interests and background, your date reacts nonverbally. You don't wait until you are done sending your verbal message to start receiving and decoding the nonverbal messages of your date. Instead, you are simultaneously sending your verbal message and receiving your date's nonverbal messages. This is an important addition to the model because it allows us to understand how we are able to adapt our communication—for example, a verbal message—in the middle of sending it based on the communication we are simultaneously receiving from our communication partner.

The transaction model also includes a more complex understanding of context. The interaction model portrays context as physical and psychological influences that enhance or impede communication. While these contexts are important, they focus on message transmission and reception. Since the transaction model of communication views communication as a force that shapes our realities before and after specific interactions occur, it must account for contextual influences outside of a single interaction. To do this, the transaction model considers how social, relational, and cultural contexts frame and influence our communication encounters.

Social context refers to the stated rules or unstated norms that guide communication. As we are socialized into our various communities, we learn rules and implicitly pick up on norms for communicating. Some common rules that influence social contexts include don't lie to people, don't interrupt people, don't pass people in line, greet people when they greet you, thank people when they pay you a compliment, and so on. Parents and teachers often explicitly convey these rules to their children or students. Rules may be stated over and over, and there may be punishment for not following them.

Norms are social conventions that we pick up on through observation, practice, and trial and error. We may not even know we are breaking a social norm until we notice people looking at us strangely or someone corrects or teases us. For example, as a new employee you may over- or underdress for the company's holiday party because you don't know the norm for formality. Although there probably isn't a stated rule about how to dress at the holiday party, you will notice your error without someone having to point it out, and you will likely not deviate from the norm again in order to save yourself any potential embarrassment. Even though breaking social norms doesn't result in the formal punishment that might be a consequence of breaking a social rule, the social awkwardness we feel when we violate social norms is usually enough to teach us that these norms are powerful even though they aren't made explicit like rules. Norms even have the power to override social rules in some situations. To go back to the examples of common social rules mentioned before, we may break the rule about not lying if the lie is meant to save someone from feeling hurt. We often interrupt close friends when we're having an exciting conversation, but we wouldn't be as likely to interrupt a professor while they are lecturing. Since norms and rules vary among people and cultures, relational and cultural contexts are also included in the transaction model in order to help us understand the multiple contexts that influence our communication.

Relational context includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). We communicate differently with someone we just met versus someone we've known for a long time. Initial interactions with people tend to be more highly scripted and governed by established norms and rules, but when we have an established relational context, we may be able to bend or break social norms and rules more easily. For example, you would likely follow social norms of politeness and attentiveness and might spend the whole day cleaning the house for the first time you invite your new neighbors to visit. Once the neighbors are in your house, you may also make them the center of your attention during their visit. If you end up becoming friends with your neighbors and establishing a relational context, you might not think as much about having everything cleaned and prepared or even giving them your whole attention during later visits. Since communication norms and rules also vary based on the type of relationship people have, relationship type is also included in relational context (Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998). For example, there are certain communication rules and norms that apply to a supervisor-supervisee relationship that don't apply to a brother-sister relationship and vice versa. Just as social norms and relational history influence how we communicate, so does culture.

Cultural context includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability (Chen, 2014). Whether we are aware of it or not, we all have multiple cultural identities that influence our communication. Some people, especially those with identities that have been historically marginalized, are regularly aware of how their cultural identities influence their communication and influence how others communicate with them. Conversely, people with identities that are dominant or in the majority may rarely, if ever, think about the role their cultural identities play in their communication.

1.3 Communication Principles

Taking this course will change how you view communication. Most people admit that communication is important, but it is often in the back of our minds or viewed as something that "just happens." Putting communication at the front of your mind and becoming more aware of how you communicate can be informative and have many positive effects. As we learn the principles of communication, you are encouraged to take note of aspects of communication that you haven't thought about before and begin to apply the principles of communication to various parts of your life.

Communication Is Integrated into All Parts of Our Lives

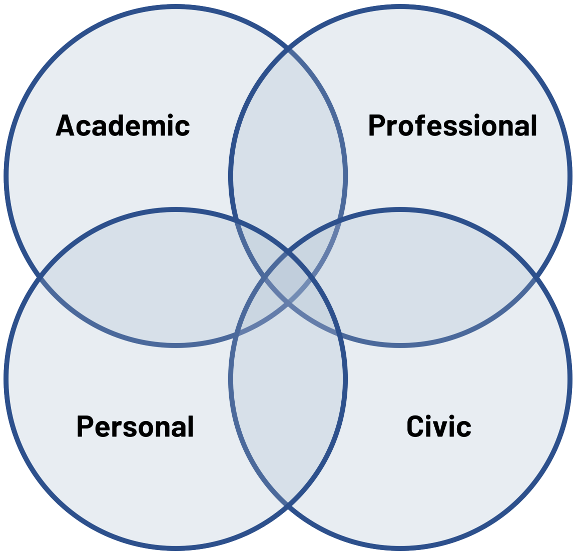

Figure 1.7: Communication is integrated and overlaps in all categories of life.

Communication has value in the real world and in our real lives. When we say *real*, we don't mean to imply that there is some part of our world or lives that is not real. Since communication is such a practical field of study, we use the word *real* to emphasize that what you're reading isn't just about theories and vocabulary or passing a test and giving a good speech. We also don't mean to imply that there is a divide between the classroom and the real world. The "real world" is whatever we are experiencing at any given moment. In order to explore how communication is integrated into all parts of our lives, we have divided up our lives into four spheres: academic, professional, personal, and civic. The boundaries and borders between these spheres are not solid, and there is much overlap. After all, much of what goes on in a classroom is present in a professional environment, and the classroom has long been seen as a place to prepare students to become active and responsible citizens in their civic lives. The philosophy behind this approach is called **integrative learning**, which encourages students to reflect on how the content they are learning connects to other classes they have taken or are taking, their professional goals, and their civic responsibilities (Huber & Hutchings, 2004).

Academic

It's probably not difficult to get you, as students in a communication class, to see the relevance of communication to your academic lives. At least during this semester, studying communication is important to earn a good grade in the class, right? Beyond the relevance to your grade in this class, try to make explicit connections between this course and courses you have taken before and are currently taking. Then, when you leave this class, connect the content in future classes back to what you learned here. If you can begin to see these connections now, you can build on the foundational communication skills you learn in here to become a more competent communicator, which will undoubtedly also benefit you as a student.

Personal

While many students know from personal experience and from the prevalence of communication counseling on television talk shows and in self-help books that communication forms, maintains, and ends our interpersonal relationships, they do not know the extent to which that occurs. While we do learn from experience, until we learn specific vocabulary and develop foundational knowledge of communication concepts and theories, we do not have the tools needed to make sense of these experiences. Just having a vocabulary to name the communication phenomena in our lives increases our ability to consciously alter our communication to achieve our goals, avoid miscommunication, and analyze and learn from our inevitable mistakes.

Civic

The connection between communication and our civic lives is a little more abstract and difficult for students to understand. Many younger people don't yet have a conception of a "civic" part of their lives because the academic, professional, and personal parts of their lives have so much more daily relevance. **Civic engagement** refers to working to make a difference in our communities by improving the quality of life of community members raising awareness about social, cultural, or political issues; or participating in a wide variety of political and nonpolitical processes (Ehrlich, 2000). The civic part of our lives is developed through engagement with the decision making that goes on in our society at the small-group, local, state, regional, national, or international level. Such involvement ranges from serving on a neighborhood advisory board to sending an e-mail to a US senator. Discussions and decisions that affect our communities happen around us all the time, but it takes time and effort to become a part of that process. Doing so, however, allows us to become a part of groups or causes that are meaningful to us, which enables us to work for the common good. This type of civic engagement is crucial to the functioning of a democratic society.

Communication Meets Needs

You hopefully now see that communication is far more than the transmission of information. The exchange of messages and information is important for many reasons, but it is not enough to meet the various needs we have as human beings. While the content of our communication may help us achieve certain physical and instrumental needs, it also feeds into our identities and relationships in ways that far exceed the content of what we say.

Physical Needs

Physical needs include needs that keep our bodies and minds functioning. Communication, which we most often associate with our brain, mouth, eyes, and ears, actually has many more connections to and effects on our physical body and well-being. At the most basic level, communication can alert others that our physical needs are not being met. Even babies cry when they are hungry or sick to alert their caregiver of these physical needs. Asking a friend if you can stay at their house because you got evicted or kicked out of your own place will help you meet your physical need for shelter. There are also strong ties between the social function of communication and our physical and psychological health. Human beings are social creatures, which makes communication important for our survival. In fact, prolonged isolation has been shown to severely damage a human (Williams & Zadro, 2001). Aside from surviving, communication skills can also help us thrive. People with good interpersonal communication skills are better able to adapt to stress and have less depression and anxiety (Hargie, 2011). Communication can also be therapeutic, which can lessen or prevent physical problems. A research study found that spouses of suicide or accidental death victims who did not communicate about the death with their friends were more likely to have health problems such as weight change and headaches than those who did talk with friends (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Satisfying physical needs is essential for our physical functioning and survival. But, in order to socially function and thrive, we must also meet instrumental, relational, and identity needs.

Instrumental Needs

Instrumental needs include needs that help us get things done in our day-to-day lives and achieve short- and long-term goals. We all have short- and long-term goals that we work on every day. Fulfilling these goals is an ongoing communicative task, which means we spend much of our time communicating for instrumental needs. Some common instrumental needs include influencing others, getting information we need, or getting support (Burleson, Metts, & Kirch, 2000). In short, communication that meets our instrumental needs helps us "get things done."

Relational Needs

Relational needs include needs that help us maintain social bonds and interpersonal relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Communicating to fill our instrumental needs helps us function on many levels, but communicating for relational needs helps us achieve the social relating that is an essential part of being human.

Communication meets our relational needs by giving us a tool through which to develop, maintain, and end relationships. In order to develop a relationship, we may use nonverbal communication to assess whether someone is interested in talking to us or not, then use verbal communication to strike up a conversation. Then, through the mutual process of self-disclosure, a relationship forms over time (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Once formed, we need to maintain a relationship, so we use communication to express our continued liking of someone. We can verbally say things like "You're such a great friend" or engage in behaviors that communicate our investment in the relationship, like organizing a birthday party. Although our relationships vary in terms of closeness and intimacy, all individuals have relational needs and all relationships require maintenance. Finally, communication or the lack of it helps us end relationships. We may communicate our deteriorating commitment to a relationship by avoiding communication with someone, verbally criticizing him or her, or explicitly ending a relationship. From spending time together, to checking in with relational partners by text, social media, or face-to-face, to celebrating accomplishments, to providing support during difficult times, communication forms the building blocks of our relationships.

Identity Needs

Identity needs include our need to present ourselves to others and be thought of in particular and desired ways. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself? Are you funny, smart, loyal, or quirky? Your answer isn't just based on who you think you are, since much of how we think of ourselves is based on our communication with other people. Our identity changes as we progress through life, but communication is the primary means of establishing our identity and fulfilling our identity needs. Communication allows us to present ourselves to others in particular ways. Just as many companies, celebrities, and politicians create a public image, we desire to present different faces in different contexts. The influential scholar Erving Goffman compared self-presentation to a performance and suggested we all perform different roles in different contexts (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, competent communicators can successfully manage how others perceive them by adapting to situations and contexts. A parent may perform the role of stern head of household, supportive shoulder to cry on, or hip and culturally aware friend based on the situation they are in with their child. A newly hired employee may initially perform the role of motivated and agreeable coworker but later perform more leadership behaviors after being promoted.

Communication Is a Process

Communication is a process that involves an interchange of verbal and/or nonverbal messages within a continuous and dynamic sequence of events (Hargie, 2011). When we refer to communication as a process, we imply that it doesn't have a distinct beginning and end or follow a predetermined sequence of events. It can be difficult to trace the origin of a communication encounter, since communication doesn't always follow a neat and discernible format, which makes studying communication interactions or phenomena difficult.

We have already learned, in the transaction model of communication, that we communicate using multiple channels and send and receive messages simultaneously. There are also messages and other stimuli around us that we never actually perceive because we can only attend to so much information at one time. The dynamic nature of communication allows us to examine some principles of communication that are related to its processual nature. Next, we will learn that communication messages vary in terms of their level of conscious thought and intention, communication is irreversible, and communication is unrepeatable.

Communication Is Guided by Culture and Context

As we learned earlier, context is a dynamic component of the communication process. Culture and context also influence how we perceive and define communication. Western culture tends to put more value on senders than receivers and on the content rather the context of a message. These cultural values are reflected in our definitions and models of communication (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). As we will learn later, cultures vary in terms of having a more individualistic or more collectivistic cultural orientation. The United States is considered an individualistic culture, where emphasis is put on individual expression and success. Japan is considered a collectivistic culture, where emphasis is put on group cohesion and harmony. These are strong cultural values that are embedded in how we learn to communicate (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). In many collectivistic cultures, there is more emphasis placed on silence and nonverbal context. Whether in the United States, Japan, or another country, people are socialized from birth to communication in culturally specific ways that vary by context. In this section we will discuss how communication is learned, the rules and norms that influence how we communicate, and the ethical implications of communication.

Communication Is Learned

Everyone is born with the capacity and ability to communicate, but everyone communicates differently. This is because much of communication is learned rather than innate. As we have already seen, communication patterns are relative to the context and culture in which one is communicating, and many cultures have distinct languages consisting of symbols.

A key principle of communication is that it is symbolic. Communication is symbolic in that the words that make up our language systems do not directly correspond to something in reality. Instead, they stand in for or symbolize something. The fact that communication varies so much among people, contexts, and cultures illustrates the principle that meaning is not inherent in the words we use. For example, let's say you go to France on vacation and see the word *poisson* on the menu. Unless you know how to read French, you will not know that the symbol is the same as the English symbol *fish*. Those two words don't look the same at all, yet they symbolize the same object. If you went by how the word looks alone, you might think that the French word for fish is more like the English word *poison* and avoid choosing that for your dinner. Putting a picture of a fish on a menu would definitely help a foreign tourist understand what they are ordering, since the picture is an actual representation of the object rather than a symbol for it.

All symbolic communication is learned, negotiated, and dynamic. We know that the letters *b-o-o-k* refer to a bound object with multiple written pages. We also know that the letters *t-r-u-c-k* refer to a vehicle with a bed in the back for hauling things. But if we learned in school that the letters *t-r-u-c-k* referred to a bound object with written pages and *b-o-o-k* referred to a vehicle with a bed in the back, then that would make just as much sense, because the letters don't actually refer to the object and the word itself only has the meaning that we assign to it.

We are all socialized into different languages, but we also speak different "languages" based on the situation we are in. For example, in some cultures it is considered inappropriate to talk about family or health issues in public, but it wouldn't be odd to overhear people in a small town grocery store in the United States talking about their children or their upcoming surgery. There are some communication patterns shared by very large numbers of people and some that are particular to a dyad—best friends, for example, who have their own inside terminology and expressions that wouldn't make sense to anyone else. These examples aren't on the same scale as differing languages, but they still indicate that communication is learned. They also illustrate how rules and norms influence how we communicate.

Communication Has Ethical Implications

Figure 1.8: Aristotle.

Another culturally and situationally relative principle of communication is the fact that communication has ethical implications. **Communication ethics** deals with the process of negotiating and reflecting on our actions and communication regarding what we believe to be right and wrong. Aristotle said, "In the arena of human life the honors and rewards fall to those who show their good qualities in action" (Pearson, Child, Mattern, & Kahl, 2006). Aristotle focuses on actions, which is an important part of communication ethics. While ethics has been studied as a part of philosophy since the time of Aristotle, only more recently has it become applied. In communication ethics, we are more concerned with the decisions people make about what is right and wrong than the systems, philosophies, or religions that inform those decisions. Much of ethics is gray area. Although we talk about making decisions in terms of what is right and what is wrong, the choice is rarely that simple. Aristotle goes on to say that we should act "to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way."

Communication has broad ethical implications. In this course, we will discuss the importance of ethical listening, how to avoid plagiarism, how to present evidence ethically, and how to apply ethical standards to mass media and social media. These are just a few examples of how communication and ethics will be discussed in this book, but hopefully you can already see that communication ethics is integrated into academic, professional, personal, and civic contexts.

1.4 Communication Competence

Communication competence has become a focus in higher education over the past couple of decades as educational policy makers and advocates have stressed a "back to basics" mentality (McCroskey, 1984). The ability to communicate effectively is often included as a primary undergraduate learning goal along with other key skills like writing, critical thinking, and problem solving. You likely haven't heard professors or university administrators use the term *communication competence*, but as we learn more about it in this section, you will see how communication competence can benefit you in many aspects of your life.

Defining Competence

We have already defined *communication*, and you probably know that to be competent at something means you know what you're doing. When we combine these terms, we get the following definition: **communication competence** refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts (Cooley & Roach, 1984). To better understand this definition, let's break apart its components.

The first part of the definition we will unpack deals with *knowledge*. The cognitive elements of competence include knowing how to do something and understanding why things are done the way they are (Hargie, 2011). People can develop cognitive competence by observing and evaluating the actions of others. Cognitive competence can also be developed through instruction. As you build a repertoire of communication knowledge based on your experiential and classroom knowledge, you will also be developing behavioral competence.

The second part of the definition of communication competence that we will unpack is *the ability to use*. Individual factors affect our ability to do anything. Not everyone has the same athletic, musical, or intellectual ability. At the individual level, a person's physiological and psychological characteristics affect competence. For example, you might know strategies for being an effective speaker, but public speaking anxiety that kicks in when you get in front of the audience may prevent you from fully putting that knowledge into practice.

The third part of the definition we will unpack is ability to *adapt* to *various contexts*. What is competent or not varies based on social and cultural context, which makes it impossible to have only one standard for what counts as communication competence (Cooley & Roach, 1984). Social variables such as status and power affect competence. In a social situation where one person—say, a supervisor—has more power than another—for example, his or her employee—then the supervisor is typically the one who sets the standard for competence. Cultural variables such as race and nationality also affect competence. A Taiwanese woman who speaks English as her second language may be praised for her competence in the English language in her home country but be viewed as less competent in the United States because of her accent. In summary, although we have a clear definition of communication competence, there are not definitions for how to be competent in any given situation, since competence varies at the individual, social, and cultural level.

Despite the fact that no guidelines for or definitions of competence will be applicable in all situations, the National Communication Association (NCA) has identified many aspects of competence related to communication. The primary focus has been on competencies related to speaking and listening, and the NCA notes that developing communication competence in these areas will help people in academic, professional, and civic contexts (Morreale, Rubin, & Jones, 1998). To help colleges and universities develop curriculum and instruction strategies to prepare students, the NCA has defined what students should be able to do in terms of speaking and listening competencies by the time they graduate from college:

1. State ideas clearly.
2. Communicate ethically.
3. Recognize when it is appropriate to communicate.
4. Identify their communication goals.
5. Select the most appropriate and effective medium for communicating.
6. Demonstrate credibility.
7. Identify and manage misunderstandings.
8. Manage conflict.
9. Be open-minded about another's point of view.
10. Listen attentively.

These are just some of the competencies the NCA identified as important for college graduates. While these are skill focused rather than interpersonally or culturally focused, they provide a concrete way to assess your own speaking competencies and to prepare yourself for professional speaking and listening, which is often skill driven.

Developing Competence

Knowing the dimensions of competence is an important first step toward developing competence. Everyone has some experience with and knowledge about communication. After all, you've spent many years explicitly and implicitly learning to communicate. For example, we are explicitly taught the verbal codes we use to communicate. On the other hand, although there are numerous rules and norms associated with nonverbal communication, we rarely receive explicit instruction on how to do it. Instead, we learn by observing others and through trial and error with our own nonverbal communication. Competence obviously involves verbal and nonverbal elements, but it also applies to many situations and contexts. Communication competence is needed in order to understand communication ethics, to develop cultural awareness, to use computer-mediated communication, and to think critically. Competence involves knowledge, motivation, and skills. It's not enough to know what good communication consists of; you must also have the motivation to reflect on and better your communication and the skills needed to do so.

One way to progress toward communication competence is to become a more mindful communicator. A mindful communicator actively and fluidly processes information, is sensitive to communication contexts and multiple perspectives, and is able to adapt to novel communication situations (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Becoming a more mindful communicator has many benefits, including achieving communication goals, detecting deception, avoiding stereotypes, and reducing conflict. Whether or not we achieve our day-to-day communication goals depends on our communication competence. Various communication behaviors can signal that we are communicating mindfully. For example, asking an employee to paraphrase their understanding of the instructions you just gave them shows that you are aware that verbal messages are not always clear, that people do not always listen actively, and that people often do not speak up when they are unsure of instructions for fear of appearing incompetent or embarrassing themselves. Some communication behaviors indicate that we are not communicating mindfully, such as withdrawing from a romantic partner or engaging in passive-aggressive behavior during a period of interpersonal conflict. Most of us know that such behaviors lead to predictable and avoidable conflict cycles, yet we are all guilty of them. Our tendency to assume that people are telling us the truth can also lead to negative results. Therefore, a certain amount of tentativeness and mindful monitoring of a person's nonverbal and verbal communication can help us detect deception. However, this is not the same thing as chronic suspicion, which would not indicate communication competence.

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Figure 1.3: Instagram is a form of mass communication. Claudio Schwarz. 2020. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/vj3n0tiX85Y

Figure 1.4: The transmission model of communication. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0. Includes Brain by Delwar Hossain from NounProject (Noun Project license).

Figure 1.5: The interaction model of communication. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0. Includes Brain by Delwar Hossain from NounProject (Noun Project license).

Figure 1.6: Transaction model of communication. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0. Includes Brain by Delwar Hossain from NounProject (Noun Project license).

Figure 1.7: Communication is integrated and overlaps in all categories of life. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 1.8: Aristotle. Sculpture by Lysippos; Photography by Jastrow. Art: 330-310 BC; Photograph: 2006. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aristotle_Altemps_Inv8575.jpg

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2.

COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION

Introduction

Think back to the first day of classes. Did you plan for what you were going to wear? Did you get the typical school supplies together? Did you try to find your classrooms ahead of time or look for the syllabus online? Did you look up your professors on an online professor evaluation site? Based on your answers to these questions, your professors could form an impression of who you are as a student. However, would that perception be accurate? Would it match up with how you see yourself as a student? Moreover, perception, of course, is a two-way street. You also formed impressions about your professors based on their appearance, dress, organization, intelligence, and approachability. The impressions that both teacher and student make on the first day help set the tone for the rest of the semester.

As we go through our daily lives we perceive all sorts of people and objects, and we often make sense of these perceptions by using previous experiences to help filter and organize the information we take in (Broadbent, 2013). Sometimes we encounter new or contradictory information that changes the way we think about a person, group, or object. The perceptions that we make of others and that others make of us affect how we communicate and act. We will learn about the perception process, how we perceive others, how we perceive and present ourselves, and how we can improve our perceptions.

2.1 Perception Process

Perception is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information (Wertz, 1982). This process includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filters. These stimuli are organized into our existing structures and patterns and interpreted based on previous experiences. Although perception is a largely cognitive and psychological process, how we perceive the people and objects around us affects our communication. We respond differently to an object or person that we perceive favorably than we do to something we find unfavorable (Wertz, 1982). How do we filter through the mass amounts of incoming information, organize it, and make meaning from what makes it through our perceptual filters and into our social realities?

Selecting Information

We take in information through all five of our senses, but our perceptual field (the world around us) includes so many stimuli that it is impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all. As information comes in through our senses, various factors influence what actually continues through the perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). **Selecting** is the first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information. Think about how, out of many other possible stimuli to pay attention to, you may hear a familiar voice in the hallway, see a pair of shoes you want to buy from across the mall, or smell something cooking for dinner when you get home from work. We quickly cut through and push to the background all kinds of sights, smells, sounds, and other stimuli, but how do we decide what to select and what to leave out?

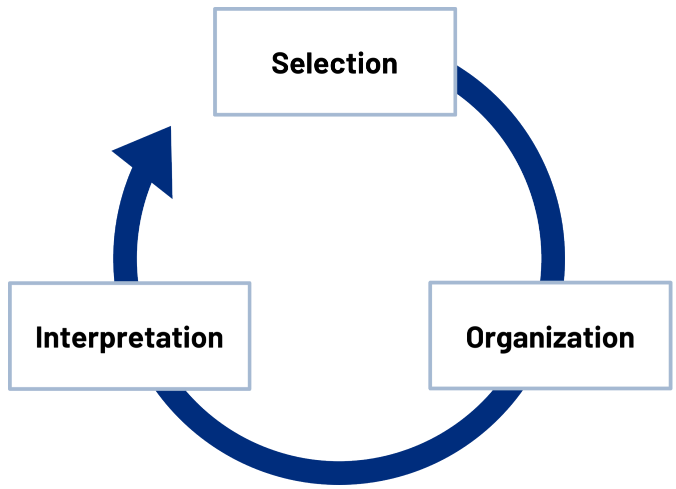

Figure 2.1: The perception process.

We tend to pay attention to information that is salient. **Salience** is the degree to which something attracts our attention in a particular context. The thing attracting our attention can be abstract, like a concept, or concrete, like an object. For example, a person's identity as a Native American may become salient when they are protesting at the Columbus Day parade in Denver, Colorado. A bright flashlight shining in your face while camping at night is sure to be salient. The degree of salience depends on three features (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). We tend to find salient things that are visually or aurally stimulating and things that meet our needs or interests. Lastly, expectations affect what we find salient.

Visual and Aural Stimulation

It is probably not surprising to learn that visually and/or aurally stimulating things become salient in our perceptual field and get our attention (Wertz, 1982). Creatures ranging from fish to hummingbirds are attracted to things like silver spinners on fishing poles or red and yellow bird feeders. Having our senses stimulated is not always a positive thing though. Think about the couple that will not stop talking during the movie or the upstairs neighbor whose subwoofer shakes your ceiling at night. In short, stimuli can be attention getting in a productive or distracting way. As communicators, we can use this knowledge to our benefit by minimizing distractions when we have something important to say. It is probably better to have a serious conversation with a significant other in a quiet place rather than a crowded food court.

Needs and Interests

We tend to pay attention to information that we perceive to meet our needs or interests in some way. This type of selective attention can help us meet instrumental needs and get things done. When you need to speak with a financial aid officer about your scholarships and loans, you sit in the waiting room and listen for your name to be called. Paying close attention to whose name is called means you can be ready to start your meeting and get your business handled. When we do not think certain messages meet our needs, stimuli that would normally get our attention may be completely lost. Imagine you are in the grocery store and you hear someone say your name. You turn around, only to hear that person say, "Finally! I said your name three times. I thought you forgot who I was!" A few seconds before, when you were focused on figuring out which kind of orange juice to get, you were attending to the various pulp options to the point that you tuned other stimuli out, even something as familiar as the sound of someone calling your name.

We also find salient information that interests us. Of course, many times, stimuli that meet our needs are also interesting, but it is worth discussing these two items separately because sometimes we find things interesting that do not necessarily meet our needs (Wertz, 1982). We have all been sucked into a television show, video game, or random project and paid attention to that at the expense of something that actually meets our needs (like cleaning, or spending time with a significant other). Paying attention to things that interest us but do not meet specific needs seems like the basic formula for procrastination with which we are all familiar.

Expectations

The relationship between salience and expectations is a little more complex. We can find expected things salient and find things that are unexpected salient (Wertz, 1982). While this may sound confusing, a couple examples should illustrate this point. If you are expecting a package to be delivered, you might notice the slightest noise of a truck engine or someone's footsteps approaching your front door. Since we expect something to happen, we may be extra tuned in to clues that it is coming. In terms of the unexpected, if you have a shy and soft-spoken friend who you overhear raising the volume and pitch of his voice while talking to another friend, you may pick up on that and assume that something out of the ordinary is going on. For something unexpected to become salient, it has to reach a certain threshold of difference. If you walked into your regular class and there were one or two more students there than normal, you may not even notice. If you walked into your class and there was someone dressed up as a wizard, you would probably notice. Therefore, if we expect to experience something out of the routine, like a package delivery, we will find stimuli related to that expectation salient. If we experience something that we were not expecting and that is significantly different from our routine experiences, then we will likely find it salient. We can also apply this concept to our communication.

Organizing Information

Organizing is the second part of the perception process, in which we sort and categorize information that we perceive based on innate and learned cognitive patterns. Three ways we sort things into patterns are by using proximity, similarity, and difference (Coren & Girgus, 1980). In terms of proximity, we tend to think that things that are close together go together. For example, have you ever been waiting to be helped in a business and the clerk assumes that you and the person standing beside you are together? The slightly awkward moment usually ends when you and the other person in line look at each other, then back at the clerk, and one of you explains that you are not together. Even though you may have never met that other person in your life, the clerk used a basic perceptual organizing cue to group you together because you were standing in proximity to one another.

We also group things together based on *similarity*. We tend to think similar-looking or similar-acting things belong together (Ma, 2012). We also organize information that we take in based on *difference*. In this case, we assume that the item that looks or acts different from the rest does not belong with the group. Perceptual errors involving people and assumptions of difference can be especially awkward, if not offensive.

These strategies for organizing information are so common that they are built into how we teach our children basic skills and how we function in our daily lives (Ma, 2012). We probably all had to look at pictures in grade school and determine which things went together and which thing did not belong. If you think of the literal act of organizing something, like your desk at home or work, we follow these same strategies. If you have a bunch of papers and mail on the top of your desk, you will likely sort papers into separate piles for separate classes or put bills in a separate place than personal mail. You may have one drawer for pens, pencils, and other supplies and another drawer for files. In this case, you are grouping items based on similarities and differences. You may also group things based on proximity, for example, by putting financial items like your checkbook, a calculator, and your pay stubs in one area so you can update your budget efficiently. In summary, we simplify information and look for patterns to help us more efficiently communicate and get through life.

Interpreting Information

Although selecting and organizing incoming stimuli happens very quickly, and sometimes without much conscious thought, interpretation can be a much more deliberate and conscious step in the perception process (Vannuscorps & Caramazza, 2016). **Interpretation** is the third part of the perception process, in which we assign meaning to our experiences using mental structures known as schemata. **Schemata** are like databases of stored, related information that we use to interpret new experiences. We all have fairly complicated schemata that have developed over time as small units of information combine to make information that is more complex.

We have an overall schema about how to interpret experiences with teachers and classmates. This schema started developing before we even went to preschool based on things that parents, peers, and the media told us about school. For example, you learned that certain symbols and objects like an apple, a ruler, a calculator, and a notebook are associated with being a student or teacher. You learned new concepts like grades and recess, and you engaged in new practices like doing homework, studying, and taking tests. You also formed new relationships with teachers, administrators, and classmates. As you progressed through your education, your schema adapted to the changing environment. How smooth or troubling schema reevaluation and revision is varies from situation to situation and person to person. For example, some students, when faced with new expectations for behavior and academic engagement, adapt their schema relatively easily as they move from elementary, to middle, to high school, and on to college. Other students do not adapt as easily and holding onto their old schema creates problems as they try to interpret new information through old, incompatible schema.

It is important to be aware of schemata because our interpretations affect our behavior (Rumelhart, 2017). For example, if you are doing a group project for class and you perceive a group member to be shy based on your schema of how shy people communicate, you may avoid giving him presentation responsibilities in your group project because you do not think shy people make good public speakers. Schemata also guide our interactions, providing a script for our behaviors. We know, in general, how to act and communicate in a waiting room, in a classroom, on a first date, and on a game show. Even a person who has never been on a game show can develop a schema for how to act in that environment by watching *The Price Is Right*, for example. People go to great lengths to make shirts with clever sayings or act enthusiastically in hopes of being picked to be a part of the studio audience and become a contestant on the show.

Figure 2.2: Women dress in clever t-shirts in hopes of being picked for The Price is Right.

2.2 Perceiving Others

Are you a good judge of character? How quickly can you "size someone up?" Interestingly, research shows that many people are surprisingly accurate at predicting how an interaction with someone will unfold based on initial impressions. Researchers investigated the ability of people to make a judgment about a person's competence after as little as 100 milliseconds of exposure to politicians' faces. Even more surprising is that people's judgments of competence, after exposure to two candidates for senate elections, accurately predicted election outcomes (Ballew II & Todorov, 2007). In short, after only minimal exposure to a candidate's facial expressions, people made judgments about the person's competence, and those candidates judged more competent were people who actually won elections! As you read this section, keep in mind that these principles apply to how you perceive others and to how others perceive you. Just as others make impressions on us, we make impressions on others.

Attribution and Interpretation

You probably have a family member, friend, or coworker with whom you have ideological or political differences. When conversations and inevitable disagreements occur, you may view this person as "pushing your buttons" if you are invested in the issue being debated, or you may view the person as "on their soapbox" if you are not invested. In either case, your existing perceptions of the other person were probably reinforced after your conversation. You may leave the conversation thinking, "She is never going to wake up and see how ignorant she is! I don't know why I even bother trying to talk to her!" Similar situations occur regularly. Some key psychological processes play into how we perceive others' behaviors. By examining these processes, attribution in particular, we can see how our communication with others is affected by the explanations we create for others' behavior. In addition, we will learn some common errors that we make in the attribution process that regularly lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

Attribution

In most interactions, we are constantly running an attribution script in our minds, which essentially tries to come up with explanations for what is happening (Crittenden, 1983). Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my officemate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others' behaviors to internal or external factors. Internal attributions connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. External attributions connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors. Attributions are important to consider because the explanations we reach are influenced by the behaviors of other people (Crittenden, 1983). Imagine that Gloria and Jerry are dating. One day, Jerry gets frustrated and raises his voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change.

Conversely, Gloria may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Jerry's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Gloria may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Jerry has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed." This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.

One of the most common perceptual errors is the fundamental attribution error, which refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980). If you Google some clips from the reality television show Parking Wars, you will see the ire that people often direct at parking enforcement officers. In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

Perceptual errors can also be biased, and in the case of the self-serving bias, the error works out in our favor (Shepperd, Malone, & Sweeny, 2008). Just as we tend to attribute others' behaviors to internal rather than external causes, we do the same for ourselves, especially when our behaviors have led to something successful or positive. When our behaviors lead to failure or something negative, we tend to attribute the cause to external factors. Thus, the **self-serving bias** is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control (Shepperd, Malone, & Sweeney, 2008). When we look at the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias together, we can see that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than another person, or at least less personally.

Physical and Environmental Influences on Perception

We make first impressions based on a variety of factors, including physical and environmental characteristics. In terms of physical characteristics, style of dress and grooming are important, especially in professional contexts. We have general schema regarding how to dress and groom for various situations ranging from formal, to business casual, to casual, to lounging around the house.

You would likely be able to offer some descriptors of how a person would look and act from the following categories: a Goth person, a preppie, a jock, a fashionista, a hipster. We form the schema associated with these various cliques or styles through personal experience and exposure to media representations of these groups. Different professions also have schema for appearance and dress. Imagine a doctor, mechanic, congressperson, exotic dancer, or mail carrier. Each group has clothing and personal styles that create and fit into general patterns. Of course, the mental picture we have of any of the examples above is not going to be representative of the whole group, meaning that stereotypical thinking often exists within our schema.

Culture, Personality, and Perception

Our cultural identities and our personalities affect our perceptions. Sometimes we are conscious of the effects and sometimes we are not. In either case, we have a tendency to favor others who exhibit cultural or personality traits that match up with our own. This tendency is so strong that is often leads us to assume that people we like are more similar to us than they actually are. Knowing more about how these forces influence our perceptions can help us become more aware of and competent in regards to the impressions we form of others.

Culture

Race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, nationality, and age all affect the perceptions that we make. Our cultural identities influence the schemata through which we interpret what we perceive (Schwartz, 2020). As we become socialized into various cultural identities, we internalize beliefs, attitudes, and values shared by others in our cultural group. Schemata held by members of a cultural identity group have similarities, but schemata held by different cultural groups may vary greatly. Until we learn how other cultural groups perceive their world, we will likely have a narrow or naïve view of the world and assume that others see things the way we do. Exposing yourself to and experiencing cultural differences in perspective does not mean that you have to change your schema to match another cultural group's schema. Instead, it may offer you a chance to understand better why and how your schemata were constructed the way they were.

As we have learned, perception starts with information that comes in through our senses (Macpherson, 2011). Our culture influences how we perceive even basic sensory information. The following list illustrates this:

- **Sight.** People in different cultures "read" art in different ways, differing in terms of where they start to look at an image and the types of information they perceive and process.
- **Sound.** "Atonal" music in some Asian cultures is unpleasing; it is uncomfortable to people who are not taught that these combinations of sounds are pleasing.
- **Touch.** In some cultures, it would be very offensive for a man to touch—even tap on the shoulder—a woman who is not a relative.
- **Taste.** Tastes for foods vary greatly around the world. "Stinky tofu," which is a favorite snack of people in Taipei, Taiwan's famous night market, would likely be very off-putting in terms

of taste and smell to many foreign tourists.

- **Smell.** While Americans spend considerable effort to mask natural body odor (which we typically find unpleasant) with soaps, sprays, and lotions, some other cultures would not find unpleasant or even notice what we consider "b.o." Those same cultures may find an American's "clean" (soapy, perfumed, deodorized) smell unpleasant.

Personality

Potential employers often conduct "employment verifications" during which they ask general questions about the applicant. While they may ask a few questions about intellectual ability or academic performance, they typically ask questions that try to create a personality profile of the applicant. They want to know what kind of leader, coworker, and person he or she is. This is a smart move on their part, because our personalities greatly influence how we see ourselves in the world and how we perceive and interact with others.

Personality refers to a person's general way of thinking, feeling, and behaving based on underlying motivations and impulses (McCornack, 2007). These underlying motivations and impulses form our personality traits. Personality traits are "underlying," but they are fairly enduring once a person reaches adulthood. That is not to say that people's personalities do not change, but major changes in personality are not common unless they result from some form of trauma. Although personality scholars believe there are thousands of personalities, they all comprise some combination of the same few traits. Much research has been done on personality traits, and the "Big Five" that are most commonly discussed are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness (McCrea, 2001). These five traits appear to be representative of personalities across cultures.

The Big Five Personality Traits

Figure 2.3: The big 5 personality traits.

- **Extraversion.** Refers to a person's interest in interacting with others. People with high extraversion are sociable and often called "extroverts." People with low extraversion, often called "introverts," are less sociable.
- **Agreeableness.** Refers to a person's level of trustworthiness and friendliness. People with high agreeableness are cooperative and likable. People with low agreeableness are suspicious of others and sometimes aggressive. This makes it more difficult for people to find them pleasant to be with.
- **Conscientiousness.** Refers to a person's level of self-organization and motivation. People with high conscientiousness are methodical, motivated, and dependable. People with low conscientiousness are less focused, careful, and dependable.
- **Neuroticism.** Refers to a person's level of negative thoughts regarding himself or herself. People high in neuroticism are insecure, experience emotional distress, and may be perceived as unstable. People low in neuroticism are more relaxed, have less emotional swings, and are perceived as more stable.
- **Openness.** Refers to a person's willingness to consider new ideas and perspectives. People high in openness are creative and are perceived as open minded. People low in openness are more rigid, set in their thinking, and are perceived as "set in their ways."

2.3 Perceiving and Presenting Self

Just as our perception of others affects how we communicate, so does our perception of ourselves. But what influences our self-perception? How much of our self is a product of our own making? How much of it is constructed based on how others react to us? How do we present ourselves to others in ways that maintain our sense of self or challenge how others see us? We will begin to answer these questions in this section as we explore self-concept, self-esteem, and self-presentation.

Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the overall idea of who a person thinks he or she is (Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). If I said, "Tell me who you are," your answers would be clues as to how you see yourself, your self-concept. Each person has an overall self-concept that might be encapsulated in a short list of overarching characteristics that he or she finds important. However, each person's self-concept is also influenced by context, meaning we think differently about ourselves depending on the situation. In some situations, personal characteristics, such as our abilities, personality, and other distinguishing features, will best describe who we are. You might consider yourself laid back, traditional, funny, open minded, or driven, or you might label yourself a leader or a thrill seeker. In other situations, our self-concept may be tied to group or cultural membership. For example, you might consider yourself a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, a Southerner, or a member of the track team.

We also form our self-concept through our interactions with others and their reactions to us. The concept of the **looking glass self** explains that we see ourselves reflected in other people's reactions to us and then form our self-concept based on how we believe other people see us (Cooley, 1902; Yeung & Martin, 2003). This reflective process of building our self-concept is based on what other people have actually said, such as "You're a good listener," and other people's actions, such as coming to you for advice. These thoughts evoke emotional responses that feed into our self-concept. For example, you may think, "I'm glad that people can count on me to listen to their problems."

We also develop our self-concept through comparisons to other people. **Social comparison theory** states that we describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people. Social comparisons are based on two dimensions: superiority/inferiority and similarity/difference (Hargie, 2011). In terms of superiority and inferiority, we evaluate characteristics like attractiveness, intelligence, athletic ability, and so on. For example, you may judge yourself more intelligent than your brother or less athletic than your best friend, and these judgments are incorporated into your self-concept. This process of comparison and evaluation is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can have negative consequences if our reference group is not appropriate. Reference groups are the groups we use for social comparison, and they typically change based on what we are evaluating. In terms of athletic ability, many people choose unreasonable reference groups with which to engage in social comparison. If a man wants to get into better shape and starts an exercise routine, he may be discouraged by his difficulty keeping up with the aerobics instructor or running partner and judge himself as inferior, which could negatively affect his self-concept. Using as a reference group people who have only recently started a fitness program but have shown progress could help maintain a more accurate and hopefully positive self-concept.

We also engage in social comparison based on similarity and difference. Since self-concept is context specific, similarity may be desirable in some situations and difference more desirable in others. Factors like age and personality may influence whether or not we want to fit in or stand out. Although we compare ourselves to others throughout our lives, adolescent and teen years usually bring new pressure to be similar to or different from particular reference groups. Think of all the cliques in high school. Think about how people voluntarily and involuntarily broke off into groups based on popularity, interest, culture, or grade level. Some kids in your high school probably wanted to fit in with and be similar to other people in the marching band but be different from the football players. Conversely, athletes were probably more apt to compare themselves, in terms of similar athletic ability, to other athletes rather than kids in show choir. Nevertheless, social comparison can be complicated by perceptual influences. As we learned earlier, we organize information based on similarity and difference, but these patterns do not always hold true. Even though students involved in athletics and students involved in arts may seem very different, a dancer or singer may also be very athletic, perhaps even more so than a member of the football team. As with other aspects of perception, there are positive and negative consequences of social comparison.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept. While self-concept is a broad description of the self, self-esteem is a more specifically an evaluation of the self (Byrne, 1996). If I again prompted you to "Tell me who you are," and then asked you to evaluate (label as good/bad, positive/negative, desirable/undesirable) each of the things you listed about yourself, I would get clues about your self-esteem. Like self-concept, self-esteem has general and specific elements. Generally, some people are more likely to evaluate themselves positively while others are more likely to evaluate themselves negatively (Brockner, 1988). More specifically, our self-esteem varies across our life span and across contexts.

2.4 Improving Perception

So far, we have learned about the perception process and how we perceive others and ourselves. Now we will turn to a discussion of how to improve our perception. Our self-perception can be improved by becoming aware of how schema, socializing forces, self-fulfilling prophecies, and negative patterns of thinking can distort our ability to describe and evaluate ourselves. How we perceive others can be improved by developing better listening and empathetic skills, becoming aware of stereotypes and prejudice, developing self-awareness through self-reflection, and engaging in perception checking.

Improving Self-Perception

Our self-perceptions can and do change (Bem, 1972). Recall that we have an overall self-concept and self-esteem that are relatively stable. We also have context-specific self-perceptions.

Context-specific self-perceptions vary depending on the person with whom we are interacting, our emotional state, and the subject matter being discussed. Becoming aware of the process of self-perception and the various components of our self-concept will help you understand and improve your self-perceptions.

Since self-concept and self-esteem are so subjective and personal, it would be inaccurate to say that someone's self-concept is "right" or "wrong." Instead, we can identify negative and positive aspects of self-perceptions as well as discuss common barriers to forming accurate and positive self-perceptions. We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves that are constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of yourself changed when you moved from high school to college. Similarly, other people's self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job.

Let's now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

Avoid Reliance on Rigid Schema

As we learned earlier, schemata are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as scripts, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need to be incorporated into the schema. Therefore, it is important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how when you are driving a familiar route you sometimes fall under "highway hypnosis." Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you have already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

Beware of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

Self-fulfilling prophecies are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyll et al., 2010). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student does not attend class regularly and does not listen actively when she does attend. Because of these behaviors, the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces her original belief that the instructor was not a good teacher.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication.

This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational belief.

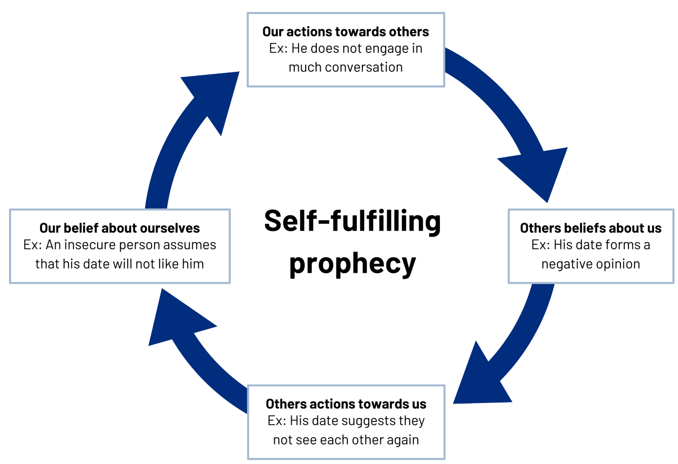

Figure 2.4: Self-fulfilling prophecy example.

Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date, he does not engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date would not like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be used successfully to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking. It has also been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinson, Logel, Shepherd, & Zanna, 2011).

Overcoming Barriers to Perceiving Others

Many barriers prevent us from competently perceiving others. While some are more difficult to overcome than others are, they can all be addressed by raising our awareness of the influences around us and committing to monitoring, reflecting on, and changing some of our communication habits. Various filters and blinders (lazy listening skills, lack of empathy, or stereotypes and prejudice) influence how we perceive and respond to others.

Beware of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group. Stereotypes are schemata that are taken too far, as they reduce and ignore a person's individuality and the diversity present within a larger group of people. Stereotypes can be based on cultural identities, physical appearance, behavior, speech, beliefs, and values, among other things, and are often caused by a lack of information about the target person or group (Guyll et al., 2010). Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

While the negative effects of stereotypes are straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences. For example, the "model minority" stereotype has been applied to some Asian cultures in the United States. Seemingly positive stereotypes of Asian Americans as hardworking, intelligent, and willing to adapt to "mainstream" culture are not always received as positive and can lead some people within these communities to feel objectified, ignored, or overlooked.

Stereotypes can also lead to double standards that point to larger cultural and social inequalities. There are many more words to describe a sexually active female than a male, and the words used for females are disproportionately negative, while those used for males are more positive. Since stereotypes are generally based on a lack of information, we must take it upon ourselves to gain exposure to new kinds of information and people, which will likely require us to get out of our comfort zones. When we do meet people, we should base the impressions we make on describable behavior rather than inferred or secondhand information. When stereotypes negatively influence our overall feelings and attitudes about a person or group, prejudiced thinking results.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities (Allport, Clark, & Pettigrew, 1954). Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, response by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice. Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease that affected only "deviants" and therefore did not get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudge based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

Engage in Self-Reflection

A good way to improve your perceptions and increase your communication competence in general is to engage in self-reflection. If a communication encounter does not go well and you want to know why, your self-reflection will be much more useful if you are aware of and can recount your thoughts and actions.

Self-reflection can also help us increase our cultural awareness. Our thought process regarding culture is often "other focused," meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage "know thyself" is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because our taken-for-granted or deeply held beliefs and values may become less certain when we see the multiple perspectives that exist.

We can also become more aware of how our self-concepts influence how we perceive others. We often hold other people to the standards we hold for ourselves or assume that their self-concept should be consistent with our own. For example, if you consider yourself a neat person and think that sloppiness in your personal appearance would show that you are unmotivated, rude, and lazy, then you are likely to think the same of a person you judge to have a sloppy appearance. So asking questions like "Is my impression based on how this person wants to be, or how I think this person should want to be?" can lead to enlightening moments of self-reflection. Asking questions in general about the perceptions you are making is an integral part of perception checking.

Checking Perception

Perception checking is a strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication (Hansen, Resnick, & Galea, 2002). We can use some internal and external strategies. In terms of internal strategies, review the various influences on perception that we have learned about and always be willing to ask yourself, “What is influencing the perceptions I am making right now?” Even being aware of what influences are acting on our perceptions makes us more aware of what is happening in the perception process. In terms of external strategies, we can use other people to help verify our perceptions.

The cautionary adage “Things aren’t always as they appear” is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it is a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation. However, not all situations allow us the chance to verify our perceptions. Preventable crimes have been committed because people who saw something suspicious did not report it even though they had a bad feeling about it. Of course, we have to walk a line between being reactionary and being too cautious, which is difficult to manage. We are ethically and (sometimes) legally required to report someone to the police who is harming himself or herself or others, but sometimes the circumstances are much more uncertain.

References

Figures

Figure 2.1: The perception process. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.2: Women dress in clever t-shirts in hopes of being picked for The Price is Right. Do512. 2012. CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. https://flic.kr/p/ddHE4M

Figure 2.3: The big 5 personality traits. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 2.4: Self-fulfilling prophecy example. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Section 2.1

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3. LANGUAGE AND MEANING

Introduction

The relationship between language and meaning is not a straightforward one. One reason for this complicated relationship is the limitlessness of modern language systems like English (Crystal, 2005). Language is productive in the sense that there are an infinite number of utterances we can make by connecting existing words in new ways. In addition, there is no limit to a language's vocabulary, as new words are coined daily. Of course, words aren't the only things we need to communicate, and although verbal and nonverbal communication are closely related in terms of how we make meaning, nonverbal communication is not productive and limitless. Although we can only make a few hundred physical signs, we have about a million words in the English language. So with all this possibility, how does communication generate meaning?

We arrive at meaning through the interaction between our nervous and sensory systems and some stimulus outside of them. It is here, between what the communication models labeled as encoding and decoding, that meaning is generated as sensory information is interpreted. The indirect and sometimes complicated relationship between language and meaning can lead to confusion, frustration, or even humor. We may even experience a little of all three, when we stop to think about how there are some twenty-five definitions available to tell us the meaning of word *meaning*! (Crystal, 2005) Since language and symbols are the primary vehicle for our communication, it is important that we not take the components of our verbal communication for granted.

3.1 Language is Symbolic

Our language system is primarily made up of symbols. A **symbol** is something that stands in for or represents something else. Symbols can be communicated verbally (speaking the word *hello*), in writing (putting the letters *H-E-L-L-O* together), or nonverbally (waving your hand back and forth). In any case, the symbols we use stand in for something else, like a physical object or an idea, they do not actually correspond to the thing being referenced in any direct way.

The symbols we use combine to form language systems or codes. **Codes** are culturally agreed on and ever-changing systems of symbols that help us organize, understand, and generate meaning (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). There are about 6,000 language codes used in the world, and around 40 percent of those (2,400) are only spoken and do not have a written version (Crystal, 2005).

The symbolic nature of our communication is a quality unique to humans. Since the words we use do not have to correspond directly to a "thing" in our "reality," we can communicate in abstractions. This property of language is called **displacement**. It refers to our ability to talk about events that are removed in space or time from a speaker and situation (Crystal, 2005).

For example, the word *calculate* comes from the Latin word *calculus*, which means "pebble." However, what does a pebble have to do with calculations? Pebbles were used, very long ago, to calculate things before we developed verbal or written numbering systems (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). As I noted earlier, a farmer may have kept, in a box, one pebble for each of his chickens. Each pebble represented one chicken, meaning that each symbol (the pebble) had a direct correlation to another thing out in the world (its chicken). This system allowed the farmer to keep track of his livestock. He could periodically verify that each pebble had a corresponding chicken. If there was a discrepancy, he would know that a chicken was lost, stolen, or killed.

Later, symbols were developed that made accounting a little easier. Instead of keeping track of boxes of pebbles, the farmer could record a symbol like the word *five* or the numeral *15* that could stand in for five or fifteen pebbles. This demonstrates how our symbols have evolved and how some still carry that ancient history with them, even though we are unaware of it. While this evolution made communication easier in some ways, it also opened up room for misunderstanding, since the relationship between symbols and the objects or ideas they represented became less straightforward. Although the root of *calculate* means "pebble," the word *calculate* today has at least six common definitions.

The Triangle of Meaning

The **triangle of meaning** is a model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent and highlights the indirect relationship between the symbol and referent (Ogden & Richards, 1923). As you can see in figure 3.1 "Triangle of meaning," the thought is the concept or idea a person references. The symbol is the word that represents the thought, and the referent is the object or idea to which the symbol refers.

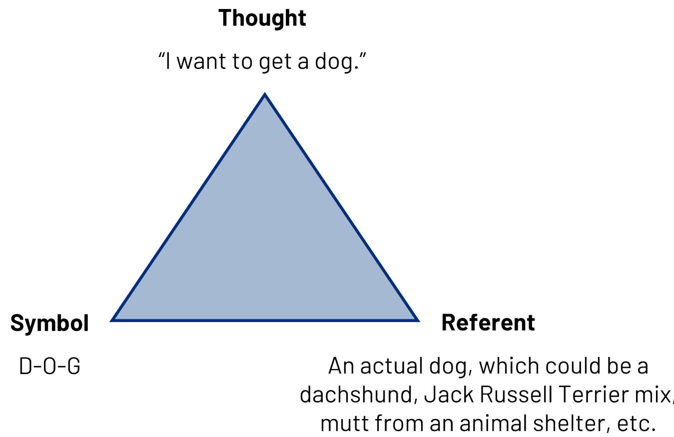

Figure 3.1: Triangle of meaning.

This model is useful for us as communicators because when we are aware of the indirect relationship between symbols and referents, we are aware of how common misunderstandings occur, as the following example illustrates. Jasper and Abby have been thinking about getting a new dog. So each of them is having a similar thought. They are each using the same symbol, the word *dog*, to communicate about their thought. Their referents, however, are different. Jasper is thinking about a small dog like a dachshund, and Abby is thinking about an Australian shepherd. Since the word *dog* does not refer to one specific object in our reality, it is possible for them to have the same thought and use the same symbol only to find out the other person did not have the same thing in mind.

Being aware of this indirect relationship between symbol and referent, we can try to compensate for it by getting clarification. Abby might ask Jasper, "What kind of dog do you have in mind?" This question would allow Jasper to describe his referent, which would allow for more shared understanding. If Jasper responds, "Well, I like short-haired dogs. And we need a dog that will work well in an apartment," then there is still quite a range of referents. Abby could ask questions for clarification, like "Sounds like you're saying that a smaller dog might be better. Is that right?" Getting to a place of shared understanding can be difficult, even when we define our symbols and describe our referents.

Definitions

Definitions help us narrow the meaning of particular symbols, which also narrows a symbol's possible referents. They also provide more words (symbols) for which we must determine a referent.

Words have denotative and connotative meanings. **Denotation** refers to definitions that are accepted by the language group as a whole, or the dictionary definition of a word. For example, the denotation of the word *cowboy* is a man who takes care of cattle. Another denotation is a reckless and/or independent person. A more abstract word, like *change*, would be more difficult to understand due to the multiple denotations.

Connotation refers to definitions that are based on emotion- or experience-based associations people have with a word. To go back to our previous words, *change* can have positive or negative connotations depending on a person's experiences. A person who just ended a long-term relationship may think of change as good or bad depending on what he or she thought about his or her former partner. Even words like *handkerchief* that only have one denotation can have multiple connotations. A handkerchief can conjure up thoughts of dainty Southern belles or disgusting snot-rags.

A word like *cowboy* has many connotations, and philosophers of language have explored how connotations extend beyond one or two experiential or emotional meanings of a word to constitute cultural myths (Barthes, 1972). *Cowboy*, for example, connects to the frontier and the western history of the United States, which has mythologies associated with it that help shape the narrative of the nation. While people who grew up with cattle or have family that ranch may have a very specific connotation of the word *cowboy* based on personal experience, other people's connotations may be more influenced by popular cultural symbolism like that seen in westerns.

Language is Learned

As we just learned, the relationship between the symbols that make up our language and their referents is arbitrary, which means they have no meaning until we assign it to them. In order to use a language effectively system, we have to learn, over time, which symbols go with which referents, since we cannot just tell by looking at the symbol. Like me, you probably learned what the word *apple* meant by looking at the letters *A-P-P-L-E* and a picture of an apple and having a teacher or caregiver help you sound out the letters until you said the whole word. Over time, we associated that combination of letters with the picture of the red delicious apple and no longer had to sound each letter out. This is a deliberate process that may seem slow in the moment, but as we will see next, our ability to acquire language is actually quite astounding. We did not just learn individual words and their meanings, though; we also learned rules of grammar that help us put those words into meaningful sentences.

The Rules of Language

Any language system has to have rules to make it learnable and usable. **Grammar** refers to the rules that govern how words are used to make phrases and sentences. Someone would likely know what you mean by the question "Where's the remote control?" But "The control remote where's?" is likely to be unintelligible or at least confusing (Crystal, 2005). Knowing the rules of grammar is important in order to be able to write and speak to be understood, but knowing these rules is not enough to make you an effective communicator. As we will learn later, creativity and play also have a role in effective verbal communication. Even though teachers have long enforced the idea that there are right and wrong ways to write and say words, there really is not anything inherently right or wrong about the individual choices we make in our language use. Rather, it is our collective agreement that gives power to the rules that govern language.

Looking back to our discussion of connotation, we can see how individuals play a role in how meaning and language are related, since we each bring our own emotional and experiential associations with a word that are often more meaningful than a dictionary definition. In addition, we have quite a bit of room for creativity, play, and resistance with the symbols we use. Have you ever had a secret code with a friend that only you knew? This can allow you to use a code word in a public place to get meaning across to the other person who is "in the know" without anyone else understanding the message. The fact that you can take a word, give it another meaning, have someone else agree on that meaning, and then use the word in your own fashion clearly shows that meaning is in people rather than words. As we will learn later, many slang words developed because people wanted a covert way to talk about certain topics like drugs or sex without outsiders catching on.

Language is Expressive Functions of Language

What utterances make up our daily verbal communication? Some of our words convey meaning, some convey emotions, and some actually produce actions. Language also provides endless opportunities for fun because of its limitless, sometimes nonsensical, and always changing nature. In this section, we will learn about the five functions of language, which show us that language is expressive, language is powerful, language is fun, language is dynamic, and language is relational.

Language is Expressive

Verbal communication helps us meet various needs through our ability to express ourselves. In terms of instrumental needs, we use verbal communication to ask questions that provide us with specific information. We also use verbal communication to describe things, people, and ideas. Verbal communication helps us inform, persuade, and entertain others, which as we will learn later are the three general purposes of public speaking. It is also through our verbal expressions that our personal relationships are formed. At its essence, language is expressive. **Verbal expressions** help us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

Expressing Observations

When we express observations, we report on the sensory information we are taking or have taken in. Eyewitness testimony is a good example of communicating observations. Witnesses are not supposed to make judgments or offer conclusions; they only communicate factual knowledge as they experienced it. For example, a witness could say, "I saw a white Mitsubishi Eclipse leaving my neighbor's house at 10:30 pm." Observation and description occur in the first step of the perception-checking process. When you are trying to make sense of an experience, expressing observations in a descriptive rather than evaluative way can lessen defensiveness, which facilitates competent communication.

Expressing Thoughts

When we express thoughts, we draw conclusions based on what we have experienced. In the perception process, this is similar to the interpretation step. We take various observations and evaluate and interpret them to assign them meaning (a conclusion). Whereas our observations are based on sensory information (what we saw, what we read, what we heard), thoughts are connected to our beliefs (what we think is true/false), attitudes (what we like and dislike), and values (what we think is right/wrong or good/bad). Jury members are expected to express thoughts based on reported observations to help reach a conclusion about someone's guilt or innocence. A juror might express the following thought: "The neighbor who saw the car leaving the night of the crime seemed credible. And the defendant seemed to have a shady past—I think he's trying to hide something." Sometimes people intentionally or unintentionally express thoughts as if they were feelings. For example, when people say, "I feel like you're too strict with your attendance policy," they are not really expressing a feeling; they are expressing a judgment about the other person (a thought).

Expressing Feelings

When we express feelings, we communicate our emotions. Expressing feelings is a difficult part of verbal communication, because there are many social norms about how, why, when, where, and to whom we express our emotions. Norms for emotional expression also vary based on nationality and other cultural identities and characteristics such as age and gender. In terms of age, young children are typically freer to express positive and negative emotions in public. Gendered elements intersect with age as boys grow older and are socialized into a norm of emotional restraint. Although individual men vary in the degree to which they are emotionally expressive, a prevailing social norm encourages and expects women to be more emotionally expressive than men.

Expressing feelings can be uncomfortable for those listening. Some people are generally not good at or comfortable with receiving and processing other people's feelings. Even those with good empathetic listening skills can be positively or negatively affected by others' emotions. Expressions of anger can be especially difficult to manage because they represent a threat to the face and self-esteem of others.

Despite the fact that expressing feelings is more complicated than other forms of expression, emotion sharing is an important part of how we create social bonds and empathize with others, and it can be improved.

In order to express our emotions, it is important that we develop an emotional vocabulary. The more specific we can be when we are verbally communicating our emotions, the less ambiguous our emotions will be for the person decoding our message. As we expand our emotional vocabulary, we are able to convey the intensity of the emotion we are feeling whether it is mild, moderate, or intense. For example, *happy* is mild, *delighted* is moderate, and *ecstatic* is intense; *ignored* is mild, *rejected* is moderate, and *abandoned* is intense (Hargie, 2011).

In a time when so much of our communication is electronically mediated, it is likely that we will communicate emotions through the written word in an e-mail, text, or instant message. We may also still use pen and paper when sending someone a thank-you note, a birthday card, or a sympathy card. Communicating emotions through the written (or typed) word can have advantages such as time to compose your thoughts and convey the details of what you are feeling. There are also disadvantages in that important context and nonverbal communication cannot be included. Things like facial expressions and tone of voice offer much insight into emotions that may not be expressed verbally. There is also a lack of immediate feedback. Sometimes people respond immediately to a text or e-mail, but think about how frustrating it is when you text someone and they do not get back to you right away. If you are in need of emotional support or want validation of an emotional message you just sent, waiting for a response could end up negatively affecting your emotional state.

Expressing Needs

When we express needs, we are communicating in an instrumental way to help us get things done. Since we usually know our needs more than others do, it is important for us to be able to convey those needs to others. Expressing needs can help us get a project done at work or help us navigate the changes of a long-term romantic partnership. Not expressing needs can lead to feelings of abandonment, frustration, or resentment. For example, if one romantic partner expresses the following thought "I think we're moving too quickly in our relationship" but does not also express a need, the other person in the relationship does not have a guide for what to do in response to the expressed thought. Stating, "I need to spend some time with my hometown friends this weekend. Would you mind if I went home by myself?" would likely make the expression more effective. Be cautious of letting evaluations or judgments sneak into your expressions of need. Saying, "I need you to stop suffocating me!" really expresses a thought-feeling mixture more than a need.

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Language Is Powerful

The contemporary American philosopher David Abram wrote, "Only if words are felt, bodily presences, like echoes or waterfalls, can we understand the power of spoken language to influence, alter, and transform the perceptual world" (Abram, 1997). This statement encapsulates many of the powerful features of language. Next, we will discuss how language expresses our identities, affects our credibility, serves as a means of control, and performs actions.

Language Expresses our Identities

The power of language to express our identities varies depending on the origin of the label (self-chosen or other imposed) and the context. People are usually comfortable with the language they use to describe their own identities but may have issues with the labels others place on them. In terms of context, many people express their "Irish" identity on St. Patrick's Day, but they may not think much about it over the rest of the year. There are many examples of people who have taken a label that was imposed on them, one that usually has negative connotations, and intentionally used it in ways that counter previous meanings. Some country music singers and comedians have reclaimed the label *redneck*, using it as an identity marker they are proud of rather than a pejorative term. Other examples of people reclaiming identity labels is the "black is beautiful" movement of the 1960s that repositioned *black* as a positive identity marker for African Americans and the "queer" movement of the 1980s and '90s that reclaimed *queer* as a positive identity marker for some gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. Even though some people embrace reclaimed words, they still carry their negative connotations and are not openly accepted by everyone.

Language Affects our Credibility

One of the goals of this chapter is to help you be more competent with your verbal communication. People make assumptions about your credibility based on how you speak and what you say. Even though we have learned that meaning is in people rather than words and that the rules that govern verbal communication, like rules of grammar, are arbitrary, these norms still mean something. You do not have to be a perfect grammarian to be perceived as credible. In fact, if you followed the grammar rules for written communication to the letter you would actually sound strange, since our typical way of speaking is not as formal and structured as writing. However, you still have to support your ideas and explain the conclusions you make to be seen as competent. You have to use language clearly and be accountable for what you say in order to be seen as trustworthy. Using informal language and breaking social norms we have discussed so far would not enhance your credibility during a professional job interview, but it might with your friends at a tailgate party. Politicians know that the way they speak affects their credibility, but they also know that using words that are too scientific or academic can lead people to perceive them as eggheads, which would hurt their credibility. Politicians and many others in leadership positions need to be able to use language to put people at ease, relate to others, and still appear confident and competent.

Language is a Means of Control

Control is a word that has negative connotations, but our use of it here can be positive, neutral, or negative. Verbal communication can be used to reward and punish. We can offer verbal communication in the form of positive reinforcement to praise someone. We can withhold verbal communication or use it in a critical, aggressive, or hurtful way as a form of negative reinforcement.

Directives are utterances that try to get another person to do something. They can range from a rather polite *ask* or *request* to a more forceful *command* or *insist*. Context informs when and how we express directives and how people respond to them. Promises are often paired with directives in order to persuade people to comply, and those promises, whether implied or stated, should be kept in order to be an ethical communicator. Keep this in mind to avoid arousing false expectations on the part of the other person (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990).

Rather than verbal communication being directed at one person as a means of control, the way we talk creates overall climates of communication that may control many. Verbal communication characterized by empathy, understanding, respect, and honesty creates open climates that lead to more collaboration and more information exchange. Verbal communication that is controlling, deceitful, and vague creates a closed climate in which people are less willing to communicate and less trusting (Brown, 2006).

Language is Dynamic

As we already learned, language is essentially limitless. We may create a one-of-a-kind sentence combining words in new ways and never know it. Aside from the endless structural possibilities, words change meaning, and new words are created daily. In this section, we will learn more about the dynamic nature of language by focusing on neologisms and slang.

Neologisms

Neologisms are newly coined or used words. Newly coined words are those that were just brought into linguistic existence. Newly used words make their way into languages in several ways, including borrowing and changing structure. *Taking* is actually a more fitting descriptor than *borrowing*, since we take words but do not really give them back. In any case, borrowing is the primary means through which languages expand. English is a good case in point. Most of its vocabulary is borrowed and does not reflect the language's Germanic origins. English has been called the "vacuum cleaner of languages" (Crystal, 2005). *Weekend* is a popular English word based on the number of languages that have borrowed it. We have borrowed many words, like *chic* from French, *karaoke* from Japanese, and *caravan* from Arabic.

Figure 3.2: "Google" is a neologism; the term went from being just a noun to both a noun and a verb.

Existing words also change in their use and meaning. The digital age has given rise to some interesting changes in word usage. Before Facebook, the word *friend* had many meanings, but it was mostly used as a noun referring to a companion. The sentence, *I'll friend you*, would not have made sense to many people just a few years ago because *friend* was not used as a verb. *Google* went from being a proper noun referring to the company to a more general verb that refers to searching for something on the Internet (perhaps not even using the Google search engine). Meanings can expand or contract without changing from a noun to a verb. *Gay*, an adjective for feeling happy, expanded to include *gay* as an adjective describing a person's sexual orientation. Perhaps because of the confusion that this caused, the meaning of *gay* has contracted again, as the earlier meaning is now considered archaic, meaning it is no longer in common usage.

Slang

Slang is a great example of the dynamic nature of language. **Slang** refers to new or adapted words that are specific to a group, context, and/or time period; regarded as less formal; and representative of people's creative play with language. Research has shown that only about 10 percent of the slang terms that emerge over a fifteen-year period survive. Many more take their place though, as new slang words are created using inversion, reduction, or old-fashioned creativity (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

Inversion is a form of word play that produces slang words like *sick*, *wicked*, and *bad* that refer to the opposite of their typical meaning. Reduction creates slang words such as *pic*, *sec*, and *later* from *picture*, *second*, and *see you later*. New slang words often represent what is edgy, current, or simply relevant to the daily lives of a group of people. Many creative examples of slang refer to illegal or socially taboo topics like sex, drinking, and drugs. It makes sense that developing an alternative way to identify drugs or talk about taboo topics could make life easier for the people who partake in such activities. Slang allows people who are in "in the know" to break the code and presents a linguistic barrier for unwanted outsiders. Taking a moment to think about the amount of slang that refers to being intoxicated on drugs or alcohol or engaging in sexual activity should generate a lengthy list.

Language is Relational

We use verbal communication to initiate, maintain, and terminate our interpersonal relationships. The first few exchanges with a potential romantic partner or friend help us size the other person up and figure out if we want to pursue a relationship or not. We then use verbal communication to remind others how we feel about them and to check in with them—engaging in relationship maintenance through language use. When negative feelings arrive and persist, or for many other reasons, we often use verbal communication to end a relationship.

Language Can Bring Us Together

Interpersonally, verbal communication is key to bringing people together and maintaining relationships. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, our use of words like *I*, *you*, *we*, *our*, and *us* affect our relationships. “We language” includes the words *we*, *our*, and *us* and can be used to promote a feeling of inclusiveness. “I language” can be useful when expressing thoughts, needs, and feelings because it leads us to “own” our expressions and avoid the tendency to mistakenly attribute the cause of our thoughts, needs, and feelings to others. Communicating emotions using “I language” may also facilitate emotion sharing by not making our conversational partner feel at fault or defensive. For example, instead of saying, “You’re making me crazy!” you could say, “I’m starting to feel really anxious because we can’t make a decision about this.” Conversely, “you language” can lead people to become defensive and feel attacked, which could be divisive and result in feelings of interpersonal separation.

Aside from the specific words that we use, the frequency of communication affects relationships. Of course, the content of what is said is important, but research shows that romantic partners who communicate frequently with each other and with mutual friends and family members experience less stress and uncertainty in their relationship and are more likely to stay together (McCornack, 2007).

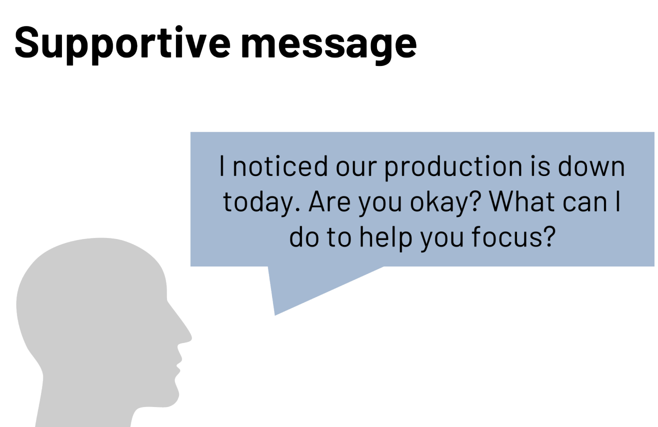


Figure 3.3: Example of a supportive message.

When frequent communication combines with **supportive messages**, which are messages communicated in an open, honest, and non-confrontational way, people are sure to come together.

Language Can Separate Us

Whether its criticism, teasing, or language differences, verbal communication can also lead to feelings of separation. Language differences alone do not present insurmountable barriers. We can learn other languages with time and effort, there are other people who can translate and serve as bridges across languages, and we can communicate quite a lot nonverbally in the absence of linguistic compatibility. People who speak the same language can intentionally use language to separate. The words *us* and *them* can be a powerful start to separation.

Figure 3.4: Example of an unsupportive message.

Think of how language played a role in segregation in the United States as the Supreme Court upheld the notion of "separate but equal" and how apartheid affected South Africa as limits, based on finances and education, were placed on the black majority's rights to vote. Symbols, both words and images, were a very important part of Hitler's rise to power in the 1930s and '40s in Europe. Various combinations of colored stars, triangles, letters, and other symbols were sewn onto the clothing or uniforms of people persecuted by the Nazis in order to classify them. People were labeled and reduced to certain characteristics rather than seen as complete humans, which facilitated the Nazis' oppression, violence, and killing (Holocaust and Human Rights Education Center,2012).

At the interpersonal level, **unsupportive messages** can make others respond defensively, which can lead to feelings of separation and actual separation or dissolution of a relationship. It is impossible to be supportive in our communication all the time, but consistently unsupportive messages can hurt others' self-esteem, escalate conflict, and lead to defensiveness. People who regularly use unsupportive messages may create a toxic win/lose climate in a relationship. Six verbal tactics that can lead to feelings of defensiveness and separation are global labels, sarcasm, dragging up the past, negative comparisons, judgmental "you" messages, and threats (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

Common Types of Unsupportive Messages

1. **Global labels.** "You're a liar." Labeling someone irresponsible, untrustworthy, selfish, or lazy calls his or her whole identity as a person into question. Such sweeping judgments and

generalizations are sure to escalate a negative situation.

2. **Sarcasm.** "No, you didn't miss anything in class on Wednesday. We just sat here and looked at each other." Even though sarcasm is often disguised as humor, it usually represents passive-aggressive behavior through which a person indirectly communicates negative feelings.
3. **Dragging up the past.** "I should have known not to trust you when you never paid me back that $100 I let you borrow." Bringing up negative past experiences is a tactic used by people when they do not want to discuss a current situation. Sometimes people have built up negative feelings that are suddenly let out by a seemingly small thing in the moment.
4. **Negative comparisons.** "Jade graduated from college without any credit card debt. I guess you're just not as responsible as her." Holding a person up to the supposed standards or characteristics of another person can lead to feelings of inferiority and resentment. Parents and teachers may unfairly compare children to their siblings.
5. **Judgmental "you" messages.** "You're never going to be able to hold down a job." Accusatory messages are usually generalized overstatements about another person that go beyond labeling but still do not describe specific behavior in a productive way.
6. **Threats.** "If you don't stop texting back and forth with your ex, both of you are going to regret it." Threatening someone with violence or some other negative consequence usually signals the end of productive communication. Aside from the potential legal consequences, threats usually overcompensate for a person's insecurity.

3.2 Using Words Well

Have you ever gotten lost because someone gave you directions that did not make sense to you? Have you ever puzzled over the instructions for how to put something like a bookshelf or grill together? When people do not use words well, there are consequences that range from mild annoyance to legal actions. When people do use words well, they can be inspiring and make us better people. In this section, we will learn how to use words well by using words clearly, using words affectively, and using words ethically.

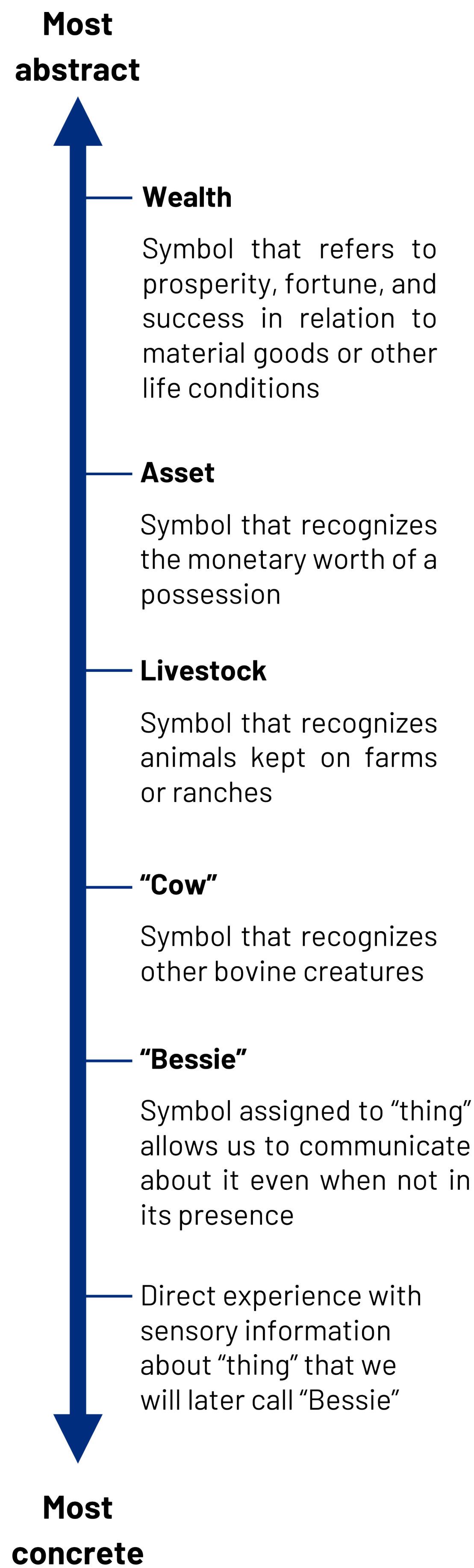
Using Words Clearly

The level of clarity with which we speak varies depending on whom we talk to, the situation we are in, and our own intentions and motives. We sometimes make a deliberate effort to speak as clearly as possible. We can indicate this concern for clarity nonverbally by slowing our rate and increasing our volume or verbally by saying, "Frankly…" or "Let me be clear…" Sometimes it can be difficult to speak clearly—for example, when we are speaking about something with which we are unfamiliar. Emotions and distractions can also interfere with our clarity. Being aware of the varying levels of abstraction within language can help us create clearer and more "whole" messages.

Level of Abstraction

The ladder of abstraction is a model used to illustrate how language can range from concrete to abstract. As we follow a concept up the ladder of abstraction, more and more of the "essence" of the original object is lost or left out, which leaves more room for interpretation, which can lead to misunderstanding. This process of abstracting, of leaving things out, allows us to communicate more effectively because it serves as a shorthand that keeps us from having a completely unmanageable language filled with millions of words—each referring to one specific thing (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). However, it requires us to use context and other words to generate shared meaning. Some words are more directly related to a concept or idea than others are. If I asked you to go take a picture of a book, you could do that. If I asked you to go and take a picture of "work," you couldn't because *work* is an abstract word that was developed to refer to any number of possibilities from the act of writing a book, to repairing an air conditioner, to fertilizing an organic garden. You could take a picture of any of those things, but you cannot take a picture of "work."

You can see the semanticist S. I. Hayakawa's classic example of the abstraction ladder with "Bessie the cow" in figure 3.5 "Ladder of abstraction" (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). At the lowest level, we have something that is very concrete. At this level, we are actually in the moment of experiencing the stimuli that is coming in through our senses. We perceive the actual "thing," which is the "cow" in front of us (either in person or as an image). This is concrete, because it is unmediated, meaning it is actually the moment of experience. As we move up a level, we give the experience a name—we are looking at "Bessie." So now, instead of the direct experience with the "thing" in front of us, we have given the thing a name, which takes us one step away from



the direct experience to the use of a more abstract symbol. Now we can talk and think about Bessie even when we are not directly experiencing her. At the next level, the word *cow* now lumps Bessie in with other bovine creatures that share similar characteristics. As we go on up the ladder, *cow* becomes *livestock*, *livestock* becomes an *asset*, and then an *asset* becomes *wealth*. Note that it becomes increasingly difficult to define the meaning of the symbol as we go up the ladder. With each step, we lose more of the characteristics of the original concrete experience.

Figure 3.5: Ladder of abstraction.

When shared referents are important, we should try to use language that is lower on the ladder of abstraction. Being intentionally concrete is useful when giving directions, for example, and can help prevent misunderstanding. We sometimes intentionally use abstract language. Since abstract language is often unclear or vague, we can use it as a means of testing out a potential topic (like asking a favor), offering negative feedback indirectly (to avoid hurting someone's feelings or to hint), or avoiding the specifics of a topic.

Definitions and Clarity

Knowing more about the role that abstraction plays in the generation of meaning can help us better describe and define the words we use. As we learned earlier, denotative definitions are those found in the dictionary—the official or agreed-on definition. Since definitions are composed of other words, people who compile dictionaries take for granted that there is a certain amount of familiarity with the words used to define another word—otherwise we would just be going in circles.

One challenge we face when defining words is our tendency to go up the ladder of abstraction rather than down (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). For example, if asked to define the word *blue*, you would likely say it is a color. If asked what a color is, you would say it is a tint or characteristic of the appearance of a particular thing. To define more clearly, by going down the ladder of abstraction, you could say, "It's the color of Frank Sinatra's eyes," or "It's what the sky looks like on a clear day." People often come to understanding more quickly when a definition is descriptive and/or ties into their personal experiences. Definitions are not useless, but they are usually best when paired with examples.

Jargon refers to specialized words used by a certain group or profession. Since jargon is specialized, it is often difficult to relate to a diverse audience and should therefore be limited when speaking to people from outside the group—or at least be clearly defined when it is used.

Using Words Affectively

Affective language refers to language used to express a person's feelings and create similar feelings in another person (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). Affective language can be intentionally used in relational contexts to create or enhance interpersonal bonds and can be effectively employed in public speaking to engage an audience and motivate them in particular ways. We also use affective language spontaneously and less intentionally. People who "speak from the heart" connect well with others due to the affective nature of their words. Sometimes people become so filled with emotion that they have to express it, and these exclamations usually arouse emotions in others. Hearing someone exclaim, "I'm so happy!" can evoke similar feelings of joy, while hearing someone exclaim, "Why me!?" while sobbing conjures up similar feelings of sadness and frustration. There are also specific linguistic devices that facilitate affective communication.

Figurative Language

When people say something is a "figure of speech," they are referring to a word or phrase that deviates from expectations in some way in meaning or usage (Yaguello, 1998). Figurative language is the result of breaking semantic rules, but in a way that typically enhances meaning or understanding rather than diminishes it. To understand figurative language, a person has to be familiar with the semantic rules of a language and with social norms and patterns within a cultural and/or language group, which makes it difficult for nonnative speakers to grasp. Figurative language has the ability to convey much meaning in fewer words, because some of the meaning lies in the context of usage (what a listener can imply by the deviation from semantic norms) and in the listener (how the listener makes meaning by connecting the figurative language to his or her personal experience). Some examples of figurative speech include simile, metaphor, and personification.

A **simile** is a direct comparison of two things using the words *like* or *as*. Similes can be very explicit for conveying a specific meaning and can help increase clarity and lead people to connect personally to a meaning since they have to visualize the comparison in their mind. For example, Forrest Gump's famous simile, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get," conjures up feelings of uncertainty and excitement. More direct similes like "I slept like a baby" and "That bread was hard as a rock" do not necessarily stir the imagination but still offer an alternative way of expressing something.

A **metaphor** is an implicit comparison of two things that are not alike and/or are not typically associated. They become meaningful as people realize the speaker's purpose for relating the two seemingly disparate ideas. Metaphors are figurative devices that can make our writing and speaking richer, but they require a person to balance creative associations among ideas with the common rules of the language if people are expected to figure out the meaning behind the association. A speaker must have the linguistic knowledge and insight to realize when a nonliteral use of words or ideas will be more meaningful than a literal and conventional use of those words. Metaphors challenge the imagination, which can cause each person to make sense of the metaphor in his or her own way (Olbricht, 1968).

Many metaphors spring from our everyday experiences. For example, many objects have been implicitly compared to human body parts; for example, we say a clock has hands and a face. **Personification** refers to the attribution of human qualities or characteristics of other living things to nonhuman objects or abstract concepts. This can be useful when trying to make something abstract more concrete and can create a sense of urgency or "realness" out of something that is hard for people to conceive. Personification has been used successfully in public awareness campaigns because it allows people to identify with something they think might not be relevant to them.

Evocative Language

Vivid language captures people's attention and their imagination by conveying emotions and action. Think of the array of mental images that a poem or a well-told story from a friend can conjure up. Evocative language can also lead us to have physical reactions. Words like *shiver* and *heartbroken* can lead people to remember previous physical sensations related to the word. As a speaker, there may be times when evoking a positive or negative reaction could be beneficial. Evoking a sense of calm could help you talk a friend through troubling health news. Evoking a sense of agitation and anger could help you motivate an audience to action. When we are conversing with a friend or speaking to an audience, we are primarily engaging others' visual and auditory senses. Evocative language can help your conversational partner or audience members feel, smell, or taste something as well as hear it and see it. Good writers know how to use words effectively and affectively. A well-written story, whether it is a book or screenplay, will contain all the previous elements. The rich fantasy worlds conceived in *Star Trek*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, and *Harry Potter* show the power of figurative and evocative language to capture our attention and our imagination.

Some words are so evocative that their usage violates the social norms of appropriate conversations. Although we could use such words to shock people, we can also use euphemisms, or less evocative synonyms for or indirect references to words or ideas that are deemed inappropriate to discuss directly. We have many euphemisms for things like excretory acts, sex, and death (Allan & Burridge, 2006). While euphemisms can be socially useful and creative, they can also lead to misunderstanding and problems in cases where communication that is more direct is warranted despite social conventions.

Using Words Ethically

Communication is irreversible. The National Communication Association's "Credo for Ethical Communication" states that we should be accountable for the long- and short-term effects of our communication (National Communication Association, 2012). The way we talk, the words we choose to use, and the actions we take after we are done speaking are all important aspects of communication ethics. Knowing that language can have real effects for people increases our need to be aware of the ethical implications of what we say. Hate speech and bias are important aspects of communication ethics on language and culture. In this section, we will focus on civility and accountability.

Civility

Our strong emotions regarding our own beliefs, attitudes, and values can sometimes lead to incivility in our verbal communication. Incivility occurs when a person deviates from established social norms. It can take many forms, including insults, bragging, bullying, gossiping, swearing, deception, and defensiveness, among others (Miller, 2001). Some people lament that we live in a time when civility is diminishing, but since standards and expectations for what is considered civil communication have changed over time, this isn't the only time such claims have been made (Miller, 2001). As individualism and affluence have increased in many societies, so have the number of idiosyncratic identities that people feel they have the right to express. These increases could contribute to the impression that society is becoming less civil, when in fact it is just becoming different. As we learned in our section on perception and personality, we tend to assume other people are like us, and we may be disappointed or offended when we realize they are not. Cultural changes have probably contributed to making people less willing to engage in self-restraint, which again would be seen as uncivil by people who prefer a more restrained and self-controlled expression (Miller, 2001). The following are some common individual and situational influences that may lead to breaches of civility (Miller, 2001):

- **Individual differences.** Some people differ in their interpretations of civility in various settings, and some people have personality traits that may lead to actions deemed uncivil on a more regular basis.
- **Ignorance.** In some cases, especially in novel situations involving uncertainty, people may not know what social norms and expectations are.

- **Lack of skill.** Even when we know how to behave, we may not be able to do it. Such frustrations may lead a person to revert to undesirable behavior such as engaging in personal attacks during a conflict because they do not know what else to do.
- **Lapse of control.** Self-control is not an unlimited resource. Even when people know how to behave and have the skill to respond to a situation appropriately, they may not do so. Even people who are careful to monitor their behavior have occasional slipups.
- **Negative intent.** Some people, in an attempt to break with conformity or challenge societal norms, or for self-benefit (publicly embarrassing someone in order to look cool or edgy), are openly uncivil. Such behavior can also result from mental or psychological stresses or illnesses.

Polarizing Language

Philosophers of language have long noted our tendency to represent the world in very narrow ways when we feel threatened (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This misrepresents reality and closes off dialogue. Although in our everyday talk we describe things in nuanced and measured ways, quarrels and controversies often narrow our vision, which is reflected in our vocabulary. In order to maintain a civil discourse in which people interact ethically and competently, it has been suggested that we keep an open mind and an open vocabulary.

One feature of communicative incivility is polarizing language, which refers to language that presents people, ideas, or situations as polar opposites. Such language exaggerates differences and overgeneralizes. Things are not simply black or white, right or wrong, or good or bad. Being able to see only two values and clearly accepting one and rejecting another does not indicate sophisticated or critical thinking. We do not have to accept every viewpoint as right and valid, and we can still hold strongly to our own beliefs and defend them without ignoring other possibilities, rejecting, or alienating others. A citizen who says, "All cops are corrupt," is just as wrong as the cop who says, "All drug users are scum." In avoiding polarizing language, we keep a more open mind, which may lead us to learn something new. A citizen may have a personal story about a negative encounter with a police officer that could enlighten us on his or her perspective, but the statement also falsely overgeneralizes that experience. Avoiding polarizing language can help us avoid polarized thinking, and the new information we learn may allow us to better understand and advocate for our position. Avoiding sweeping generalizations allows us to speak more clearly and avoid defensive reactions from others that result from such blanket statements.

Swearing

Scholars have identified two main types of swearing: social swearing and annoyance swearing (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007). People engage in **social swearing** to create social bonds or for impression management (to seem cool or attractive). This type of swearing is typically viewed as male dominated, but some research studies have shown that the differences in frequency and use of swearing by men and women are not as vast as perceived. Nevertheless, there is generally more of a social taboo against women swearing than men, but as you already know, communication is contextual. **Annoyance swearing** provides a sense of relief, as people use it to manage stress and tension, which can be a preferred alternative to physical aggression. In some cases, swearing can be cathartic, allowing a person to release emotions that might otherwise lead to more aggressive or violent actions.

Accountability

The complexity of our verbal language system allows us to present inferences as facts and mask judgments within seemingly objective or oblique language. As an ethical speaker and a critical listener, it is important to be able to distinguish between facts, inferences, and judgments (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). **Inferences** are conclusions based on thoughts or speculation, but not direct observation. **Facts** are conclusions based on direct observation or group consensus. **Judgments** are expressions of approval or disapproval that are subjective and not verifiable.

Linguists have noted that a frequent source of miscommunication is **inference-observation confusion**, or the misperception of an inference (conclusion based on limited information) as an observation (an observed or agreed-on fact) (Haney, 1992). We can see the possibility for such confusion in the following example: If a student posts on a professor-rating site the statement "This professor grades unfairly and plays favorites," then they are presenting an inference and a judgment that could easily be interpreted as a fact. Using some of the strategies discussed earlier for speaking clearly can help present information in a more ethical way—for example, by using concrete and descriptive language and owning emotions and thoughts through the use of "I language." To help clarify the message and be more accountable, the student could say, "I worked for three days straight on my final paper and only got a C," which we will assume is a statement of fact. This could then be followed up with "But my friend told me she only worked on hers the day before it was due and she got an A. I think that's unfair and I feel like my efforts aren't recognized by the professor." Of the last two statements, the first states what may be a fact (note, however, that the information is secondhand rather than directly observed) and the second states an inferred conclusion and expresses an owned thought and feeling. Sometimes people do not want to mark their statements as inferences because they want to believe them as facts. In this case, the student may have attributed her grade to the professor's "unfairness" to cover up or avoid thoughts that her friend may be a better student in this subject area, a better writer, or a better student in general. Distinguishing between facts, inferences, and judgments, however, allows your listeners to better understand your message and judge the merits of it, which makes us more accountable and therefore more ethical speakers.

3.3 Language, Society, and Culture

Society and culture influence the words that we speak, and the words that we speak influence society and culture. Such a cyclical relationship can be difficult to understand, but many of the examples here and examples from our own lives help illustrate this point. One of the best ways to learn about society, culture, and language is to seek out opportunities to go beyond our typical comfort zones. Studying abroad, for example, brings many challenges that can turn into valuable lessons.

Language and Social Context

We arrive at meaning through conversational interaction, which follows many social norms and rules. As we have already learned, rules are explicitly stated conventions ("Look at me when I'm talking to you.") and norms are implicit (saying you have to leave before you actually do to initiate politely the end to a conversation). To help conversations function meaningfully, we have learned social norms and internalized them to such an extent that we do not often consciously enact them. Instead, we rely on routines and roles (as determined by social forces) to help us proceed with verbal interaction, which also helps determine how a conversation will unfold. Our various social roles influence how we speak. For example, a person may say, "As a longtime member of this community…" or "As a first-generation college student…" Such statements cue others into the personal and social context from which we are speaking, which helps them better interpret our meaning.

One social norm that structures our communication is turn taking. People need to feel like they are contributing something to an interaction, so turn taking is a central part of how conversations play out (Crystal, 2005). Although we sometimes talk at the same time as others or interrupt them, there are numerous verbal and nonverbal cues, almost like a dance, that are exchanged between speakers that let people know when their turn will begin or end. Conversations do not always neatly progress from beginning to end with shared understanding along the way. There is a back and forth that is often verbally managed through rephrasing ("Let me try that again,") and clarification ("Does that make sense?") (Crystal, 2005)

Ending a conversation is similarly complex. Just walking away or ending a conversation without engaging in socially acceptable "leave-taking behaviors" would be considered a breach of social norms. Topic changes are often places where people can leave a conversation, but it is still routine for us to give a special reason for leaving, often in an apologetic tone (whether we mean it or not). Generally, though, conversations end through the cooperation of both people, as they offer and recognize typical signals that a topic area has been satisfactorily covered or that one or both people need to leave. It is customary in the United States for people to say they have to leave before they actually do and for that statement to be dismissed or ignored by the other person until additional leave-taking behaviors are enacted. When such cooperation is lacking, an awkward silence or abrupt ending can result, and as we have already learned, US Americans are not big fans of silence. Silence is not viewed the same way in other cultures, which leads us to our discussion of cultural context.

Language and Cultural Context

Culture is not solely determined by a person's native language or nationality. It's true that languages vary by country and region and that the language we speak influences our realities, but even people who speak the same language experience cultural differences because of their various intersecting cultural identities and personal experiences. We have a tendency to view our language as a whole more favorably than other languages. Although people may make persuasive arguments regarding which languages are more pleasing to the ear or difficult or easy to learn than others, no one language enables speakers to communicate more effectively than another (McCornack, 2007).

From birth, we are socialized into our various cultural identities. As with the social context, this acculturation process is a combination of explicit and implicit lessons. A child in Colombia, which is considered a more collectivist country in which people value group membership and cohesion over individualism, may not be explicitly told, "You are a member of a collectivistic culture, so you should care more about the family and community than yourself." This cultural value would be transmitted through daily actions and through language use. Just as babies acquire knowledge of language practices at an astonishing rate in their first two years of life, so do they acquire cultural knowledge and values that are embedded in those language practices. At nine months old, it is possible to distinguish babies based on their language. Even at this early stage of development, when most babies are babbling and just learning to recognize but not wholly reproduce verbal interaction patterns, a Colombian baby would sound different from a Brazilian baby, even though neither would actually be using words from their native languages of Spanish and Portuguese (Crystal, 2005).

Customs and Norms

Social norms are culturally relative. The words used in politeness rituals in one culture can mean something completely different in another. For example, thank you in American English acknowledges receiving something (a gift, a favor, a compliment), in British English it can mean "yes" similar to American English's yes, please, and in French merci can mean "no" as in "no, thank you" (Crystal, 2005). Additionally, what is considered a powerful language style varies from culture to culture. Confrontational language, such as swearing, can be seen as powerful in Western cultures, even though it violates some language taboos, but would be seen as immature and weak in Japan (Wetzel, 1988).

Gender also affects how we use language, but not to the extent that most people think. Although there is a widespread belief that men are more likely to communicate in a clear and straightforward way and women are more likely to communicate in an emotional and indirect way, a meta-analysis of research findings from more than two hundred studies found only small differences in the personal disclosures of men and women (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Men and women's levels of disclosure are even more similar when engaging in cross-gender communication, meaning men and woman are more similar when speaking to each other than when men speak to men or women speak to women. This could be due to the internalized pressure to speak about the other gender in socially sanctioned ways, in essence reinforcing the stereotypes when speaking to the same gender but challenging them in cross-gender encounters. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters (Dindia, 1987). These findings, which state that men and women communicate more similarly during cross-gender encounters and then communicate in more stereotypical ways in same-gender encounters, can be explained with communication accommodation theory.

Language and Cultural Bias

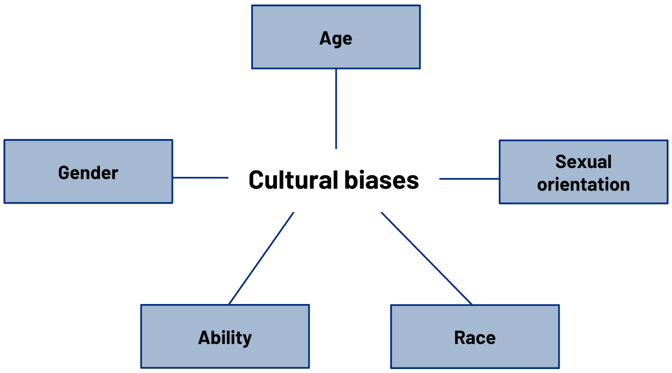


Figure 3.6: Common types of cultural bias.

Cultural bias is a skewed way of viewing or talking about a group negatively. Bias has a way of creeping into our daily language use, often under our awareness. Culturally biased language can refer to one or more cultural identities, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and ability. Much biased language is based on stereotypes and myths that influence the words we use. Bias is both intentional and unintentional, but as we've already discussed, we have to be accountable for what we say even if we didn't "intend" a particular meaning—remember, meaning is generated; it doesn't exist inside our thoughts or words. We will discuss specific ways in which cultural bias manifests in our language and ways to become more aware of bias. Becoming aware of and addressing cultural bias is not the same thing as engaging in "political correctness." Political correctness takes awareness to the extreme but does not do much to address cultural bias aside from make people feel like they are walking on eggshells. That kind of pressure can lead people to avoid discussions about cultural identities or avoid people with different cultural identities. Our goal is not to eliminate all cultural bias from verbal communication or to never offend anyone, intentionally or otherwise. Instead, we will continue to use guidelines for ethical communication that we have already discussed and strive to increase our competence.

Race

People sometimes use euphemisms for race that illustrate bias because the terms are implicitly compared to the dominant group (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2019). For example, referring to a person as "urban" or a neighborhood as "inner city" can be an accurate descriptor, but when such words are used as a substitute for racial identity, they illustrate cultural biases that equate certain races with cities and poverty. Using adjectives like *articulate* or *well dressed* in statements like "My black coworker is articulate" reinforces negative stereotypes even though these words are typically viewed as positive. Terms like *nonwhite* set up whiteness as the norm, which implies that white people are the norm against which all other races should be compared. Biased language also reduces the diversity within certain racial groups—for example, referring to anyone who looks like they are of Asian descent as Chinese or everyone who "looks" Latino/a as Mexicans. Some people with racial identities other than white, including people who are multiracial, use the label *person/people of color* to indicate solidarity among groups, but it is likely that they still prefer a more specific label when referring to an individual or referencing a specific racial group.

Gender

Language has a tendency to exaggerate perceived and stereotypical differences between men and women. The use of the term *opposite sex* presumes that men and women are opposites, like positive and negative poles of a magnet, which is obviously not true, or men and women would not be able to have successful interactions or relationships. A term like *other gender* does not presume opposites and acknowledges that male and female identities and communication are more influenced by gender, which is the social and cultural meanings and norms associated with males and females, than sex, which is the physiology and genetic makeup of a male and female.

One key to avoiding gendered bias in language is to avoid the generic use of *he* when referring to something relevant to males and females. Instead, you can informally use a gender-neutral pronoun like *they* or *their* or you can use *his or her* (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2019). When giving a series of examples, you can alternate usage of masculine and feminine pronouns, switching with each example. We have lasting gendered associations with certain occupations that have tended to be male or female dominated, which erase the presence of both genders. Other words reflect the general masculine bias present in English. The following word pairs show the gender-biased term followed by an unbiased term: waitress/server, chairman/chair or chairperson, mankind/people, cameraman/camera operator, mailman/postal worker, sportsmanship/fair play. Common language practices also tend to infantilize women but not men, when, for example, women are referred to as *chicks*, *girls*, or *babes*. Since there is no linguistic equivalent that indicates the marital status of men before their name. Using *Ms.* instead of *Miss* or *Mrs.* helps reduce bias.

Age

Language that includes age bias can be directed toward older or younger people. Descriptions of younger people often presume recklessness or inexperience, while those of older people presume frailty or disconnection. The term *elderly* generally refers to people over sixty-five, but it has connotations of weakness, which is not accurate because there are plenty of people over sixty-five who are stronger and more athletic than people in their twenties and thirties. Even though it is generic, *older people* does not really have negative implications. More specific words that describe groups of older people include *grandmothers/grandfathers* (even though they can be fairly young too), *retirees*, or *people over sixty-five* (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2019). Referring to people over the age of eighteen as *boys* or *girls* is not typically viewed as appropriate.

Sexual Orientation

Discussions of sexual and affectional orientation range from everyday conversations to contentious political and personal debates. The negative stereotypes that have been associated with homosexuality, including deviance, mental illness, and criminal behavior, continue to influence our language use (American Psychological Association, 2019). Terminology related to gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) people can be confusing, so let's spend some time raise our awareness about preferred labels. First, *sexual orientation* is the term preferred to *sexual preference*. *Preference* suggests a voluntary choice, as in someone has a preference for cheddar or American cheese, which doesn't reflect the experience of most GLB people or research findings that show sexuality is more complex. You may also see *affectional orientation* included with *sexual orientation* because it acknowledges that GLB relationships, like heterosexual relationships, are about intimacy and closeness (affection) that is not just sexually based. Most people also prefer the labels *gay*, *lesbian*, or *bisexual* to *homosexual*, which is clinical and does not so much refer to an identity as a sex act.

Ability

People with disabilities make up a diverse group that has increasingly come to be viewed as a cultural/social identity group. People without disabilities are often referred to as *able-bodied*. As with sexual orientation, comparing people with disabilities to "normal" people implies that there is an agreed-on definition of what "normal" is and that people with disabilities are "abnormal." *Disability* is also preferred to the word *handicap*. Just because someone is disabled does not mean he or she is also handicapped. The environment around them rather than their disability often handicaps people with disabilities (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2019). Ignoring the environment as the source of a handicap and placing it on the person fits into a pattern of reducing people with disabilities to their disability—for example, calling someone a paraplegic instead of a person with paraplegia. In many cases, as with sexual orientation, race, age, and gender, verbally marking a person as disabled is not relevant and does not need spotlighting. Language used in conjunction with disabilities also tends to portray people as victims of their disability and paint pictures of their lives as gloomy, dreadful, or painful. Such descriptors are often generalizations or completely inaccurate.

References

Figures

Figure 3.1: Triangle of meaning. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Table 3.1: Four types of verbal expressions. Adapted from Matthew McKay, Martha Davis, and Patrick Fanning, Messages: Communication Skills Book, 2nd ed. (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 1995), 34–36.

Figure 3.2: "Google" is a neologism; the term went from being just a noun to both a noun and a verb. Nathana Rebouças. 2020. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/O5v8heKY4cI

Figure 3.3: Example of a supportive message. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 3.4: Example of an unsupportive message. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 3.5: Ladder of abstraction. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0. Adapted under fair use from S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 85.

Figure 3.6: Common types of cultural bias. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Section 3.1

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4.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Introduction

When we think about communication, we most often focus on how we exchange information using words. While verbal communication is important, humans relied on nonverbal communication for thousands of years before we developed the capability to communicate with words. **Nonverbal communication** is a process of generating meaning using behavior other than words (Depaulo & Friedman, 1998). Rather than thinking of nonverbal communication as the opposite of or as separate from verbal communication, it's more accurate to view them as operating side by side—as part of the same system.

The content and composition of verbal and nonverbal communication also differs. In terms of content, nonverbal communication tends to do the work of communicating emotions more than verbal. In terms of composition, although there are rules of grammar that structure our verbal communication, no such official guides govern our use of nonverbal signals. Likewise, there are not dictionaries and thesauruses of nonverbal communication like there are with verbal symbols. Finally, whereas we humans are unique in our capacity to abstract and transcend space and time using verbal symbols, we are not the only creatures that engage in nonverbal communication (Hargie, 2011).

These are just some of the characteristics that differentiate verbal communication from nonverbal, and in the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss in more detail the principles, functions, and types of nonverbal communication and conclude with some guidance on how to improve our nonverbal communication competence.

4.1 Principles and Functions of Nonverbal Communication

A channel is the sensory route on which a message travels. Verbal, or word-based, communication usually only relies on one channel, because spoken language is transmitted through sound and picked up by our ears, and text based communication is picked up by our eyes. All five of our senses, on the other hand, can take in nonverbal communication. Since most of our communication relies on visual and auditory channels, those will be the primary focus. But, we can also receive messages and generate meaning through touch, taste, and smell.To define further nonverbal communication, we need to distinguish between vocal and verbal aspects of communication. Verbal and nonverbal communication include both vocal and non-vocal elements. A vocal element of verbal communication is spoken words—for example, "Come back here." A vocal element of nonverbal communication is **paralanguage** (Qiang, 2013). Paralanguage is the vocalized but not verbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and pitch. (In other words, paralanguage is everything that comes out of your throat as a sound, but is not a word.) Non-vocal elements of verbal communication include the use of unspoken symbols to convey meaning. Non-vocal elements of nonverbal communication include body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Gestures are non-vocal and nonverbal since most of them do not refer to a specific word like a written or signed symbol does.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Important Information

You have probably heard that more meaning is generated from nonverbal communication than from verbal. Some studies have claimed that 90 percent of our meaning is derived from nonverbal signals, but more recent and reliable findings claim that it is closer to 65 percent (Guerrero & Floyd, 2006). We may rely more on nonverbal signals in situations where verbal and nonverbal messages conflict and in situations where emotional or relational communication is taking place (Hargie, 2011). For example, when someone asks a question and we are not sure about the "angle" they are taking, we may hone in on nonverbal cues to fill in the meaning. For example, the question "What are you doing tonight?" could mean any number of things, but we could rely on posture, tone of voice, and eye contact to see if the person is just curious, suspicious, or hinting that they would like company for the evening.

We also put more weight on nonverbal communication when determining a person's credibility (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990). For example, if a classmate delivers a speech in class and her verbal content seems well researched and unbiased, but her nonverbal communication is poor (her voice is monotone, she avoids eye contact, she fidgets), she will likely not be viewed as credible. Conversely, in some situations, verbal communication might carry more meaning than nonverbal. In interactions where information exchange is the focus, at a briefing at work, for example, verbal communication likely accounts for much more of the meaning generated. Despite this exception, a key principle of nonverbal communication is that it often takes on more meaning in interpersonal and/or emotional exchanges.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Involuntary than Verbal

We verbally communicate involuntarily in some instances (Porter, ten Brinke, & Wallace, 2012). These types of exclamations are often verbal responses to a surprising stimulus. For example, we say “owww!” when we stub our toe or scream “stop!” when we see someone heading toward danger. Involuntary nonverbal signals are much more common. Although most nonverbal communication is not completely involuntary, it is more below our consciousness than verbal communication. Therefore, it is more difficult to control.

The involuntary nature of much nonverbal communication makes it more difficult to control or “fake” (Porter, ten Brinke, & Wallace, 2012). For example, although you can consciously smile a little and shake hands with someone when you first see them, it is difficult to fake that you are “happy” to meet someone. Nonverbal communication leaks out in ways that expose our underlying thoughts or feelings. Spokespeople, lawyers, or other public representatives who are the “face” of a politician, celebrity, corporation, or organization must learn to control their facial expressions and other nonverbal communication so they can effectively convey the message of their employer or client without having their personal thoughts and feelings leak through. Poker players, therapists, police officers, doctors, teachers, and actors are also in professions that often require them to have more awareness of and control over their nonverbal communication.

Have you ever tried to conceal your surprise, suppress your anger, or act joyful even when you weren’t? Most people whose careers don’t involve conscious manipulation of nonverbal signals find it difficult to control or suppress them. While we can consciously decide to stop sending verbal messages, our nonverbal communication always has the potential of generating meaning for another person, whether we mean it to or not. The teenager who decides to shut out his dad and not communicate with him still sends a message with his “blank” stare (still a facial expression) and lack of movement (still a gesture). In this sense, nonverbal communication is “irrepressible” (Andersen, 1999).

Nonverbal Communication Is More Ambiguous

Figure 4.1: Consider a wink as an example of ambiguous, nonverbal communication.

We know that the symbolic and abstract nature of language can lead to misunderstandings, but nonverbal communication is even more ambiguous (Neill, 2017). As with verbal communication, most of our nonverbal signals can be linked to multiple meanings, but unlike words, many nonverbal signals do not have any one specific meaning. If you have ever had someone wink at you and did not know why, you have probably experienced this uncertainty. Did they wink to express their affection for you, their pleasure with something you just did, or because you share some inside knowledge or joke?

Just as we look at context clues in a sentence or paragraph to derive meaning from a particular word, we can look for context clues in various sources of information like the physical environment, other nonverbal signals, or verbal communication to make sense of a particular nonverbal cue. Unlike verbal communication, however, nonverbal communication does not have explicit rules of grammar that bring structure, order, and agreed-on patterns of usage (Neill, 2017). Instead, we implicitly learn norms of nonverbal communication, which leads to greater variance. In general, we exhibit more idiosyncrasies in our usage of nonverbal communication than we do with verbal communication, which also increases the ambiguity of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Is More Credible

Although we can rely on verbal communication to fill in the blanks sometimes left by nonverbal expressions, we often put more trust into what people do over what they say. This is especially true in times of stress or danger when our behaviors become more instinctual and we rely on older systems of thinking and acting that evolved before our ability to speak and write (Andersen, 1999). This innateness creates intuitive feelings about the genuineness of nonverbal communication, and this genuineness relates back to our earlier discussion about the sometimes involuntary and often subconscious nature of nonverbal communication. An example of the innateness of nonverbal signals can be found in children who have been blind since birth but still exhibit the same facial expressions as other children. In short, the involuntary or subconscious nature of nonverbal communication makes it less easy to fake, which makes it seem more honest and credible. We will learn more about the role that nonverbal communication plays in deception later in this chapter.

4.2 Functions of Nonverbal Communication

A primary function of nonverbal communication is to convey meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. Nonverbal communication is also used to influence others and regulate conversational flow. Perhaps even more important are the ways in which nonverbal communication functions as a central part of relational communication and identity expression.

Nonverbal Communication Conveys Meaning

Nonverbal communication conveys meaning by reinforcing, substituting for, or contradicting verbal communication. As we've already learned, verbal and nonverbal communication are two parts of the same system that often work side by side, helping us generate meaning.

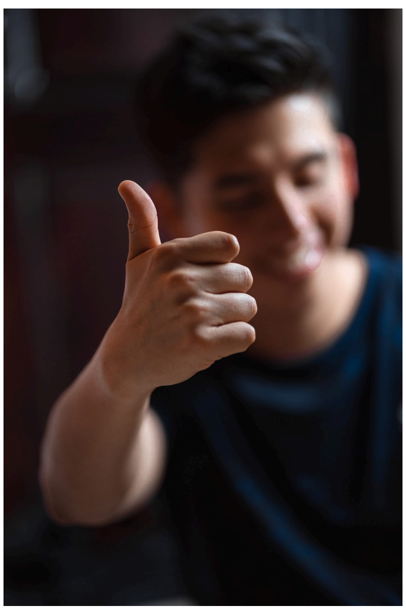

Figure 4.2: Hand gestures are helpful in reinforcing verbal communication.

In terms of reinforcing verbal communication, gestures can help describe a space or shape that another person is unfamiliar with in ways that words alone cannot. Gestures also reinforce basic meaning—for example, pointing to the door when you tell someone to leave. Facial expressions reinforce the emotional states we convey through verbal communication. For example, smiling while telling a funny story better conveys your emotions (Hargie, 2011). Vocal variation can help us emphasize a particular part of a message, which helps reinforce a word or sentence's meaning. For example, saying, "How was *your* weekend?" conveys a different meaning than "How was your *weekend*?"

Nonverbal communication can substitute for verbal communication in a variety of ways. Nonverbal communication can convey a great deal of meaning when verbal communication is not effective because of language barriers. Language barriers are present when a person has not yet learned to speak or loses the ability to speak. For example, babies who have not yet developed language skills make facial expressions, at a few months old, that are similar to those of adults and therefore can generate meaning (Oster, Hegley, & Nagel, 1992). People who have developed language skills but cannot use them because they have temporarily or permanently lost them can still communicate nonverbally. Although it is always a good idea to learn some of the local language when you travel, gestures such as pointing or demonstrating the size or shape of something may suffice in basic interactions.

Nonverbal communication is also useful in a quiet situation where verbal communication would be disturbing; for example, you may use a gesture to signal to a friend that you are ready to leave the library. Crowded or loud places can also impede verbal communication and lead people to rely more on nonverbal messages (Krauss, Chen, & Chawla, 1996). Getting a server or bartender's attention with a hand gesture is definitely more polite than yelling, "Hey you!" Finally, there are just times when we know it is better not to say something aloud. If you want to point out a person's unusual outfit or signal to a friend that you think his or her date is a loser, you are probably more likely to do that nonverbally.

Last, nonverbal communication can convey meaning by contradicting verbal communication. As we learned earlier, we often perceive nonverbal communication to be more credible than verbal communication. This is especially true when we receive **mixed messages**, or messages in which verbal and nonverbal signals contradict each other. For example, a person may say, "You can't do anything right!" in a mean tone but follow that up with a wink, which could indicate the person is teasing or joking. Mixed messages lead to uncertainty and confusion on the part of receivers, which leads us to look for more information to try to determine which message is more credible. If we are unable to resolve the discrepancy, we are likely to react negatively and potentially withdraw from the interaction (Hargie, 2011). Persistent mixed messages can lead to relational distress and hurt a person's credibility in professional settings.

Nonverbal Communication Influences Others

Nonverbal communication can be used to influence people in a variety of ways, but the most common way is through deception (Vrij, Hartwig, & Granhag, 2019). Deception is typically thought of as the intentional act of altering information to influence another person, which means that it extends beyond lying to include concealing, omitting, or exaggerating information. While verbal communication is to blame for the content of the deception, nonverbal communication partners with the language through deceptive acts to be more convincing. Since most of us intuitively believe that nonverbal communication is more credible than verbal communication, we often intentionally try to control our nonverbal communication when we are engaging in deception. Likewise, we try to evaluate other people's nonverbal communication to determine the veracity of their messages (Vrij, Hartwig, & Granhag, 2019). Students initially seem surprised when we discuss the prevalence of deception, but their surprise diminishes once they realize that deception is not always malevolent, mean, or hurtful. Deception obviously has negative connotations, but people engage in deception for many reasons (to excuse our own mistakes, be polite to others, or influence others' behaviors or perceptions).

The fact that deception served an important evolutionary purpose helps explain its prevalence among humans today. Species that are capable of deception have a higher survival rate. Other animals engage in nonverbal deception that helps them attract mates, hide from predators, and trap prey (Andersen, 1999). To put it bluntly, the better at deception a creature is, the more likely it is to survive. So, over time, the humans that were better liars were the ones that got their genes passed on. However, the fact that lying played a part in our survival as a species does not give us a license to lie.

Aside from deception, we can use nonverbal communication to "take the edge off" a critical or unpleasant message in an attempt to influence the reaction of the other person. We can also use eye contact and proximity to get someone to move or leave an area. For example, hungry diners waiting to snag a first-come-first-serve table in a crowded restaurant send messages to the people who have already eaten and paid that it's time to go. People on competition reality television shows like *Survivor* and *Big Brother* play what they have come to term a "social game." The social aspects of the game involve the manipulation of verbal and nonverbal cues to send strategic messages about oneself in an attempt to influence others. Nonverbal cues such as length of conversational turn, volume, posture, touch, eye contact, and choices of clothing and accessories can become part of a player's social game strategy. Although reality television is not a reflection of real life, people still engage in competition and strategically change their communication to influence others, making it important to be aware of how we nonverbally influence others and how they may try to influence us.

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversational Flow

Conversational interaction has been likened to a dance, where each person has to make moves and take turns without stepping on the other's toes. Nonverbal communication helps us regulate our conversations so we do not end up constantly interrupting each other or waiting in awkward silences between speaker turns. Pitch, which is a part of vocalics, helps us cue others into our conversational intentions. A rising pitch typically indicates a question and a falling pitch indicates the end of a thought or the end of a conversational turn. We can also use a falling pitch to indicate closure, which can be very useful at the end of a speech to signal to the audience that you are finished, which cues the applause and prevents an awkward silence that the speaker ends up filling with "That's it" or "Thank you." We also signal our turn is coming to an end by stopping hand gestures and shifting our eye contact to the person who we think will speak next (Hargie, 2011). Conversely, we can "hold the floor" with nonverbal signals even when we are not exactly sure what we are going to say next. Repeating a hand gesture or using one or more verbal fillers can extend our turn even though we are not verbally communicating at the moment.

Nonverbal Communication Affects Relationships

To relate successfully to other people, we must possess some skill at encoding and decoding nonverbal communication. The nonverbal messages we send and receive influence our relationships in positive and negative ways and can work to bring people together or push them apart. Nonverbal communication in the form of tie signs, immediacy behaviors, and expressions of emotion are just three of many examples that illustrate how nonverbal communication affects our relationships.

Immediacy behaviors play a central role in bringing people together. Some scholars have identified them as the most important function of nonverbal communication (Andersen & Andersen, 2005). **Immediacy behaviors** are verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators and include things like smiling, nodding, making eye contact, and occasionally engaging in social, polite, or professional touch (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007). Immediacy behaviors are a good way of creating rapport, or a friendly and positive connection between people. Skilled nonverbal communicators are more likely to be able to create rapport with others due to attention-getting expressiveness, warm initial greetings, and an ability to get "in tune" with others, which conveys empathy (Riggio, 1992). These skills are important to help initiate and maintain relationships.

While verbal communication is our primary tool for solving problems and providing detailed instructions, nonverbal communication is our primary tool for communicating emotions. This makes sense when we remember that nonverbal communication emerged before verbal communication and was the channel through which we expressed anger, fear, and love for thousands of years of human history (Andersen, 1999). Touch and facial expressions are two primary ways we express emotions nonverbally. Love is a primary emotion that we express nonverbally and that forms the basis of our close relationships. Although no single facial expression for love has been identified, it is expressed through prolonged eye contact, close interpersonal distances, increased touch, and increased time spent together, among other things. Given many people's limited emotional vocabulary, nonverbal expressions of emotion are central to our relationships.

Nonverbal Communication Expresses Our Identities

Nonverbal communication expresses who we are. Our identities (the groups to which we belong, our cultures, our hobbies and interests, etc.) are conveyed nonverbally through the way we set up our living and working spaces, the clothes we wear, the way we carry ourselves, and the accents and tones of our voices (Canfield, 2002). Our physical bodies give others impressions about who we are, and some of these features are more under our control than others are. Height, for example, has been shown to influence how people are treated and perceived in various contexts. Our level of attractiveness also influences how we perceive ourselves and how people perceive us. Although we can temporarily alter our height or looks—for example, with different shoes or different color contact lenses—we can only permanently alter these features using more invasive and costly measures such as cosmetic surgery. We have more control over some other aspects of nonverbal communication in terms of how we communicate our identities. For example, the way we carry and present ourselves through posture, eye contact, and tone of voice can be altered to present ourselves as warm or distant depending on the context.

Aside from our physical body, **artifacts**, which are the objects and possessions that surround us, also communicate our identities. Examples of artifacts include our clothes, jewelry, and space decorations. In all the previous examples, implicit norms or explicit rules can affect how we nonverbally present ourselves. For example, in a particular workplace, it may be a norm (implicit) for people in management positions to dress casually, or it may be a rule (explicit) that different levels of employees wear different uniforms or follow particular dress codes. We can also use nonverbal communication to express identity characteristics that do not match up with who we actually think we are. Through changes to nonverbal signals, a capable person can try to appear helpless, a guilty person can try to appear innocent, or an uninformed person can try to appear credible.

4.3 Types of Nonverbal Communication

Just as verbal language is broken up into various categories, there are also different types of nonverbal communication. As we learn about each type of nonverbal signal, keep in mind that nonverbals often work in concert with each other, combining to repeat, modify, or contradict the verbal message being sent.

Kinesics

The word **kinesics** comes from the root word *kinesis*, which means "movement," and refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and face movements (Harrigan, 2005). Specifically, this section will outline the use of gestures, head movements and posture, eye contact, and facial expressions as nonverbal communication.

Gestures

There are three main types of gestures: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators (Andersen, 1999). **Adaptors** are touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety. Adaptors can be targeted toward the self, objects, or others. In regular social situations, adaptors result from uneasiness, anxiety, or a general sense that we are not in control of our surroundings. Many of us subconsciously click pens, shake our legs, or engage in other adaptors during classes, meetings, or while waiting as a way to do something with our excess energy. Public speaking students who watch video recordings of their speeches notice nonverbal adaptors that they did not know they used. In public speaking situations, people most commonly use self- or object-focused adaptors.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning within a cultural context. A hitchhiker's raised thumb, the "OK" sign with thumb and index finger connected in a circle with the other three fingers sticking up, and the raised middle finger are all examples of emblems that have an agreed-on meaning or meanings with a culture. Emblems can be still or in motion; for example, circling the index finger around at the side of your head says "He or she is crazy," or rolling your hands repeatedly in front of you says "Move on."

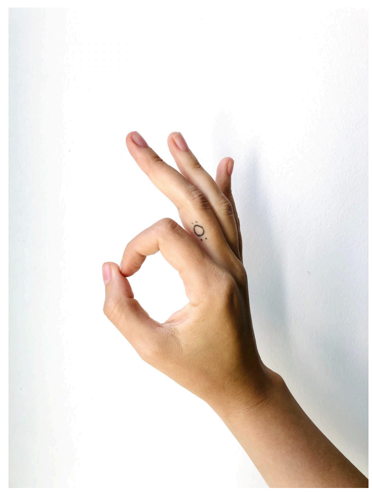

Figure 4.3: The "OK" hand gesture is an example of an emblem.

Head Movements and Posture

We group head movements and posture together because they are often both used to acknowledge others and communicate interest or attentiveness. In terms of head movements, a head nod is a universal sign of acknowledgement in cultures where the formal bow is no longer used as a greeting. In these cases, the head nod essentially serves as an abbreviated bow. An innate and universal head movement is the headshake back and forth to signal "no." This nonverbal signal begins at birth, even before a baby has the ability to know that it has a corresponding meaning. Babies shake their head from side to side to reject their mother's breast and later shake their head to reject attempts to spoon-feed (Pease & Pease, 2004). This biologically based movement then sticks with us to be a recognizable signal for "no." We also move our head to indicate interest. For example, a head up typically indicates an engaged or neutral attitude, a head tilt indicates interest and is an innate submission gesture that exposes the neck and subconsciously makes people feel more trusting of us, and a head down signals a negative or aggressive attitude (Pease & Pease, 2004).

There are four general human postures: standing, sitting, squatting, and lying down (Hargie, 2011). Within each of these postures, there are many variations, and when combined with particular gestures or other nonverbal cues they can express many different meanings. Most of our communication occurs while we are standing or sitting. One interesting standing posture involves putting our hands on our hips and is a nonverbal cue that we use subconsciously to make us look bigger and show assertiveness. When the elbows are pointed out, this prevents others from getting past us as easily and is a sign of attempted dominance or a gesture that says we are ready for action. In terms of sitting, leaning back shows informality and indifference, straddling a chair is a sign of dominance (but also some insecurity because the person is protecting the vulnerable front part of his or her body), and leaning forward shows interest and attentiveness (Pease & Pease, 2004).

Eye Contact

We also communicate through eye behaviors, primarily eye contact (Glaeser & Paulus, 2015). While eye behaviors are often studied under the category of kinesics, they have their own branch of nonverbal studies called **oculesics**, which comes from the Latin word *oculus*, meaning "eye." The face and eyes are the main point of focus during communication, and along with our ears, our eyes take in most of the communicative information around us. The saying "The eyes are the window to the soul" is actually accurate in terms of where people typically think others are "located," which is right behind the eyes (Andersen, 1999). Certain eye behaviors have become tied to personality traits or emotional states, as illustrated in phrases like "hungry eyes," "evil eyes," and "bedroom eyes."

Aside from regulating conversations, eye contact is also used to monitor interaction by taking in feedback and other nonverbal cues and to send information. Our eyes bring in the visual information we need to interpret people's movements, gestures, and eye contact. A speaker can use his or her eye contact to determine if an audience is engaged, confused, or bored and then adapt his or her message accordingly. Our eyes also send information to others. People know not to interrupt when we are in deep thought because we naturally look away from others when we are processing information.

Making eye contact with others also communicates that we are paying attention and are interested in what another person is saying.

Facial Expressions

Our faces are the most expressive part of our bodies. Think of how photos are often intended to capture a particular expression "in a flash" to preserve for later viewing. Even though a photo is a snapshot in time, we can still interpret much meaning from a human face caught in a moment of expression, and basic facial expressions are recognizable by humans all over the world. Much research has supported the universality of a core group of facial expressions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. The first four are especially identifiable across cultures (Andersen, 1999). However, the triggers for these expressions and the cultural and social norms that influence their displays are still culturally diverse.

Since you are likely giving speeches in this class, let's learn about the role of the face in public speaking. Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech. In order to set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile to communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Facial expressions communicate a range of emotions. They can be used to infer personality traits and make judgments about a speaker's credibility and competence. Facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored. Even if you are not bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which is not likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably, and that will help you achieve your speech goals.

Haptics

Think of how touch has the power to comfort someone in moment of sorrow when words alone cannot. This positive power of touch is countered by the potential for touch to be threatening because of its connection to sex and violence. To learn about the power of touch, we turn to **haptics**, which refers to the study of communication by touch (Hannaford & Okamura, 2016). We probably get more explicit advice and instruction on how to use touch than any other form of nonverbal communication. A lack of nonverbal communication competence related to touch could have negative interpersonal consequences; for example, if we do not follow the advice we have been given about the importance of a firm handshake, a person might make negative judgments about our confidence or credibility. A lack of competence could have more dire negative consequences, including legal punishment, if we touch someone inappropriately (intentionally or unintentionally).

Touch is necessary for human social development, and it can be welcoming, threatening, or persuasive. Research projects have found that students evaluated a library and its staff more favorably if the librarian briefly touched the patron while returning his or her library card, that female restaurant servers received larger tips when they touched patrons, and that people were more likely to sign a petition when the petitioner touched them during their interaction (Andersen, 1999). Conversely, casual touching can be interpreted as demeaning or sexist, especially when crossing genders, generations or cultures.

Vocalics

We learned earlier that *paralanguage* refers to the vocalized but nonverbal parts of a message. **Vocalics** is the study of paralanguage, which includes the vocal qualities that go along with verbal messages, such as pitch, volume, rate, vocal quality, and verbal fillers (Andersen, 1999).

Pitch helps convey meaning, regulate conversational flow, and communicate the intensity of a message. Even babies recognize a sentence with a higher pitched ending as a question. We also learn that greetings have a rising emphasis and farewells have falling emphasis. Of course, no one ever tells us these things explicitly; we learn them through observation and practice. We do not notice some more subtle and/or complex patterns of paralanguage involving pitch until we are older. Children, for example, have a difficult time perceiving sarcasm, which is usually conveyed through paralinguistic characteristics like pitch and tone rather than the actual words being spoken. Adults with lower than average intelligence and children have difficulty reading sarcasm in another person's voice and instead may interpret literally what they say (Andersen, 1999).

Paralanguage provides important context for the verbal content of speech. For example, volume helps communicate intensity. A louder voice is usually thought of as more intense, although a soft voice combined with a certain tone and facial expression can be just as intense. We typically adjust our volume based on our setting, the distance between people, and the relationship. In our age of computer-mediated communication, TYPING IN ALL CAPS is equated with yelling. A voice at a low volume or a whisper can be very appropriate when sending a covert message or flirting with a romantic partner, but it would not enhance a person's credibility if used during a professional presentation.

Speaking rate refers to how fast or slow a person speaks and can lead others to form impressions about our emotional state, credibility, and intelligence and is situated within cultures. As with volume, variations in speaking rate can interfere with the ability of others to receive and understand verbal messages. A slow speaker could bore others and lead their attention to wander. A fast speaker may be difficult to follow, and the fast delivery can actually distract from the message. Speaking a little faster than the normal 120–150 words a minute, however, can be beneficial, as people tend to find speakers whose rate is above average more credible and intelligent (Buller & Burgoon, 1986). When speaking at a faster-than-normal rate, it is important that a speaker also clearly articulate and pronounce his or her words. The following is a review of the various communicative functions of vocalics:

- **Repetition.** Vocalic cues reinforce other verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., saying, "I'm not sure" with an uncertain tone).
- **Complementing.** Vocalic cues elaborate on or modify verbal and nonverbal meaning (e.g., the pitch and volume used to say "I love sweet potatoes" would add context to the meaning of the sentence, such as the degree to which the person loves sweet potatoes or the use of sarcasm).
- **Accenting.** Vocalic cues allow us to emphasize particular parts of a message, which helps determine meaning (e.g., "*She* is my friend," or "She is *my* friend," or "She is my *friend*").
- **Substituting.** Vocalic cues can take the place of other verbal or nonverbal cues (e.g., saying, "uh huh" instead of "I am listening and understand what you're saying").
- **Regulating.** Vocalic cues help regulate the flow of conversations (e.g., falling pitch and slowing rate of speaking usually indicate the end of a speaking turn).
- **Contradicting.** Vocalic cues may contradict other verbal or nonverbal signals (e.g., a person could say, "I'm fine" in a quick, short tone that indicates otherwise).

Proxemics

Proxemics refers to the study of how space and distance influence communication (Hall, 1968). We only need look at the ways in which space shows up in common metaphors to see that space, communication, and relationships are closely related. For example, when we are content with and attracted to someone, we say we are "close" to him or her. When we lose connection with someone, we may say he or she is "distant." In general, space influences how people communicate and behave.

Proxemic Distances

We all have varying definitions of what our "personal space" is, and these definitions are contextual and depend on the situation and the relationship (Hall, 1968). Although our bubbles are invisible, people are socialized into the norms of personal space within their cultural group. Scholars have identified four zones for Americans.

Public Space

Public space starts about twelve feet from a person and extends out from there. It is formal and not intimate (Hall, 1968). This is the least personal of the four zones. It would typically be used when a person is engaging in a formal speech and is removed from the audience to allow the audience to see or when a high profile or powerful person like a celebrity or executive maintains such a distance as a sign of power or for safety and security reasons.

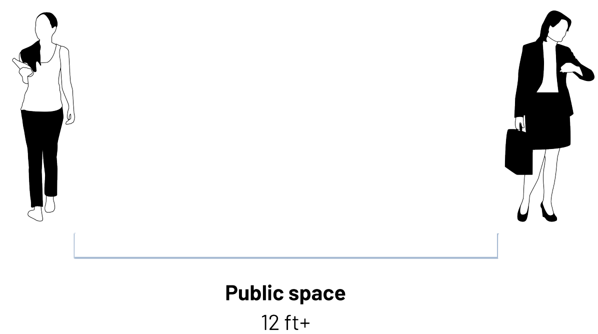

Figure 4.4: Public space.

Social Space

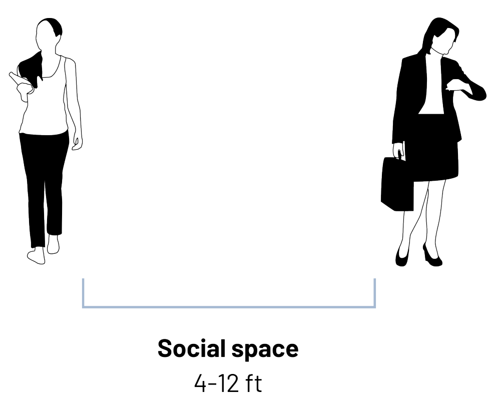

Figure 4.5: Social space.

Communication that occurs in the social zone, which is four to twelve feet away from our body, is typically in the context of a professional or casual interaction, but not intimate or public (Hall, 1968). This distance is preferred in many professional settings because it reduces the suspicion of any impropriety. The expression "keep someone at an arm's length" means that someone is kept out of the personal space and kept in the social/professional space. If two people held up their arms and stood so just the tips of their fingers were touching, they would be around four feet away from each other, which is perceived as a safe distance because the possibility for intentional or unintentional touching does not exist. It is also possible to have people in the outer portion of our social zone but not feel obligated to interact with them, but when people come much closer than six feet to us then we often feel obligated to acknowledge their presence.

Personal Space

Personal and intimate zones refer to the space that starts at our physical body and extends four feet (Hall, 1968).These zones are reserved for friends, close acquaintances, and significant others. Much of our communication occurs in the personal zone, which is what we typically think of as our "personal space bubble" and extends from 1.5 feet to 4 feet away from our body. Even though we are getting closer to the physical body of another person, we may use verbal communication at this point to signal that our presence in this zone is friendly and not intimate. Even people who know each other could be uncomfortable spending too much time in this zone unnecessarily.

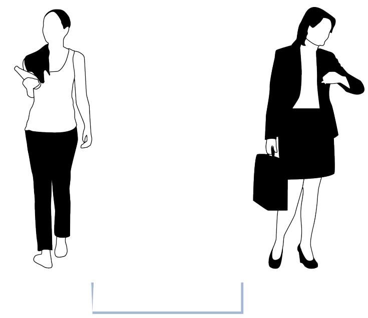

Figure 4.6: Personal space.

Intimate Space

Figure 4.7: Intimate space.

As we breach the invisible line that is 1.5 feet from our body, we enter the intimate zone, which is reserved for only the closest friends, family, and romantic/intimate partners (Hall, 1968). It is impossible to ignore completely people when they are in this space, even if we are trying to pretend that we are ignoring them. A breach of this space can be comforting in some contexts and annoying or frightening in others. We need regular human contact that is not just verbal but also physical. We have already discussed the importance of touch in nonverbal communication, and in order for that much-needed touch to occur, people have to enter our intimate space.

So what happens when our space is violated? Although these zones are well established in research for personal space preferences of Americans, individuals vary in terms of their reactions to people entering certain zones, and determining what constitutes a "violation" of space is subjective and contextual. For example, another person's presence in our social or public zones does not typically arouse suspicion or negative physical or communicative reactions, but it could in some situations or with certain people. However, many situations lead to our personal and intimate space being breached by others against our will, and these breaches are more likely to be upsetting, even when they are expected.

We have all had to get into a crowded elevator or wait in a long line. In such situations, we may rely on some verbal communication to reduce immediacy and indicate that we are not interested in closeness and are aware that a breach has occurred. People make comments about the crowd, saying, "We're really packed in here like sardines," or use humor to indicate that they are pleasant and well-adjusted and uncomfortable with the breach like any "normal" person would be. Interestingly, as we will learn in our discussion of territoriality, we do not often use verbal communication to defend our personal space during regular interactions. Instead, we rely on nonverbal communication (like moving, crossing our arms, or avoiding eye contact) to deal with breaches of space.

Chronemics

Chronemics refers to the study of how time affects communication. Personal time refers to the ways in which individuals experience time (Bruneau, 2011). The way we experience time varies based on our mood, our interest level, and other factors. Think about how quickly time passes when you are interested in and therefore engaged in something. People with past-time orientations may want to reminisce about the past, reunite with old friends, and put considerable time into preserving memories and keepsakes in scrapbooks and photo albums. People with future-time orientations may spend the same amount of time making career and personal plans, writing out to-do lists, or researching future vacations, potential retirement spots, or what book they are going to read next.

Physical time refers to the fixed cycles of days, years, and seasons. Physical time, especially seasons, can affect our mood and psychological states. Some people experience seasonal affective disorder that leads them to experience emotional distress and anxiety during the changes of seasons, primarily from warm and bright to dark and cold (summer to fall and winter).

Cultural time refers to how large groups of people view time. Polychronic people do not view time as a linear progression that needs to be divided into small units and scheduled in advance. Polychronic people keep schedules that are more flexible and may engage in several activities at once. Monochronic people tend to schedule their time more rigidly and do one thing at a time. A polychronic or monochronic orientation to time influences our social realities and how we interact with others.

Additionally, the way we use time depends in some ways on our status. For example, doctors can make their patients wait for extended periods of time, and executives and celebrities may run consistently behind schedule, making others wait for them. Promptness and the amount of time that is socially acceptable for lateness and waiting varies among individuals and contexts. Chronemics also covers the amount of time we spend talking. We have already learned that conversational turns and turn-taking patterns are influenced by social norms and help our conversations progress. We all know how annoying it can be when a person dominates a conversation or when we cannot get a person to contribute anything.

Personal Presentation and Environment

Personal presentation involves two components: our physical characteristics and the artifacts with which we adorn and surround ourselves. Physical characteristics include body shape, height, weight, attractiveness, and other physical features of our bodies. We do not have as much control over how these nonverbal cues are encoded as we do with many other aspects of nonverbal communication. Although ideals of attractiveness vary among cultures and individuals, research consistently indicates that people who are deemed attractive based on physical characteristics have distinct advantages in many aspects of life. This fact, along with media images that project often unrealistic ideals of beauty, have contributed to booming health and beauty, dieting, gym, and plastic surgery industries.

Have you ever tried to change your “look?” An example might be big changes in how you present yourself in terms of clothing and accessories. A younger version of you in high school might embrace wearing clothes from the local thrift store daily. Of course, most of them were older clothes, so you were going for a “retro” look, which that might suit you at that age. Later in the last years of college, you might as if you are entering a new stage of adulthood, so you might start wearing business-casual clothes to school every day, embracing the “dress for the job you want” philosophy. In both cases, these changes will definitely affect how others perceived you Television programs like *What Not to Wear* seek to show the power of wardrobe and personal style changes in how people communicate with others.

4.4 Nonverbal Communication Competence

As we age, we internalize social and cultural norms related to sending (encoding) and interpreting (decoding) nonverbal communication. In terms of sending, the tendency of children to send unmonitored nonverbal signals reduces as we get older and begin to monitor and perhaps censor or mask them (Andersen, 1999). Likewise, as we become communicators that are more experienced we tend to think that we become better at interpreting nonverbal messages. In this section, we will discuss some strategies for effectively encoding and decoding nonverbal messages. As we have already learned, we receive little, if any, official instruction in nonverbal communication, but you can think of this chapter as a training manual to help improve your own nonverbal communication competence. As with all aspects of communication, improving your nonverbal communication takes commitment and continued effort.

Guidelines for Sending Nonverbal Messages

First impressions matter. Nonverbal cues account for much of the content from which we form initial impressions, so it is important to know that people make judgments about our identities and skills after only brief exposure. Our competence regarding and awareness of nonverbal communication can help determine how an interaction will proceed and, in fact, whether it will take place at all. People who are skilled at encoding nonverbal messages are more favorably evaluated after initial encounters. This is likely due to the fact that people who are more nonverbally expressive are also more attention getting and engaging and make people feel more welcome and warm due to increased immediacy behaviors, all of which enhance perceptions of charisma.

Nonverbal Communication is Multichannel

Be aware of the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication. We rarely send a nonverbal message in isolation. For example, a posture may be combined with a touch or eye behavior to create what is called a nonverbal cluster (Pease & Pease, 2004). **Nonverbal congruence** refers to consistency among different nonverbal expressions within a cluster. Congruent nonverbal communication is more credible and effective than ambiguous or conflicting nonverbal cues. Even though you may intend for your nonverbal messages to be congruent, they could still be decoded in a way that does not match up with your intent, especially since nonverbal expressions vary in terms of their degree of conscious encoding. In this sense, the multichannel nature of nonverbal communication creates the potential of both increased credibility and increased ambiguity.

Nonverbal Communication Affects Our Interactions

Nonverbal communication affects our own and others' behaviors and communication. Changing our nonverbal signals can affect our thoughts and emotions. Knowing this allows us to have more control over the trajectory of our communication, possibly allowing us to intervene in a negative cycle. You might start to exhibit nonverbal clusters that signal frustration when you are waiting in line to get your driver's license renewed and the man in front of you does not have his materials organized and is asking unnecessary questions.

You might cross your arms, a closing-off gesture, and combine that with wrapping your fingers tightly around one bicep and occasionally squeezing, which is a self-touch adaptor that results from anxiety and stress. The longer you stand like that, the more frustrated and defensive you will become, because that nonverbal cluster reinforces and heightens your feelings. Increased awareness about these cycles can help you make conscious moves to change your nonverbal communication and, subsequently, your cognitive and emotional states (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995).

Nonverbal Communication Regulates Conversations

The ability to encode appropriate turn-taking signals can help ensure that we can hold the floor when needed in a conversation or work our way into a conversation smoothly, without inappropriately interrupting someone or otherwise being seen as rude. People with nonverbal encoding competence are typically more "in control" of conversations. This regulating function can be useful in initial encounters when we are trying to learn more about another person and in situations where status differentials are present or compliance gaining or dominance are goals.

Even though verbal communication is most often used to interrupt another person, interruptions are still studied as a part of chronemics because it interferes with another person's talk time. Instead of interrupting, you can use nonverbal signals like leaning in, increasing your eye contact, or using a brief gesture like subtly raising one hand or the index finger to signal to another person that you would like to take the floor.

Nonverbal Communication Relates to Listening

Part of being a good listener involves nonverbal-encoding competence, as nonverbal feedback in the form of head nods, eye contact, and posture can signal that a listener is paying attention and the speaker's message is received and understood. Active listening, for example, combines good cognitive listening practices with outwardly visible cues that signal to others that we are listening. Listeners are expected to make more eye contact with the speaker than the speaker makes with them, so it is important to "listen with your eyes" by maintaining eye contact, which signals attentiveness. Listeners should also avoid distracting movements in the form of self, other, and object adaptors. Being a higher self-monitor can help you catch nonverbal signals that might signal that you are not listening, at which point you could consciously switch to more active listening signals.

Nonverbal Communication Relates to Impression Management

The nonverbal messages we encode also help us express our identities and play into impression management. Being able to control nonverbal expressions and competently encode them allows us to better manage our persona and project a desired self to others—for example, a self that is perceived as competent, socially attractive, and engaging. Being nonverbally expressive during initial interactions usually leads to impressions that are more favorable. So smiling, keeping an attentive posture, and offering a solid handshake help communicate confidence and enthusiasm that can be useful on a first date, during a job interview, when visiting family for the holidays, or when running into an acquaintance at the grocery store.

Guidelines for Interpreting Nonverbal Messages

We learn to decode or interpret nonverbal messages through practice and by internalizing social norms. Following the suggestions to become a better encoder of nonverbal communication will lead to better decoding competence through increased awareness. Since nonverbal communication is more ambiguous than verbal communication, we have to learn to interpret these cues as clusters within contexts. My favorite way to increase my knowledge about nonverbal communication is to engage in people watching. Just by consciously taking in the variety of nonverbal signals around us, we can build our awareness and occasionally be entertained. Skilled decoders of nonverbal messages are said to have nonverbal sensitivity, which, very similarly to skilled encoders, leads them to have larger social networks, be more popular, and exhibit less social anxiety (Riggio, 1992).

Recognize that Certain Nonverbal Signals are Related

The first guideline for decoding nonverbal signals is to recognize that certain nonverbal signals are related. Nonverbal rulebooks are not effective because they typically view a nonverbal signal in isolation, similar to how dictionaries separately list denotative definitions of words. To get a more nuanced understanding of the meaning behind nonverbal cues, we can look at them as progressive or layered. For example, people engaging in negative critical evaluation of a speaker may cross their legs, cross one arm over their stomach, and put the other arm up so the index finger is resting close to the eye while the chin rests on the thumb (Pease & Pease, 2004). A person would not likely perform all those signals simultaneously. Instead, he or she would likely start with one and then layer more cues on as the feelings intensified. If we notice that a person is starting to build related signals like the ones above onto one another, we might be able to intervene in the negative reaction that is building. Of course, as nonverbal cues are layered on, they may contradict other signals, in which case we can turn to context clues to aid our interpretation.

Read Nonverbal Cues in Context

We can gain insight into how to interpret nonverbal cues through personal contexts. People have idiosyncratic nonverbal behaviors, which create an individual context that varies with each person. Even though we generally fit into certain social and cultural patterns, some people deviate from those norms. For example, some cultures tend toward less touching and greater interpersonal distances during interactions. The United States falls into this general category, but there are people who were socialized into these norms who as individuals deviate from them and touch more and stand closer to others while conversing. As the idiosyncratic communicator inches toward his or her conversational partner, the partner may inch back to reestablish the interpersonal distance norm. Such deviations may lead people to misinterpret sexual or romantic interest or feel uncomfortable. While these actions could indicate such interest, they could also be idiosyncratic. As this example shows, these individual differences can increase the ambiguity of nonverbal communication, but when observed over a period of time, they can actually help us generate meaning.

Try to compare observed nonverbal cues to a person's typical or baseline nonverbal behavior to help avoid misinterpretation. In some instances, it is impossible to know what sorts of individual nonverbal behaviors or idiosyncrasies people have because there is not a relational history. In such cases, we have to turn to our knowledge about specific types of nonverbal communication or draw from more general contextual knowledge.

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Figures

Figure 4.1: Consider a wink as an example of ambiguous, nonverbal communication. Jonathan Safa. 2018. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/ITH_dM_RQLk

Figure 4.2: Hand gestures are helpful in reinforcing verbal communication. Johan Godínez. 2020. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/dDYRYivNzbI

Figure 4.3: The "OK" hand gesture is an example of an emblem. Elena Rabkina. 2020. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/QH8aF3B0gYQ

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5.

LISTENING

Introduction

In our sender-oriented society, listening is often overlooked as an important part of the communication process. Yet research shows that adults spend about 45 percent of their time listening, which is more than any other communicative activity. In some contexts, we spend even more time listening than that. On average, workers spend 55 percent of their workday listening, and managers spend about 63 percent of their day listening (Hargie, 2011).

Listening is a primary means through which we learn new information, which can help us meet instrumental needs as we learn things that helps us complete certain tasks at work or school and get things done in general. The act of listening to our relational partners provides support, which is an important part of **relational maintenance** and helps us meet our relational needs. Listening to what others say about us helps us develop an accurate self-concept, which can help us more strategically communicate for identity needs in order to project to others our desired self. Overall, improving our listening skills can help us be better students, better relational partners, and more successful professionals.

5.1 Understanding How and Why We Listen

Listening is the learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages. We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to practice our own forms of expression. In this section, we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

The Listening Process

Listening is a process and as such does not have a defined start and finish. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements. It does not unfold in a linear, systematic fashion. Models of processes are informative in that they help us visualize specific components, but keep in mind that they do not capture the speed, overlapping nature, or overall complexity of the actual process in action. The stages of the listening process are receiving, interpreting, recalling, and responding.

Figure 5.1: Listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements.

Receiving

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process, we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through auditory and visual channels. Although we do not often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in e-mail, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music interfere with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interfere primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and in turn listen, by trying to minimize noise.

Interpreting

During the interpreting stage of listening, we combine the visual and auditory information we receive and try to make meaning out of that information using schemata. The interpreting stage engages cognitive and relational processing as we take in informational, contextual, and relational cues and try to connect them in meaningful ways to previous experiences. It is through the interpreting stage that we may begin to understand the stimuli we have received.

When we understand something, we are able to attach meaning by connecting information to previous experiences. Through the process of comparing new information with old information, we may also update or revise particular schemata if we find the new information relevant and credible. If we have difficulty interpreting information, meaning we do not have previous experience or information in our existing schemata to make sense of it, then it is difficult to transfer the information into our long-term memory for later recall. In situations where understanding the information we receive is not important or is not a goal, this stage may be fairly short or even skipped. After all, we can move something to our long-term memory by repetition and then later recall it without ever having understood it.

Recalling

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day (Hargie, 2011). Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Hargie, 2011).

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit does not provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. **Short-term memory** is a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. **Long-term memory** is a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing schema and in which information can be stored indefinitely

(Hargie, 2011). Working memory is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind, process it, and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there is not a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities. They can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we cannot remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening.

Responding

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

Paraphrasing is a responding behavior that can also show that you understand what was communicated. When you **paraphrase** information, you rephrase the message into your own words. For example, you might say the following to start a paraphrased response: “What I heard you say was…” or “It seems like you’re saying…” You can also ask clarifying questions to get more information. It is often a good idea to pair a paraphrase with a question to keep a conversation flowing. For example, you might pose the following paraphrase and question pair: "It seems like you believe you were treated unfairly. Is that right?" On the other hand, you might ask a standalone question like "What did your boss do that made you think he was 'playing favorites?'" Make sure to paraphrase and/or ask questions once a person's turn is over, because interrupting can also be interpreted as a sign of not listening. Paraphrasing is also a good tool to use in computer-mediated communication, especially since miscommunication can occur due to a lack of nonverbal and other contextual cues.

The Importance of Listening

Understanding how listening works provides the foundation we need to explore why we listen, including various types and styles of listening. In general, listening helps us achieve all of our communication goals (physical, instrumental, relational, and identity). Listening is also important in academic, professional, and personal contexts. In terms of academics, poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person's first year of college (Zabava & Wolvin, 1993). In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills including listening are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021).

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving (Di Salvo, 1980). Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We should not underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Empathetic listening can help us expand our self and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences, helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of empathetic listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000).

Listening Types

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel "heard" and supported (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic (Watson, Barker, & Weaver III, 1995).

Informational Listening

Informational listening entails listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining information. This type of listening is not evaluative and is common in teaching and learning contexts ranging from a student listening to an informative speech to an out-of-towner listening to directions to the nearest gas station. We also use informational listening when we listen to news reports, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college. They will be expected to have mastered these skills once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college.

Critical Listening

Critical listening entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various persuasive appeals and faulty logic (known as fallacies). Critical listening is important during persuasive exchanges, but I recommend always employing some degree of critical listening, because you may find yourself in a persuasive interaction that you thought was informative. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech in this class and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily.

Empathetic Listening

Empathetic listening is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening. While the word *empathy* means to "feel into" or "feel with" another person, *sympathy* means to "feel for" someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy (Bruneau, 1993). Empathetic listening is other oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It is often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback is not actually desired.

Empathetic listening is key for dialogue and helps maintain interpersonal relationships. In order to reach dialogue, people must have a degree of open-mindedness and a commitment to civility that allows them to be empathetic while still allowing them to believe in and advocate for their own position.

5.2 Barriers to Effective Listening

Figure 5.2: Music is an example of a barrier to effective listening.

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process (Hargie, 2011). At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

Environmental and Physical Barriers to Listening

Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. Even though the person may not have demonstrated any leadership abilities, people subconsciously gravitate toward speakers who are nonverbally accessible. The ability to effectively see and hear a person increases people's confidence in their abilities to receive and process information. Eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise.

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical body. **Physiological noise** is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and affect our listening relative to their intensity. Another type of noise, psychological noise, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening.

Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline, creates a barrier to message reception and processing. The generally positive emotional state of being in love can be just as much of a barrier as feeling hatred. Excited arousal can also distract as much as anxious arousal. Stress about an upcoming events ranging from losing a job, to having surgery, to wondering about what to eat for lunch can overshadow incoming messages.

Psychological noise is relevant here given that the body and mind are not completely separate. In fact, they can interact in ways that further interfere with listening. Fatigue, for example, is usually a combination of psychological and physiological stresses that manifests as stress (psychological noise) and weakness, sleepiness, and tiredness (physiological noise). Additionally, mental anxiety (psychological noise) can also manifest itself in our bodies through trembling, sweating, blushing, or even breaking out in rashes (physiological noise).

Cognitive and Personal Barriers to Listening

Aside from the barriers to effective listening that may be present in the environment or emanate from our bodies, cognitive limits, a lack of listening preparation, difficult or disorganized messages, and prejudices can interfere with listening. Whether you call it multitasking, daydreaming, glazing over, or drifting off, we all cognitively process other things while receiving messages. If you think of your listening mind as a wall of ten televisions, you may notice that in some situations five of the ten televisions are tuned into one channel. If that one channel is a lecture being given by your professor, then you are exerting about half of your cognitive processing abilities on one message.

Difference between Speech and Thought Rate

Our ability to process more information than what comes from one speaker or source creates a barrier to effective listening. While people speak at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, we can process between 400 and 800 words per minute (Hargie, 2011). This gap between speech rate and thought rate gives us an opportunity to side-process any number of thoughts that can be distracting from a more important message. Because of this gap, it is impossible to give one message our "undivided attention," but we can occupy other channels in our minds with thoughts related to the central message. For example, using some of your extra cognitive processing abilities to repeat, rephrase, or reorganize messages coming from one source allows you to use that extra capacity in a way that reinforces the primary message.

The difference between speech and thought rate connects to personal barriers to listening, as personal concerns are often the focus of competing thoughts that can take us away from listening and challenge our ability to concentrate on others' messages. Two common barriers to concentration are self-centeredness and lack of motivation (Brownell, 1993). For example, when our self-consciousness is raised, we may be too busy thinking about how we look, how we're sitting, or what others think of us to be attentive to an incoming message. Additionally, we are often challenged when presented with messages that we do not find personally relevant. In general, we employ **selective attention**, which refers to our tendency to pay attention to the messages that benefit us in some way and filter others out. Therefore, the student who is checking his or her Twitter feed during class may suddenly switch his or her attention back to the previously ignored professor when the following words are spoken: "This will be important for the exam."

Prejudice

Oscar Wilde said, "Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced." Unfortunately, some of our default ways of processing information and perceiving others lead us to rigid ways of thinking. When we engage in prejudiced listening, we are usually trying to preserve our ways of thinking and avoid being convinced of something different. This type of prejudice is a barrier to effective listening, because when we prejudge a person based on his or her identity or ideas, we usually stop listening in an active and/or ethical way.

We exhibit prejudice in our listening in several ways, some of which are more obvious than others. For example, we may claim to be in a hurry and only selectively address the parts of a message that we agree with or that are not controversial. We can also operate from a state of denial where we avoid a subject or person altogether so that our views are not challenged. Prejudices that are based on a person's identity, such as race, age, occupation, or appearance, may lead us to assume that we know what he or she will say, essentially closing down the listening process. Keeping an open mind and engaging in perception checking can help us identify prejudiced listening and shift us into more competent listening practices.

Bad Listening Practices

The previously discussed barriers to effective listening may be difficult to overcome because they are at least partially beyond our control. Other "bad listening" practices may be habitual, but they are easier to address with some concerted effort. These bad listening practices include interrupting, distorted listening, eavesdropping, aggressive listening, narcissistic listening, and pseudo-listening.

Figure 5.3: Bad listening practices.

Interrupting

Conversations unfold as a series of turns, and turn taking is negotiated through a complex set of verbal and nonverbal signals that are consciously and subconsciously received. In this sense, conversational turn taking has been likened to a dance where communicators try to avoid stepping on each other's toes. One of the most frequent glitches in the turn-taking process is interruption, but not all interruptions are considered "bad listening."

An interruption could be unintentional if we misread cues and think a person is done speaking only to have him or her start up again at the same time we do. Sometimes interruptions are more like overlapping statements that show support (e.g., "I think so too.") or excitement about the conversation (e.g., "That's so cool!"). Back-channel cues like "uh-huh" also overlap with a speaker's message. We may also interrupt out of necessity if we are engaged in a task with the other person and need to offer directions (e.g., "Turn left here."), instructions (e.g., "Will you whisk the eggs?"), or warnings (e.g., "Look out behind you!"). All these interruptions are not typically thought of as evidence of bad listening unless they become distracting for the speaker or are unnecessary.

Unintentional interruptions can still be considered bad listening if they result from mindless communication. As we have already learned, intended meaning is not as important as the meaning that is generated in the interaction itself. So if you interrupt unintentionally, but because you were only half-listening, then the interruption is still evidence of bad listening. The speaker may form a negative impression of you that cannot just be erased by you noting that you did not "mean to interrupt." Interruptions can also be used as an attempt to dominate a conversation. A person engaging in this type of interruption may lead the other communicator to try to assert dominance, too, resulting in a competition to see who can hold the floor the longest or the most often. More than likely, though, the speaker will form a negative impression of the interrupter and may withdraw from the conversation.

Distorted Listening

Distorted listening occurs in many ways. Sometimes we just get the order of information wrong. This can have relatively little negative effects if we are casually recounting a story or we forget the order of turns (left, right, left or right, left, right?) in our driving directions. It can have very negative effects if we recount the events of a crime out of order, which leads to faulty testimony at a criminal trial. Rationalization is another form of distorted listening through which we adapt, edit, or skew incoming information to fit our existing schemata. We may, for example, reattribute the cause of something to better suit our own beliefs. If a professor is explaining to a student why he earned a "D" on his final paper, the student could reattribute the cause from "I didn't follow the paper guidelines" to "this professor is an unfair grader."

Sometimes we actually change the words we hear to make them better fit what we are thinking. This can easily happen if we join a conversation late, overhear part of a conversation, or are being a lazy listener and miss important setup and context. Passing along distorted information can lead to negative consequences ranging from starting a false rumor about someone to passing along incorrect medical instructions from one health-care provider to the next (Hargie, 2011). Last, the addition of material to a message is a type of distorted listening that actually goes against our normal pattern of listening, which involves reducing the amount of information and losing some meaning as we take it in. The metaphor of "weaving a tall tale" is related to the practice of distorting through addition, as inaccurate or fabricated information is added to what was actually heard.

Aggressive Listening

Aggressive listening is a bad listening practice in which people pay attention in order to attack something that a speaker says (McCornack, 2007). Aggressive listeners like to ambush speakers in order to critique their ideas, personality, or other characteristics. Such behavior often results from built-up frustration within an interpersonal relationship. Unfortunately, the more two people know each other, the better they will be at aggressive listening. Take the following exchange between long-term partners:

> ***Deb:***
>
> *I have been thinking about making a salsa garden next to the side porch. I think it would be really good to be able to go pick our own tomatoes, peppers, and cilantro to make homemade salsa.*
>
> ***Summer:***
>
> *Really? When are you thinking about doing it?*
>
> ***Deb:***
>
> *Next weekend. Would you like to help?*
>
> ***Summer:***
>
> *I won't hold my breath. Every time you come up with some "idea of the week", you get so excited about it. But do you ever follow through with it? No. We'll be eating salsa from the store next year, just like we are now.*

Although Summer's initial response to Deb's idea is seemingly appropriate and positive, she asks the question because she has already planned her upcoming aggressive response. Summer's aggression toward Deb is not about a salsa garden; it is about a building frustration with what Summer perceives as Deb's lack of follow-through on her ideas. Aside from engaging in aggressive listening because of built-up frustration, such listeners may also attack others' ideas or mock their feelings because of their own low self-esteem and insecurities.

Narcissistic Listening

Narcissistic listening is a form of self-centered and self-absorbed listening in which listeners try to make the interaction about them (McCornack, 2007). Narcissistic listeners redirect the focus of the conversation to them by interrupting or changing the topic. When the focus is taken off them, narcissistic listeners may give negative feedback by pouting, providing negative criticism of the speaker or topic, or ignoring the speaker. A common sign of narcissistic listening is the combination of a "pivot," when listeners shift the focus of attention back to them, and "one-upping," when listeners try to top what previous speakers have said during the interaction. You can see this narcissistic combination in the following interaction:

> ***Bryce:***
>
> *My boss has been really unfair to me lately and hasn't been letting me work around my class schedule. I think I may have to quit, but I don't know where I'll find another job.*
>
> ***Toby:***
>
> *Why are you complaining? I've been working with the same stupid boss for two years. He doesn't even care that I'm trying to get my degree and work at the same time. And you should hear the way he talks to me in front of the other employees.*

Narcissistic listeners, given their self-centeredness, may actually fool themselves into thinking that they are listening and actively contributing to a conversation. We all have the urge to share our own stories during interactions, because other people's communication triggers our own memories about related experiences. It is generally more competent to withhold sharing our stories until the other person has been able to speak and we have given the appropriate support and response. But we all shift the focus of a conversation back to us occasionally, either because we do not know another way to respond or because we are making an attempt at empathy. Narcissistic listeners consistently interrupt or follow another speaker with statements like "That reminds of the time…," "Well, if I were you…," and "That's nothing…" (Nichols, 1995).

Pseudo-Listening

Do you have a friend or family member who repeats stories? If so, then you have probably engaged in pseudo-listening as a politeness strategy. **Pseudo-listening** is behaving as if you are paying attention to a speaker when you are actually not (McCornack, 2007). Outwardly, visible signals of attentiveness are an important part of the listening process, but when they are just an "act," the pseudo-listener is engaging in bad listening behaviors. She or he is not actually going through the stages of the listening process and will likely not be able to recall the speaker's message or offer a competent and relevant response. Although it is a bad listening practice, we all understandably engage in pseudo-listening from time to time.

If a friend needs someone to talk to but you are really tired or experiencing some other barrier to effective listening, it may be worth engaging in pseudo-listening as a relational maintenance strategy, especially if the friend just needs a sounding board and is not expecting advice or guidance. We may also pseudo-listen to a romantic partner or grandfather's story for the fifteenth time to prevent hurting their feelings. We should avoid pseudo-listening when possible and should definitely avoid making it a listening habit. Although we may get away with it in some situations, each time we risk being "found out," which could have negative relational consequences.

5.3 Improving Listening Competence

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. This section will help us do that. In this section, we will learn strategies for developing and improving competence at each stage of the listening process. We will also define active listening and the behaviors that go along with it.

Looking back to the types of listening discussed earlier, we will learn specific strategies for sharpening our critical and empathetic listening skills. In keeping with our focus on integrative learning, we will also apply the skills we have learned in academic, professional, and relational contexts and explore how culture and gender affect listening.

Active Listening

Active listening refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices. Active listening can help address many of the environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers to effective listening that we discussed earlier. The behaviors associated with active listening can also enhance informational, critical, and empathetic listening.

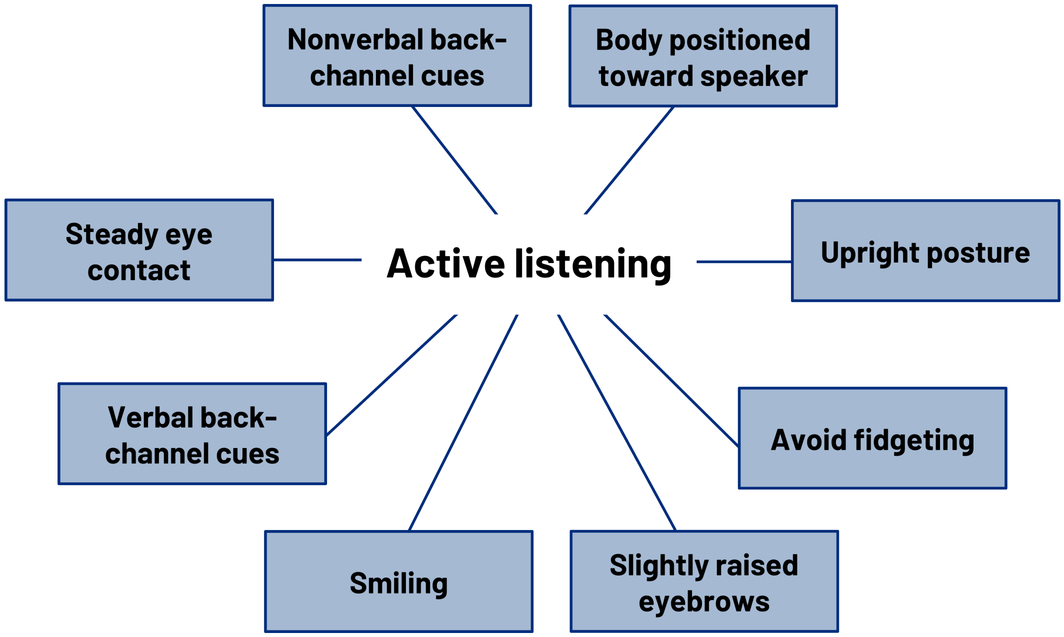

Figure 5.4: Common practices of active listening.

Active Listening can Help Overcome Barriers to Effective Listening

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we are going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are my goals for listening to this message?"
2. "How does this message relate to me / affect my life?"
3. "What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?"

As we learned earlier, the difference between speech and thought processing rate means listeners' level of attention varies while receiving a message. Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or fades (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message, then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could affect your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. This can help overcome our tendency toward selective attention. As senders of messages, we can help listeners by making the relevance of what we are saying clear and offering well-organized messages that are tailored for our listeners.

From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviors as we receive and process messages. Eye contact is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing. When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, "That's new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it." We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and "uh-huh" signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of "autopilot" listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reference previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reference a past statement or connect to the speaker's current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more. You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your nonverbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but do not let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn. Research shows that people with higher social status are more likely to interrupt others, so keep this in mind and be prepared for it if you are speaking to a high-status person, or try to resist it if you are the high-status person in an interaction (Hargie, 2011).

Note taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note taking is not always a viable option. It would be awkward to take notes during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we would not normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people do not think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. To help facilitate your note taking, you might say something like "Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important."

In summary, active listening is exhibited through verbal and nonverbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; nonverbal back-channel cues such as head nods; verbal back-channel cues such as "OK," "mmhum," or "oh"; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting (Hargie, 2011).

Becoming a Better Critical Listener

Critical listening involves evaluating the credibility, completeness, and worth of a speaker's message. Some listening scholars note that critical listening represents the deepest level of listening (Floyd, 1985). Critical listening is also important in a democracy that values free speech. The US Constitution grants US citizens the right to free speech, and many people duly protect that right for you and me. Since people can say just about anything they want, we are surrounded by countless messages that vary tremendously in terms of their value, degree of ethics, accuracy, and quality. Therefore, it falls on us to responsibly and critically evaluate the messages we receive. People who are intentionally misleading, ill informed, or motivated by the potential for personal gain produce some messages, but such messages can be received as honest, credible, or altruistic even though they are not. Being able to critically evaluate messages helps us have more control over and awareness of the influence such people may have on us. In order to critically evaluate messages, we must enhance our critical-listening skills.

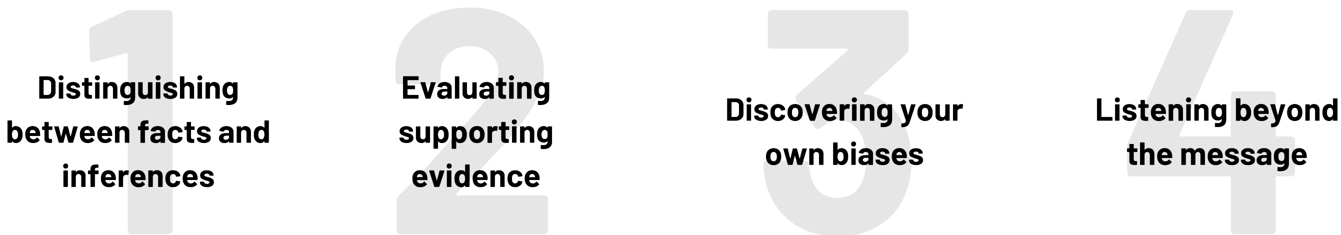

Figure 5.5: Ways to become a better critical listener.

Some critical-listening skills include distinguishing between facts and inferences, evaluating supporting evidence, discovering your own biases, and listening beyond the message. Part of being an ethical communicator is being accountable for what we say by distinguishing between facts and inferences (Hayakawa & Hayakawa, 1990). This is an ideal that is not always met in practice, so a critical listener should also make these distinctions, since the speaker may not. Since facts are widely agreed-on conclusions, they can be verified as such through some extra research. Take care in your research to note the context from which the fact emerged, as speakers may take a statistic or quote out of context, distorting its meaning. Inferences are not as easy to evaluate, because they are based on unverifiable thoughts of a speaker or on speculation. Inferences are usually based at least partially on something that is known, so it is possible to evaluate whether an inference was made carefully or not. In this sense, you may evaluate an inference based on several known facts as more credible than an inference based on one fact and more speculation. Asking a question like "What led you to think this?" is a good way to get information needed to evaluate the strength of an inference.

Distinguishing among facts and inferences and evaluating the credibility of supporting material are critical-listening skills that also require good informational-listening skills. In more formal speaking situations, speakers may cite published or publicly available sources to support their messages. When speakers verbally cite their sources, you can use the credibility of the source to help evaluate the credibility of the speaker's message. For example, a national newspaper would likely be more credible on a major national event than a tabloid magazine or an anonymous blog. In regular interactions, people also have sources for their information but are not as likely to note them within their message. Asking questions like "Where'd you hear that?" or "How do you know that?" can help get information needed to make critical evaluations.

Discovering your own biases can help you recognize when they interfere with your ability to process a message. Unfortunately, most people are not asked to critically reflect on their identities and their perspectives unless they are in college, and even people who were once critically reflective in college or elsewhere may no longer be so. Biases are also difficult to discover, because we do not see them as biases; we see them as normal or "the way things are."

Asking yourself "What led you to think this?" and "How do you know that?" can be a good start toward acknowledging your biases.

Last, to be a better critical listener, think beyond the message. A good critical listener asks the following questions: What is being said and what is not being said? In whose interests are these claims being made? Whose voices/ ideas are included and excluded? These questions take into account that speakers intentionally and unintentionally slant, edit, or twist messages to make them fit particular perspectives or for personal gain. Also, ask yourself questions like "What are the speaker's goals?" You can also rephrase that question and direct it toward the speaker, asking them, "What is your goal in this interaction?" When you feel yourself nearing an evaluation or conclusion, pause and ask yourself what influenced you. Although we like to think that we are most often persuaded through logical evidence and reasoning, we are susceptible to persuasive shortcuts that rely on the credibility or likability of a speaker or on our emotions rather than the strength of his or her evidence (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). So keep a check on your emotional involvement to be aware of how it may be influencing your evaluation. Also, be aware that how likable, attractive, or friendly you think a person is may also lead you to evaluate more positively his or her messages.

Becoming a Better Empathetic Listener

Combining active and empathetic listening leads to active-empathetic listening. During **active-empathetic listening,** a listener becomes actively and emotionally involved in an interaction in such a way that it is conscious on the part of the listener and perceived by the speaker (Bodie, 2011). To be a better empathetic listener, we need to suspend or at least attempt to suppress our judgment of the other person or their message so we can fully attend to both. Paraphrasing is an important part of empathetic listening, because it helps us put the other person's words into our frame of experience without making it about us. In addition, speaking the words of someone else in our own way can help evoke within us the feelings that the other person felt while saying them (Bodie, 2011). Active-empathetic listening is more than echoing back verbal messages. We can also engage in **mirroring**, which refers to a listener's replication of the nonverbal signals of a speaker (Bruneau, 1993). Therapists, for example, are often taught to adopt a posture and tone similar to their patients in order to build rapport and project empathy.

Paraphrasing and questioning are useful techniques for empathetic listening because they allow us to respond to a speaker without taking "the floor," or the attention, away for long. Specifically, questions that ask for elaboration act as "verbal door openers," and inviting someone to speak more and then validating their speech through active listening cues can help a person feel "listened to" (Hargie, 2011).

Listening and Culture

Some cultures place more importance on listening than other cultures. In general, collectivistic cultures tend to value listening more than individualistic cultures that are more speaker oriented. The value placed on verbal and nonverbal meaning also varies by culture and influences how we communicate and listen. A **low-context communication** style is one in which much of the meaning generated within an interaction comes from the verbal communication used rather than nonverbal or contextual cues. Conversely, much of the meaning generated by a **high-context communication** style comes from nonverbal and contextual cues (Lustig & Koester, 2006). For example, US Americans of European descent generally use a low-context communication style, while people in East Asian and Latin American cultures use a high-context communication style.

Contextual communication styles affect listening in many ways. Cultures with a high-context orientation generally use less verbal communication and value silence as a form of communication, which requires listeners to pay close attention to nonverbal signals and consider contextual influences on a message. Cultures with a low-context orientation must use more verbal communication and provide explicit details, since listeners are not expected to derive meaning from the context. Note that people from low-context cultures may feel frustrated by the ambiguity of speakers from high-context cultures, while speakers from high-context cultures may feel overwhelmed or even insulted by the level of detail used by low-context communicators. Cultures with a low-context communication style also tend to have a monochronic orientation toward time, while high-context cultures have a polychronic time orientation, which also affects listening.

Listening and Gender

Research on gender and listening has produced mixed results. As we have already learned, much of the research on gender differences and communication has been influenced by gender stereotypes and falsely connected to biological differences. Research that is more recent has found that people communicate in ways that conform to gender stereotypes in some situations and not in others, which shows that our communication is more influenced by societal expectations than by innate or gendered "hard-wiring."

For example, through socialization, men are generally discouraged from expressing emotions in public. A woman sharing an emotional experience with a man may perceive the man's lack of emotional reaction as a sign of inattentiveness, especially if he typically shows more emotion during private interactions. The man, however, may be listening but withholding nonverbal expressiveness because of social norms. He may not realize that withholding those expressions could be seen as a lack of empathetic or active listening. Researchers also dispelled the belief that men interrupt more than women do, finding that men and women interrupt each other with similar frequency in cross-gender encounters (Dindia, 1987). So men may interrupt each other more in same-gender interactions as a conscious or subconscious attempt to establish dominance because such behaviors are expected, as men are generally socialized to be more competitive than women are. However, this type of competitive interrupting is not as present in cross-gender interactions because the contexts have shifted.

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Figure 5.2: Music is an example of a barrier to effective listening. Jonas Schindler. 2021. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/oDnYWhqiOro

Figure 5.3: Bad listening practices. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 5.4: Common practices of active listening. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 5.5: Ways to become a better critical listener. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

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6.

MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY, AND COMMUNICATION

Introduction

It is only through technology that mass media can exist. While our interpersonal interactions are direct, our interactions with mass media messages are indirect, as they require technology or a "third party" to facilitate the connection. Mass communication involves transmitting messages to many people through print or electronic media. While talking to someone about a movie you just watched is interpersonal communication, watching the Academy Awards on a network or in clips on the Internet is mass communication.

6.1 The Internet and Digital Media

The "**Internet and digital media age**" began in 1990 and continues today. Whereas media used to be defined by their delivery systems, **digital media** are all similarly constructed with digital, binary code made up of ones and zeros. Instead of paper being the medium for books, radio waves being the medium for sound broadcasting, and cables being the medium for cable television, a person can now read a book, listen to the radio, and access many cable television shows on the Internet. In short, digital media read, write, and store data (text, images, sound, and video) using numerical code, which revolutionized media more quickly than ever before (Biagi, 2007).

From the beginning, the Internet was a mass medium like none other. The majority of the content was user generated and the programs needed to create and navigate online content were in the public domain. This fusing of free access to information and user creativity still forms the basis of digital "new media" that are much more user controlled and personal. Demand for Internet access and more user-friendly programs created the consumer side of the net, and old media companies and regular people saw the web as another revenue generator.

Advertising online, however, is quite different from advertising in other media. Old media advertisers measure their success with ads based on a corresponding increase or decrease in sales—a method that is not very precise or immediate. Online advertisers, on the other hand, can know exactly how many people see their ads based on the number of site visitors, and they can measure how effective their ad is by how many people click on it. This can allow them to revise, pull, or buy more of an ad quickly based on the feedback. Additionally, certain online environments provide even more user data to advertisers, which allows them to target advertisements. If you, for example, search for "vacation rentals on Lake Michigan" using a search engine, ads for lake houses or vacation spots may also show up. The social networks that people create on the Internet also create potential for revenue generation. In fact, many people have started to take advantage of this potential by monetizing their personal or social media sites.

6.2 Media and Representation

Another area of concern for those who study mass media is the representation of diversity (or lack thereof) in media messages. The FCC has identified program, ownership, and viewpoint diversity as important elements of a balanced mass media that serves the public good (Austin, 2011). This view was enforced through the Fairness Doctrine that was established in 1949. It lasted until the early 1980s. That is when the doctrine began to be questioned by those in favor of media deregulation. The Fairness Doctrine was eventually overturned in 1987, but the FCC tried in 2003 to reinstate policies that encourage minority ownership of media outlets, which they hoped in turn would lead to more diverse programming. It remains to be seen whether minority-owned media outlets will produce or carry more diverse programming, but it is important to note that the deregulation over the past few decades has led to a decrease in the number of owners of media outlets who come from minority groups.

Scholars have raised concerns about the number of characters from minority groups on television relative to the groups' percentage of the population. Perhaps even more concerning is the type of characters that actors from minority groups play and the types of shows on which they appear. Whether we want them to be or not, the people we see featured in media messages, especially those who appear frequently on television, in movies, in magazines, or in some combination of the three, serve as role models for many that view them. These people help set the tone for standards of behavior, beauty, and intelligence, among other things.

Figure 6.1: Blue-collar workers make up a bigger proportion of the working class than portrayed on television.

Social learning theory claims that media portrayals influence our development of schemata or scripts, especially as children, about different groups of people (Signorielli, 2009). For example, a person who grows up in a relatively homogenous white, middle-class environment can develop schemata about African-Americans and Latinas/Latinos based on how they are depicted in media messages. Since media messages, overall, are patterned representations, they cultivate within users a common worldview from the seeds that are planted by a relatively narrow set of content. For example, people in television shows are disproportionately portrayed as middle-class professionals. In reality, about 67 percent of people working in the United States have blue-collar or service-industry jobs, but they only make up about 10 percent of the people on television (Griffin, 2009).

6.3 Developing Media Literacy

Media literacy involves our ability to critique and analyze the potential impact of the media. The word *literacy* refers to our ability to read and comprehend written language (Livingstone, 2004), but just as we need literacy to be able to read, write, and function in our society, we also need to be able to read media messages. To be media literate, we must develop a particular skill set that is unfortunately not taught in a systematic way like reading and writing. The quest to make a more media-literate society is not new. You may be surprised to learn that the media-literacy movement began in the 1930s when Clyde Miller, a journalist and author received funding from department store magnate Edward Filene to promote curriculum materials that would identify propaganda techniques. It is estimated that over one million students used these materials within the first three years of its creation (RobbGrieco & Hobbs, 2013). Despite the fact that this movement has been around since the 1930s, many people still do not know about it.

Media literacy is not meant to censor or blame the media, nor does it advocate for us to limit or change our engagement with the media in any particular way. Instead, media literacy ties in with critical thinking and listening. Media literacy skills are important because media outlets are "culture makers," meaning they reflect much of current society but also reshape and influence sociocultural reality and real-life practices. Some may mistakenly believe that frequent exposure to media or that growing up in a media-saturated environment leads to media literacy. Knowing how to use technology to find and use media is different from knowing how to analyze it. Like other critical thinking skills, media literacy does not just develop; it must be taught, learned, practiced, and reflected on.

We learn much through the media that we do not have direct experience with, and communication and media scholars theorize that we tend to believe media portrayals are accurate representations of life. However, the media represents race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other cultural identities in biased and stereotypical ways that often favor dominant identities (Allen, 2011). Since the media influences our beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about difference, it is important to be able to evaluate critically the mediated messages that we receive. The goal of media literacy is not to teach you what to think but to teach you how you can engage with, interpret, and evaluate media in a more informed manner. Media literacy is also reflective in that we are asked to be accountable for those choices we make in regards to media by reflecting on and being prepared to articulate how those choices fit in with our own belief and value systems.

There are standard questions you can ask yourself to help you get started in your media criticism and analysis. There are no "true" or "right/wrong" answers to many of the questions we ask during the critical thinking process. Engaging in media literacy is more about expanding our understanding and perspective rather than arriving at definitive answers. The following questions will help you hone your media-literacy skills (Allen, 2011):

1. Who created this message? What did they hope to accomplish? What are their primary belief systems?
2. What is my interpretation of this message? How and why might different people understand this message differently than me? What can I learn about myself based on my interpretation? How may my interpretation differ from others'?
3. What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented or omitted in this message? What does this tell me about how other people live and believe? Does this message leave anything

or anyone out?

4. Why was this message sent? Who sent it? Is it trying to tell me something? To sell me something?

After asking these questions, media-literate people should be able to use well-reasoned arguments and evidence (not just opinion) to support their evaluations. People with media-literacy skills also know that their evaluations may not be definitive. Although this may seem like a place of uncertainty, media-literate people actually have more control over how they interact with media messages, which allows them to use media to their advantage, whether that is to become better informed or just to enjoy their media experience.

6.4 Social Media

Figure 6.2: Social media is a way for large groups of people to be connected.

Media and mass media have long been discussed as a unifying force. The shared experience of national mourning after President Kennedy was assassinated and after the storming of the U.S. Capitol building on January 6, 2021 was facilitated through media. Online media, in particular, is characterized by its connectivity.

Whereas a large audience was connected to the same radio or television broadcast, newspaper story, book, or movie via a one-way communication channel sent from one place to many, online media connects mass media outlets to people and allows people to connect back to them. The basis for this connectivity is the Internet, which connects individual computers, smartphones, and other devices in an interactive web. This web of connected personal media devices like computers and smartphones facilitates and defines social media. Technology has allowed for mediated social interaction since the days of the telegraph, but these connections were not at the mass level they are today. Therefore, even if we think of the telegram as a precursor to a “tweet,” we can still see that the potential connection points and the audience size are much different. While a telegraph went to one person, Olympian Michael Phelps can send a tweet instantly to 1.2 million people, and Justin Bieber’s tweets reach 23 million people. Social media does not just allow for connection; it allows us more control over the quality and degree of connection that we maintain with others (Siapera, 2012).

The potential for social media was realized under the conditions of what is called Web 2.0, which refers to a new way of using the connectivity of the Internet to bring people together for collaboration and creativity—to harness collective intelligence (O'Reilly, 2012). This entails using the web to collaborate on projects and problem solving rather than making and protecting one's own material (Boler, 2008). Much of this was achieved through platforms and websites such as Napster, Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia that encouraged and enabled user-generated content. It is important to note that user-generated content and collaboration have been a part of the World Wide Web for decades, but much of it was in the form of self-publishing information such as user reviews, online journal entries/ diaries, and later blogs, which cross over between the "old" web and Web 2.0.

The most influential part of the new web is **social networking sites (SNSs)**, which allow users to build a public or semipublic profile, create a network of connections to other people, and view other people's profiles and networks of connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Although SNSs have existed for over a decade, earlier iterations such as Friendster and Myspace have given way to the giant that is Facebook. Facebook, which now has more than 955 million monthly active users, is unquestionably the most popular SNS.

Social networking sites like LinkedIn focus on professional networking. In any case, the ability to self-publish information, likes/dislikes, status updates, profiles, and links allows people to construct their own life narrative and share it with other people. Likewise, users can follow the narratives of others in their network as they are constructed. The degree to which we engage with others' narratives varies based on the closeness of the relationship and situational factors, but SNSs are used to sustain strong, moderate, and weak ties with others (Richardson & Hessey, 2009).

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7.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Introduction

Humans have always been diverse in their cultural beliefs and practices. But as new technologies have led to the perception that our world has shrunk, and demographic and political changes have brought attention to cultural differences, people communicate across cultures more now than ever before. The oceans and continents that separate us can now be traversed instantly with an e-mail, phone call, tweet, or status update. Additionally, our workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods have become more integrated in terms of race and gender, increasing our interaction with domestic diversity. The Disability Rights Movement and Gay Rights Movement have increased the visibility of people with disabilities and sexual minorities. However, just because we are exposed to more difference does not mean we understand it, can communicate across it, or appreciate it.

7.1 Foundations of Culture and Identity

Culture is a complicated word to define, as there are at least six common ways that culture is used in the United States. For the purposes of exploring the communicative aspects of culture, we will define **culture** as the ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors. Unpacking the definition, we can see that culture should not be conceptualized as stable and unchanging. Culture is "negotiated." It is also dynamic, and cultural changes can be traced and analyzed to better understand why our society is the way it is. The definition also points out that culture is learned, which accounts for the importance of socializing institutions like family, school, peers, and the media. Culture is patterned in that there are recognizable widespread similarities among people within a cultural group. There is also deviation from and resistance to those patterns by individuals and subgroups within a culture, which is why cultural patterns change over time. Last, the definition acknowledges that culture influences our beliefs about what is true and false, our attitudes (including our likes and dislikes), our values regarding what is right and wrong, and our behaviors. It is from these cultural influences that our identities are formed.

Personal, Social, and Cultural Identities

Ask yourself the question "Who am I?" We develop a sense of who we are based on what is reflected back on us from other people. Our parents, friends, teachers, and the media help shape our identities. While this happens from birth, most people in Western societies reach a stage in adolescence where maturing cognitive abilities and increased social awareness lead them to begin to reflect on who they are. This begins a lifelong process of thinking about who we are now, who we were before, and who we will become (Tatum, 2000). Our identities make up an important part of our self-concept and can be broken down into three main categories: personal, social, and cultural identities.

We must avoid the temptation to think of our identities as constant. Instead, our identities are formed through processes that started before we were born. And they will continue after we are gone. Therefore, our identities are not something we achieve or complete. Two related but distinct components of our identities are our personal and social identities (Spreckels & Kotthoff, 2009). **Personal identities** include the components of self that are primarily intrapersonal and connected to our life experiences. Our **social identities** are the components of self that are derived from involvement in social groups with which we are interpersonally committed.

For example, we may derive aspects of our social identity from our family or from a community of fans for a sports team. Social identities differ from personal identities because they are externally organized through membership. Our membership may be voluntary (Greek organization on campus) or involuntary (family) and explicit (we pay dues to our labor union) or implicit (we purchase and listen to hip-hop music). There are innumerous options for personal and social identities. While our personal identity choices express who we are, our social identities align us with particular groups. Through our social identities, we make statements about who we are and who we are not.

[table id=2 /]

Personal identities may change often as people have new experiences and develop new interests and hobbies. A current interest in online video games may give way to an interest in graphic design. Social identities do not change as often because they take more time to develop, as you must become interpersonally invested. For example, if an interest in online video games leads someone to become a member of a MMORPG, or a massively multiplayer online role-playing game community, that personal identity has led to a social identity that is now interpersonal and more entrenched.

Cultural identities are based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting (Yep, 1998). Since we are often a part of them since birth, cultural identities are the least changeable of the three. The ways of being and the social expectations for behavior within cultural identities do change over time, but what separates them from most social identities is their historical roots (Collier, 1996). For example, think of how ways of being and acting have changed for African Americans since the civil rights movement. Additionally, common ways of being and acting within a cultural identity group are expressed through communication. In order to be accepted as a member of a cultural group, members must be acculturated, essentially learning and using a code that other group members will be able to recognize. We are acculturated into our various cultural identities in obvious and less obvious ways. We may literally have a parent or friend tell us what it means to be a man or a woman. We may also unconsciously consume messages from popular culture that offer representations of gender.

Difference Matters

Whenever we encounter someone, we notice similarities and differences. While both are important, often the differences are highlighted. These differences contribute to communication troubles. We do not only see similarities and differences on an individual level. In fact, we also place people into **in-groups** and **out-groups** based on the similarities and differences we perceive. This is important because we then tend to react to someone we perceive as a member of an out-group based on the characteristics we attach to the group rather than the individual (Allen, 2011). In these situations, it is more likely that stereotypes and prejudice will influence our communication. Learning about difference and why they matter will help us be more competent communicators. The other side of emphasizing difference is to claim that no differences exist and that you see everyone as a human being. Rather than trying to ignore difference and see each person as a unique individual, we should know the history of how differences came to be so socially and culturally significant and how they continue to affect us today.

Culture and identity are complex. You may be wondering how some groups came to be dominant and others non-dominant. These differences are not natural, which can be seen as we unpack how various identities have changed over time in the next section. There is, however, an **ideology of domination** that makes it seem natural and normal that some people or groups will always have power over others (Allen, 2011). In fact, hierarchy and domination, although prevalent throughout modern human history, were likely not the norm among early humans. So one of the first reasons difference matters is that people and groups are treated unequally, and better understanding how those differences came to be can help us create a more just society. Difference also matters because demographics and patterns of interaction are changing.

Figure 7.1: The Hispanic and Latinx population has grown 43% since 2000.

In the United States, the population of people of color is increasing and diversifying, and visibility for people who are gay or lesbian and people with disabilities has also increased. The 2010 Census shows that the Hispanic and Latino/a populations in the United States are now the second largest group in the country, having grown 43 percent since the last census in 2000 (Saenz, 2011). By 2030, racial and ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population (Allen, 2011). Additionally, legal and social changes have created a more open environment for sexual minorities and people with disabilities. These changes directly affect our interpersonal relationships. The workplace is one context where changing demographics has become increasingly important. Many organizations are striving to comply with changing laws by implementing policies aimed at creating equal access and opportunity. Some organizations are going further than legal compliance to try to create inclusive climates where diversity is valued because of the interpersonal and economic benefits it has the potential to produce.

We can now see that difference matters due to the inequalities that exist among cultural groups and due to changing demographics that affect our personal and social relationships. Unfortunately, many obstacles may impede our valuing of difference (Allen, 2011). Individuals with dominant identities may not validate the experiences of those in non-dominant groups because they do not experience the oppression directed at those with non-dominant identities. Further, they may find it difficult to acknowledge that not being aware of this oppression is due to privilege associated with their dominant identities. Because of this lack of recognition of oppression, members of dominant groups may minimize, dismiss, or question the experiences of non-dominant groups and view them as “complainers” or “whiners.” Recall from our earlier discussion of identity formation that people with dominant identities may stay in the unexamined or acceptance stages for a long time. Being stuck in these stages makes it much more difficult to value difference.

Members of non-dominant groups may have difficulty valuing difference due to negative experiences with the dominant group, such as not having their experiences validated. Both groups may be restrained from communicating about difference due to norms of political correctness, which may make people feel afraid to speak up because they may be perceived as insensitive or racist. All these obstacles are common and they are valid. However, as we will learn later, developing intercultural communication competence can help us gain new perspectives, become more mindful of our communication, and intervene in some of these negative cycles.

7.2 Exploring Specific Cultural Identities

We can get a better understanding of current cultural identities by unpacking how they came to be. By looking at history, we can see how cultural identities that seem to have existed forever actually came to be constructed for various political and social reasons and how they have changed over time. Communication plays a central role in this construction. As we have already discussed, our identities are relational and communicative; they are also constructed. **Social constructionism** is a view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relationship to social, cultural, and political contexts (Allen, 2011). In this section, we will explore how the cultural identities of race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability have been constructed in the United States and how communication relates to those identities. Other important identities could be discussed, like religion, age, nationality, and class. Although they are not given their own section, consider how those identities may intersect with the identities discussed next.

Race

Would it surprise you to know that human beings, regardless of how they are racially classified, share 99.9 percent of their DNA? This finding by the Human Genome Project asserts that race is a social construct, not a biological one. The American Anthropological Association agrees, stating that race is the product of "historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances" (Allen, 2011). Therefore, we will define **race** as a socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others.

Race did not become a socially and culturally recognized marker until European colonial expansion in the 1500s. As Western Europeans traveled to parts of the world previously unknown to them and encountered people who were different from them, a hierarchy of races began to develop that placed lighter skinned Europeans above darker skinned people. At the time, newly developing fields in natural and biological sciences took interest in examining the new locales, including the plant and animal life, natural resources, and native populations. Over the next three hundred years, science that we would now undoubtedly recognize as flawed, biased, and racist legitimated notions that native populations were less evolved than white Europeans were, often calling them savages. In fact, there were scientific debates as to whether some of the native populations should be considered human or animal. Racial distinctions have been based largely on phenotypes, or physiological features such as skin color, hair texture, and body/facial features. Western "scientists" used these differences as "proof" that native populations were less evolved than the Europeans, which helped justify colonial expansion, enslavement, genocide, and exploitation on massive scales (Allen, 2011). Even though there is a consensus among experts that race is social rather than biological, we cannot deny that race still has meaning in our society and affects people as if it were "real."

Given that race is one of the first things we notice about someone, it is important to know how race and communication relate (Allen, 2011). Discussing race in the United States is difficult for many reasons. One is due to uncertainty about language use. People may be frustrated by their perception that labels change too often or be afraid of using an "improper" term and being viewed as racially insensitive. It is important, however, that we not let political correctness get in the way of meaningful dialogues and learning opportunities related to difference. Learning some of the communicative history of race can make us more competent communicators and open us up to more learning experiences.

Racial classifications used by the government and our regular communication about race in the United States have changed frequently, which further points to the social construction of race. Currently, the primary racial groups in the United States are African American, Asian American, European American, Latino/a, and Native American, but a brief look at changes in how the US Census Bureau has defined race clearly shows that this hasn't always been the case (see table 7.2). In the 1900s alone, there were twenty-six different ways that race was categorized on census forms (Allen, 2011). The way we communicate about race in our regular interactions has also changed, and many people are still hesitant to discuss race for fear of using "the wrong" vocabulary.

[table id=3 /]

The five primary racial groups noted previously can still be broken down further to specify a particular region, country, or nation. For example, Asian Americans are diverse in terms of country and language of origin and cultural practices. While the category of Asian Americans can be useful when discussing broad trends, it can also generalize among groups, which can lead to stereotypes. You may find that someone identifies as Chinese American or Korean American instead of Asian American. In this case, the label further highlights a person's cultural lineage.

We should not assume, however, that someone identifies with his or her cultural lineage, as many people have more in common with their US American peers than a culture that may be one or more generations removed.

History and personal preference also influence how we communicate about race. Culture and communication scholar Brenda Allen notes that when she was born in 1950, her birth certificate included an *N* for Negro. Later she referred to herself as *colored* because that is what people in her community referred to themselves as. During and before this time, the term *black* had negative connotations and would likely have offended someone. There was a movement in the 1960s to reclaim the word *black*, and the slogan "black is beautiful" was commonly used. Brenda Allen acknowledges the newer label of *African American* but notes that she still prefers *black*. The terms *colored* and *Negro* are no longer considered appropriate because they were commonly used during a time when black people were blatantly discriminated against. Even though that history may seem far removed to some, it is not to others. Currently, the terms African American and black are frequently used, and both are considered acceptable. The phrase people of color is acceptable for most and is used to be inclusive of other racial minorities. If you are unsure what to use, you could always observe how a person refers to himself or herself, or you could ask for his or her preference. In any case, a competent communicator defers to and respects the preference of the individual.

The label Latin American generally refers to people who live in Central American countries. Although Spain colonized much of what is now South and Central America and parts of the Caribbean, the inhabitants of these areas are now much more diverse. Depending on the region or country, some people primarily trace their lineage to the indigenous people who lived in these areas before colonization, or to a Spanish and indigenous lineage, or to other combinations that may include European, African, and/or indigenous heritage. Latina and Latino are labels that are preferable to Hispanic for many who live in the United States and trace their lineage to South and/or Central America and/or parts of the Caribbean. Scholars who study Latina/o identity often use the label Latina/o in their writing to acknowledge women who avow that identity label (Calafell, 2007).

In verbal communication, you might say "Latina" when referring to a particular female or "Latino" when referring to a particular male of Latin American heritage. When referring to the group as a whole, you could say "Latinas and Latinos" instead of just "Latinos," which would be more gender inclusive. While the US Census uses Hispanic, it refers primarily to people of Spanish origin, which does not account for the diversity of background of many Latinos/as. The term Hispanic also highlights the colonizer's influence over the indigenous, which erases a history that is important to many. Additionally, there are people who claim Spanish origins and identify culturally as Hispanic but racially as white. Labels such as Puerto Rican or Mexican American, which further specify region or country of origin, may also be used. Just as with other cultural groups, if you are unsure of how to refer to someone, you can always ask for and honor someone's preference.

The history of immigration in the United States also ties to the way that race has been constructed. The metaphor of the melting pot has been used to describe the immigration history of the United States but does not capture the experiences of many immigrant groups (Allen, 2011). Generally, immigrant groups who were white, or light skinned, and spoke English were better able to assimilate, or melt into the melting pot. However, immigrant groups that we might think of as white today were not always considered so. Irish immigrants were discriminated against and even portrayed as black in cartoons that appeared in newspapers. In some Southern states, Italian immigrants were forced to go to black schools, and it was not until 1952 that Asian immigrants were allowed to become citizens of the United States. All this history is important, because it continues to influence communication among races today.

Interracial Communication

Figure 7.2: Competent communicators challenge themselves through awareness.

Race and communication are related in various ways. Racism influences our communication about race and is not an easy topic for most people to discuss. Today, people tend to view racism as overt acts such as calling someone a derogatory name or discriminating against someone in thought or action. However, there is a difference between racist acts, which we can attach to an individual, and institutional racism, which is not as easily identifiable. It is much easier for people to recognize and decry racist actions than it is to realize that racist patterns and practices go through societal institutions, which means that racism exists and does not have to be committed by any one person. As competent communicators and critical thinkers, we must challenge ourselves to be aware of how racism influences our communication at individual and societal levels.

We tend to make some of our assumptions about people's race based on how they talk, and often these assumptions are based on stereotypes. Dominant groups tend to define what is correct or incorrect usage of a language, and since language is so closely tied to identity, labeling a group's use of a language as incorrect or deviant challenges or negates part of their identity (Yancy, 2011). We know there is not only one way to speak English, but there have been movements to identify a standard.

This becomes problematic when we realize that "standard English" refers to a way of speaking English that is based on white, middle-class ideals that do not match up with the experiences of many. When we create a standard for English, we can label anything that deviates from that "nonstandard English." Differences between standard English and what has been called "Black English" have gotten national attention through debates about whether or not instruction in classrooms should accommodate students who do not speak standard English. Education plays an important role in language acquisition, and class relates to access to education. In general, whether someone speaks standard English themselves or not, they tend to judge negatively people whose speech deviates from the standard.

Another national controversy has revolved around the inclusion of Spanish in common language use, such as Spanish as an option at ATMs, or other automated services, and Spanish language instruction in school for students who do not speak or are learning to speak English. As was noted earlier, the Latino/a population in the United States is growing fast, which has necessitated inclusion of Spanish in many areas of public life. This has also created a backlash, which some scholars argue is tied more to the race of the immigrants than the language they speak and a fear that white America could be engulfed by other languages and cultures (Speicher, 2002). This backlash has led to a revived movement to make English the official language of the United States.

The U.S. Constitution does not stipulate a national language, and Congress has not designated one either. While nearly thirty states have passed English-language legislation, it has mostly been symbolic, and court rulings have limited any enforceability (Zuckerman, 2010). The Linguistic Society of America points out that immigrants are very aware of the social and economic advantages of learning English and do not need to be forced. They also point out that the United States has always had many languages represented, that national unity has not rested on a single language, and that there are actually benefits to having a population that is multilingual (Linguistic Society of America, 2011). Interracial communication presents some additional verbal challenges.

Code switching involves changing from one way of speaking to another between or within interactions. Some people of color may engage in code switching when communicating with dominant group members because they fear they will be negatively judged. Adopting the language practices of the dominant group may minimize perceived differences. This code switching creates a linguistic dual consciousness in which people are able to maintain their linguistic identities with their in-group peers but can still acquire tools and gain access needed to function in dominant society (Yancy, 2011). White people may also feel anxious about communicating with people of color out of fear of being perceived as racist. In other situations, people in dominant groups may spotlight non-dominant members by asking them to comment on or educate others about their race (Allen, 2011).

Gender

When we first meet a newborn baby, we ask whether it is a boy or a girl. This question illustrates the importance of gender in organizing our social lives and our interpersonal relationships. A Canadian family became aware of the deep emotions people feel about gender and the great discomfort people feel when they cannot determine gender when they announced to the world that they were not going to tell anyone the gender of their baby, aside from the baby's siblings. Their desire for their child, named Storm, to be able to experience early life without the boundaries and categories of gender brought criticism from many (Davis & James, 2011).

Conversely, many parents consciously or unconsciously "code" their newborns in gendered ways based on our society's associations of pink clothing and accessories with girls and blue with boys. While it is obvious to most people that colors are not gendered, they take on new meaning when we assign gendered characteristics of masculinity and femininity to them. Just like race, gender is a socially constructed category. While it is true that there are biological differences between who we label male and female, the meaning our society places on those differences is what actually matters in our day-today lives. In addition, the biological differences are interpreted differently around the world, which further shows that although we think gender is a natural, normal, stable way of classifying things, it is actually not. There is a long history of appreciation for people who cross gender lines in Native American and South Central Asian cultures, to name just two.

You may have noticed the use the word *gender* instead of *sex*. That is because **gender** is an identity based on internalized cultural notions of masculinity and femininity that is constructed through communication and interaction. There are two important parts of this definition to unpack. First, we internalize notions of gender based on socializing institutions, which helps us form our gender identity. Then we attempt to construct that gendered identity through our interactions with others, which is our gender expression. **Sex** is based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones

(Wood, 2005). While the biological characteristics between men and women are obviously different, the meaning that we create and attach to those characteristics makes them significant. The cultural differences in how that significance is ascribed are proof that "our way of doing things" is arbitrary. For example, cross-cultural research has found that boys and girls in most cultures show both aggressive and nurturing tendencies, but cultures vary in terms of how they encourage these characteristics between genders. In a group in Africa, young boys are responsible for taking care of babies and are encouraged to be nurturing (Wood, 2005).

Gender has been constructed over the past few centuries in political and deliberate ways that have tended to favor men in terms of power. Moreover, various academic fields joined in the quest to "prove" there are "natural" differences between men and women. While the "proof" they presented was credible to many at the time, it seems blatantly sexist and inaccurate today. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, scientists who measure skulls, also known as craniometrists, claimed that men were more intelligent than women were because they had larger brains. Leaders in the fast-growing fields of sociology and psychology argued that women were less evolved than men and had more in common with "children and savages" than an adult (white) males (Allen, 2011).

Doctors and other decision makers like politicians also used women's menstrual cycles as evidence that they were irrational, or hysterical, and therefore could not be trusted to vote, pursue higher education, or be in a leadership position. These are just a few of the many instances of how knowledge was created by seemingly legitimate scientific disciplines that we can now clearly see served to empower men and disempower women. This system is based on the ideology of **patriarchy**, which is a system of social structures and practices that maintains the values, priorities, and interests of men as a group (Wood, 2005). One of the ways patriarchy is maintained is by its relative invisibility. While women have been the focus of much research on gender differences, males have been largely unexamined. Men have been treated as the "generic" human being to which others are compared. However, that ignores the fact that men have a gender, too. Masculinities studies have challenged that notion by examining how masculinities are performed.

There have been challenges to the construction of gender in recent decades. Since the 1960s, scholars and activists have challenged established notions of what it means to be a man or a woman. The women's rights movement in the United States dates back to the 1800s, when the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 (Wood, 2005). Although most women's rights movements have been led by white, middle-class women, there was overlap between those involved in the abolitionist movement to end slavery and the beginnings of the women's rights movement. Although some of the leaders of the early women's rights movement had class and education privilege, they were still taking a risk by organizing and protesting. Black women were even more at risk, and Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave, faced those risks often and gave a much noted extemporaneous speech at a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, which came to be called "Ain't I a Woman?" (Wood, 2005) Her speech highlighted the multiple layers of oppression faced by black women.

Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression do not match the gender they were assigned by birth. Transgender people may or may not seek medical intervention like surgery or hormone treatments to help match their physiology with their gender identity. The term transgender includes other labels such as transsexual, transvestite, cross-dresser, and intersex, among others. Terms like hermaphrodite and she-male are not considered appropriate. As with other groups, it is best to allow someone to self-identify first and then honor their preferred label. If you are unsure of which pronouns to use when addressing someone, you can use gender-neutral language or you can use the pronoun that matches with how they are presenting. If someone has long hair, make-up, and a dress on, but you think their biological sex is male due to other cues, it would be polite to address them with female pronouns, since that is the gender identity they are expressing.

Gender as a cultural identity has implications for many aspects of our lives, including real-world contexts like education and work. Schools are primary grounds for socialization, and the educational experience for males and females is different in many ways from preschool through college. Although not always intentional, schools tend to recreate the hierarchies and inequalities that exist in society. Given that we live in a patriarchal society, there are communicative elements present in school that support this (Allen, 2011). For example, teachers are more likely to call on and pay attention to boys in a classroom, giving them more feedback in the form of criticism, praise, and help. This sends an implicit message that boys are more worthy of attention and valuable than girls are. Teachers are also more likely to lead girls to focus on feelings and appearance and boys to focus on competition and achievement. The focus on appearance for girls can lead to anxieties about body image.

Gender inequalities are also evident in the administrative structure of schools, which puts males in positions of authority more than females. While females make up 75 percent of the educational workforce, only 22 percent of superintendents and 8 percent of high school principals are women. Similar trends exist in colleges and universities, with women only accounting for 26 percent of full professors. These inequalities in schools correspond to larger inequalities in the general workforce. While there are more women in the workforce now than ever before, they still face a glass ceiling, which is a barrier for promotion to upper management. Many of my students have been surprised at the continuing pay gap that exists between men and women. In 2010, women earned about seventy-seven cents to every dollar earned by men (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2021). To put this into perspective, the National Committee on Pay Equity started an event called Equal Pay Day. In 2011, Equal Pay Day was on April 11. This signifies that for a woman to earn the same amount of money a man earned in a year, she would have to work more than three months extra, until April 11, to make up for the difference (National Committee on Pay Equity, 2021).

Sexuality

While race and gender are two of the first things we notice about others, sexuality is often something we view as personal and private. Although many people hold a view that a person's sexuality should be kept private, this is not a reality for our society. One only needs to observe popular culture and media for a short time to see that sexuality permeates much of our public discourse.

Sexuality relates to culture and identity in important ways that extend beyond sexual orientation, just as race is more than the color of one's skin and gender is more than one's biological and physiological manifestations of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality is not just physical; it is social in that we communicate with others about sexuality (Allen, 2011). Sexuality is also biological in that it connects to physiological functions that carry significant social and political meaning like puberty, menstruation, and pregnancy. Sexuality connects to public health issues like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and teen pregnancy. Sexuality is at the center of political issues like abortion, sex education, and gay and lesbian rights. While all these contribute to sexuality as a cultural identity, the focus in this section is on sexual orientation.

The most obvious way sexuality relates to identity is through sexual orientation. **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's primary physical and emotional sexual attraction and activity. The terms we most often use to categorize sexual orientation are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are sometimes referred to as sexual minorities. While the term sexual preference has been used previously, sexual orientation is more appropriate, since preference implies a simple choice. Although someone's preference for a restaurant or actor may change frequently, sexuality is not as simple. The term homosexual can be appropriate in some instances, but it carries with it a clinical and medicalized tone. As you will see in the timeline that follows, the medical community has a recent history of "treating homosexuality" with means that most would view as inhumane today. So many people prefer a term like gay, which was chosen and embraced by gay people, rather than homosexual, which was imposed by a then discriminatory medical system.

The gay and lesbian rights movement became widely recognizable in the United States in the

1950s and continues on today, as evidenced by prominent issues regarding sexual orientation in national news and politics. National and international groups like the Human Rights Campaign advocate for rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) communities. While these communities are often grouped together within one acronym (GLBTQ), they are different. Gays and lesbians constitute the most visible of the groups and receive the most attention and funding. Bisexuals are rarely visible or included in popular cultural discourses or in social and political movements. Transgender issues have received much more attention in recent years, but transgender identity connects to gender more than it does to sexuality. Last, queer is a term used to describe a group that is diverse in terms of identities but usually takes a more activist and at times radical stance that critiques sexual categories. While queer was long considered a derogatory label, and still is by some, the queer activist movement that emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s reclaimed the word and embraced it as a positive. As you can see, there is a diversity of identities among sexual minorities, just as there is variation within races and genders.

As with other cultural identities, notions of sexuality have been socially constructed in different ways throughout human history. Sexual orientation did not come into being as an identity category until the late 1800s. Before that, sexuality was viewed in more physical or spiritual senses that were largely separate from a person's identity. The table below traces some of the developments relevant to sexuality, identity, and communication that show how this cultural identity has been constructed over the past 3,000 years.

[table id=4 /]

Ability

There is resistance to classifying ability as a cultural identity, because we follow a **medical model of disability** that places disability as an individual and medical rather than social and cultural issue. While much of what distinguishes able-bodied and cognitively able from disabled is rooted in science, biology, and physiology, there are important sociocultural dimensions. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that

Figure 7.3: Ability is a social identity that makes up the largest minority group in the U.S..

substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment" (Allen, 2011). An impairment is defined as "any temporary or permanent loss or abnormality of a body structure or function, whether physiological or psychological" (Allen, 2011).

This definition is important because it notes the social aspect of disability in that people's life activities are limited and the relational aspect of disability in that the perception of a disability by others can lead someone to be classified as such. Ascribing an identity of disabled to a person can be problematic. If there is a mental or physical impairment, it should be diagnosed by a credentialed expert. If there is not an impairment, then the label of *disabled* can have negative impacts, as this label carries social and cultural significance. People are tracked into various educational programs based on their physical and cognitive abilities. In addition, there are many cases of people being mistakenly labeled disabled who were treated differently despite their protest of the ascribed label. Students who did not speak English as a first language, for example, were—and perhaps still are—sometimes put into special education classes.

Ability, just as the other cultural identities discussed, has institutionalized privileges and disadvantages associated with it. **Ableism** is the system of beliefs and practices that produces a physical and mental standard that is projected as normal for a human being and labels deviations from it abnormal, resulting in unequal treatment and access to resources. Ability privilege refers to the unearned advantages that are provided for people who fit the cognitive and physical norms (Allen, 2011). I once attended a workshop about ability privilege led by a man who was visually impaired. He talked about how, unlike other cultural identities that are typically stable over a lifetime, ability fluctuates for most people. We have all experienced times when we are more or less able.

Perhaps you broke your leg and had to use crutches or a wheelchair for a while. Getting sick for a prolonged period of time also lessens our abilities, but we may fully recover from any of these examples and regain our ability privilege. Whether you have experienced a short-term disability or not, the majority of us will become less physically and cognitively able as we get older.

Statistically, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the United States, with an estimated 20 percent of people five years or older living with some form of disability (Allen, 2011). Medical advances have allowed some people with disabilities to live longer and more active lives than before, which has led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. This number could continue to increase, as we have thousands of veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with physical disabilities or psychological impairments such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

As disability has been constructed in US history, it has intersected with other cultural identities. For example, people opposed to "political and social equality for women cited their supposed physical, intellectual, and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm." They framed women as emotional, irrational, and unstable, which was used to put them into the "scientific" category of "feeblemindedness," which led them to be institutionalized (Carlson, 2001). Arguments supporting racial inequality and tighter immigration restrictions also drew on notions of disability, framing certain racial groups as prone to mental retardation, mental illness, or uncontrollable emotions and actions. Refer to table 7.4 for a timeline of developments related to ability, identity, and communication. These thoughts led to a dark time in US history, as the eugenics movement sought to limit reproduction of people deemed as deficient.

[table id=5 /]

7.3 Intercultural Communication Competence

Figure 7.4: Intercultural communication can foster greater self-awareness and more ethical communication.

It is through intercultural communication that we come to create, understand, and transform culture and identity. **Intercultural communication** is communication between people with differing cultural identities. One reason we should study intercultural communication is to foster greater self-awareness (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Our thought process regarding culture is often "other focused," meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage "know thyself" is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Intercultural communication can allow us to step outside of our comfortable, usual frame of reference and see our culture through a different lens. Additionally, as we become more self-aware, we may also become more ethical communicators as we challenge our **ethnocentrism**, or our tendency to view our own culture as superior to other cultures.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. There are numerous components of ICC. Some key components include motivation, self- and other knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty.

Initially, a person's motivation for communicating with people from other cultures must be considered. **Motivation** refers to the root of a person's desire to foster intercultural relationships and can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Put simply, if a person is not motivated to communicate with people from different cultures, then the components of ICC discussed next do not really matter. If a person has a healthy curiosity that drives him or her toward intercultural encounters in order to learn more about self and others, then there is a foundation from which to build additional competence-relevant attitudes and skills. This intrinsic motivation makes intercultural communication a voluntary, rewarding, and lifelong learning process. Motivation can also be extrinsic, meaning that the desire for intercultural communication is driven by an outside reward like money, power, or recognition. While both types of motivation can contribute to ICC, context may further enhance or impede a person's motivation to communicate across cultures.

Members of dominant groups are often less motivated, intrinsically and extrinsically, toward intercultural communication than members of non-dominant groups, because they do not see the incentives for doing so. Having more power in communication encounters can create an unbalanced situation where the individual from the non-dominant group is expected to exhibit competence, or the ability to adapt to the communication behaviors and attitudes of the other. Even in situations where extrinsic rewards like securing an overseas business investment are at stake, it is likely that the foreign investor is much more accustomed to adapting to United States business customs and communication than vice versa. This expectation that others will adapt to our communication can be unconscious, but later ICC skills we will learn will help bring it to awareness.

The unbalanced situation I just described is a daily reality for many individuals with non-dominant identities. Their motivation toward intercultural communication may be driven by survival in terms of functioning effectively in dominant contexts. Recall the phenomenon known as code switching discussed earlier, in which individuals from non-dominant groups adapt their communication to fit in with the dominant group. In such instances, African Americans may "talk white" by conforming to what is called "standard English," women in corporate environments may adapt masculine communication patterns, people who are gay or lesbian may self-censor and avoid discussing their same-gender partners with coworkers, and people with nonvisible disabilities may not disclose them in order to avoid judgment.

While intrinsic motivation captures an idealistic view of intercultural communication as rewarding in its own right, many contexts create extrinsic motivation. In either case, there is a risk that an individual's motivation can still lead to incompetent communication. For example, it would be exploitative for an extrinsically motivated person to pursue intercultural communication solely for an external reward and then abandon the intercultural relationship once the reward is attained.

These situations highlight the relational aspect of ICC, meaning that the motivation of all parties should be considered. Motivation alone cannot create ICC.

Knowledge supplements motivation and is an important part of building ICC. Knowledge includes self- and other-awareness, mindfulness, and cognitive flexibility. Building knowledge of our own cultures, identities, and communication patterns takes more than passive experience (Martin & Nakayama). Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because we may realize that people think of our identities differently than we thought.

The most effective way to develop other-knowledge is by direct and thoughtful encounters with other cultures. However, people may not readily have these opportunities for a variety of reasons. Despite the overall diversity in the United States, many people still only interact with people who are similar to them. Even in a racially diverse educational setting, for example, people often group off with people of their own race. While a heterosexual person may have a gay or lesbian friend or relative, they likely spend most of their time with other heterosexuals. Unless you interact with people with disabilities as part of your job or have a person with a disability in your friend or family group, you likely spend most of your time interacting with able-bodied people. Living in a rural area may limit your ability to interact with a range of cultures, and most people do not travel internationally regularly. Because of this, we may have to make a determined effort to interact with other cultures or rely on educational sources like college classes, books, or documentaries. Learning another language is also a good way to learn about a culture, because you can then read the news or watch movies in the native language, which can offer insights that are lost in translation. It is important to note though that we must evaluate the credibility of the source of our knowledge, whether it is a book, person, or other source. In addition, knowledge of another language does not automatically equate to ICC.

Developing self- and other-knowledge is an ongoing process that will continue to adapt and grow as we encounter new experiences. Mindfulness and cognitive complexity will help as we continue to build our ICC (Pusch, 2009). **Mindfulness** is a state of self- and other-monitoring that informs later reflection on communication interactions. As mindful communicators, we should ask questions that focus on the interactive process like "How is our communication going? What are my reactions? What are their reactions?" Being able to adapt our communication in the moment based on our answers to these questions is a skill that comes with a high level of ICC. Reflecting on the communication encounter later to see what can be learned is also a way to build ICC. We should then be able to incorporate what we learned into our communication frameworks, which requires cognitive flexibility. **Cognitive flexibility** refers to the ability to continually supplement and revise existing knowledge to create new categories rather than forcing new knowledge into old categories. Cognitive flexibility helps prevent our knowledge from becoming stale and also prevents the formation of stereotypes and can help us avoid prejudging an encounter or jumping to conclusions. In summary, to be better intercultural communicators, we should know much about others and ourselves and be able to reflect on and adapt our knowledge as we gain new experiences.

Motivation and knowledge can inform us as we gain new experiences, but how we feel in the moment of intercultural encounters is also important. **Tolerance for uncertainty** refers to an individual's attitude about and level of comfort in uncertain situations (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Some people perform better in uncertain situations than others, and intercultural encounters often bring up uncertainty. Whether communicating with someone of a different gender, race, or nationality, we are often wondering what we should or should not do or say. Situations of uncertainty most often become clearer as they progress, but the anxiety that an individual with a low tolerance for uncertainty feels may lead them to leave the situation or otherwise communicate in a less competent manner. Individuals with a high tolerance for uncertainty may exhibit more patience, waiting on new information to become available or seeking out information, which may then increase the understanding of the situation and lead to a more successful outcome (Pusch, 2009). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated toward intercultural communication may have a higher tolerance for uncertainty, in that their curiosity leads them to engage with others who are different because they find the self- and other-knowledge gained rewarding.

Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence

How can ICC be built and achieved? This is a key question we will address in this section. Two main ways to build ICC are through experiential learning and reflective practices (Bednarz, 2010). We must first realize that competence is not any one thing. Part of being competent means that you can assess new situations and adapt your existing knowledge to the new contexts. What it means to be competent will vary depending on your physical location, your role (personal, professional, etc.), and your life stage, among other things. Sometimes we will know or be able to figure out what is expected of us in a given situation, but sometimes we may need to act in unexpected ways to meet the needs of a situation. Competence enables us to better cope with the unexpected, adapt to the non-routine, and connect to uncommon frameworks. ICC is less about a list of rules and more about a box of tools.

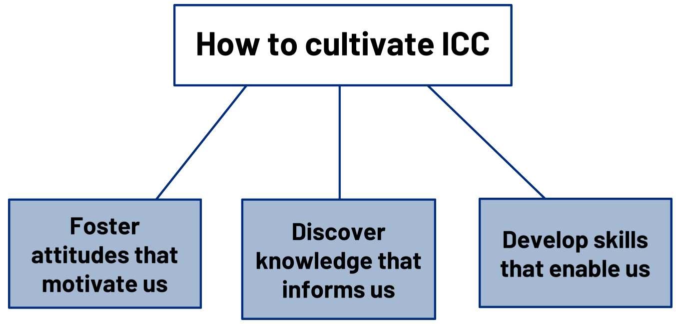

Figure 7.5: How to cultivate intercultural communication competence.

Three ways to cultivate ICC are to foster attitudes that motivate us, discover knowledge that informs us, and develop skills that enable us (Bennett, 2009). To foster attitudes that motivate us, we must develop a sense of wonder about culture. This sense of wonder can lead to feeling overwhelmed, humbled, or awed (Opdal, 2001). This sense of wonder may correlate to a high tolerance for uncertainty, which can help us turn potentially frustrating experiences we have into teachable moments. You may have had such moments in your own experience abroad. For example, trying to cook a pizza when you do not have instructions in your native language. The information on the packaging was written in Swedish, but like many college students, you have a wealth of experience cooking frozen pizzas to draw from. You might think it strange that the oven did not go up to the usual 425–450 degrees. Not to be deterred, and if you cranked the dial up as far as it would go, waited a few minutes, put in your pizza, and walked down the hall to room to wait for about fifteen minutes until the pizza was done. You would soon figure out that the oven temperatures in Sweden are listed in Celsius, not Fahrenheit!

Discovering knowledge that informs us is another step that can build on our motivation. One tool involves learning more about our cognitive style (how we learn). Our cognitive style consists of our preferred patterns for "gathering information, constructing meaning, and organizing and applying knowledge" (Bennett, 2009). As we explore cognitive styles, we discover that there are differences in how people attend to and perceive the world, explain events, organize the world, and use rules of logic (Nisbett, 2003). Some cultures have a cognitive style that focuses more on tasks, analytic and objective thinking, details and precision, inner direction, and independence, while others focus on relationships and people over tasks and things, concrete and metaphorical thinking, and a group consciousness and harmony.

Developing ICC is a complex learning process. At the basic level of learning, we accumulate knowledge and assimilate it into our existing frameworks. However, accumulated knowledge does not necessarily help us in situations where we have to apply that knowledge. Transformative learning takes place at the highest levels and occurs when we encounter situations that challenge our accumulated knowledge and our ability to accommodate that knowledge to manage a real-world situation. The cognitive dissonance that results in these situations is often uncomfortable and can lead to a hesitance to repeat such an engagement. One tip for cultivating ICC that can help manage these challenges is to find a community of like-minded people who are also motivated to develop ICC.

Developing skills that enable us is another part of ICC. Some of the skills important to ICC are the ability to empathize, accumulate cultural information, listen, resolve conflict, and manage anxiety (Bennett, 2009). Again, you are already developing a foundation for these skills by reading this book, but you can expand those skills to intercultural settings with the motivation and knowledge already described. Contact alone does not increase intercultural skills; there must be more deliberate measures taken to capitalize fully on those encounters. While research now shows that intercultural contact does decrease prejudices, this is not enough to become interculturally competent. The ability to empathize and manage anxiety enhances prejudice reduction, and these two skills have been shown to enhance the overall impact of intercultural contact even more than acquiring cultural knowledge. There is intercultural training available for people who are interested. If you cannot access training, you may choose to research intercultural training on your own, as there are many books, articles, and manuals written on the subject.

While formal intercultural experiences like studying abroad or volunteering for the Special Olympics or a shelter for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) youth can result in learning, informal experiences are also important. We may be less likely to include informal experiences in our reflection if we do not see them as legitimate. Reflection should also include "critical incidents" or what I call "a-ha! moments." Think of reflection as a tool for metacompetence that can be useful in bringing the formal and informal together (Bednarz, 2010).

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Figures

Figure 7.1: The Hispanic and Latinx population has grown 43% since 2000. Jhon David. 2018. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/3WgkTDw7XyE

Figure 7.2: Competent communicators challenge themselves through awareness. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0. Includes Think by Brandon Lim from NounProject (NounProject license).

Figure 7.3: Ability is a social identity that makes up the largest minority group in the U.S.. CDC. 2021. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/68zwHPkpxpI

Figure 7.4: Intercultural communication can foster greater self-awareness and more ethical

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Figure 7.5: How to cultivate intercultural communication competence. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

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8.

PREPARING AND SUPPORTING A SPEECH

Introduction

Ancient Greek educators and philosophers wrote the first public speaking texts about 2,400 years ago. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* covers many of the same topics addressed in this unit of the book, including speech organization, audience analysis, and persuasive appeals (Aristotle, 367-322 BCE/ 2007). Even though these principles have been around for thousands of years, it is still a challenge to get students to see the value of public speaking. Even the best speakers still do not know everything there is to know about public speaking. Other students do not think they will engage in public speaking very often, if at all. Oral communication and presentation skills are integral to professional and personal success. Last, some students are anxious or even scared by the thought of speaking in front of an audience. Speaking anxiety is common and can be addressed. Learning about and practicing public speaking fosters transferable skills that will help you organize your thoughts, outline information, do research, adapt to various audiences, and utilize and understand persuasive techniques. These skills will be useful in other college classes, your career, your personal relationships, and your civic life.

8.1 Selecting and Narrowing a Topic

Many steps go into the speech-making process. Many people do not approach speech preparation in an informed and systematic way, which results in many poorly planned or executed speeches that are not pleasant to sit through as an audience member and do not reflect well on the speaker. Good speaking skills can help you stand out from the crowd in increasingly competitive environments. While a polished delivery is important, good speaking skills must be practiced much earlier in the speech-making process (James Madison University Writing Center, 2021).

Analyze Your Audience

Audience analysis is key for a speaker to achieve his or her speech goal. One of the first questions you should ask yourself is "Who is my audience?" While there are some generalizations you can make about an audience, a competent speaker always assumes there is a diversity of opinion and background among his or her listeners. You cannot assume from looking that everyone in your audience is the same age, race, sexual orientation, religion, or many other factors. Even if you did have a homogenous audience, with only one or two people who do not match up, you should still consider those one or two people. Of course, a speaker could still unintentionally alienate certain audience members, especially in persuasive speaking situations. While this may be unavoidable, speakers can still think critically about what content they include in the speech and the effects it may have (James Madison University Communication Center, 2021).

Demographic Audience Analysis

Demographics are broad sociocultural categories, such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, education level, religion, ethnicity, and nationality used to segment a larger population. Since you are always going to have diverse demographics among your audience members, it would be unwise to focus solely on one group over another. Being aware of audience demographics is useful because you can tailor and vary examples in order to appeal to different groups of people (James Madison University Communication Center, 2021).

Psychological Audience Analysis

Psychological audience analysis considers the audience's psychological dispositions toward the topic, the speaker, and the occasion as well as how their attitudes, beliefs, and values inform those dispositions (Dlugan, 2012). When considering your audience's disposition toward your topic, you want to assess your audience's knowledge of the subject. You would not include a lesson on calculus in an introductory math course. You also would not go into the intricacies of a heart transplant to an audience with no medical training.

The audience may or may not have preconceptions about you as a speaker. One way to engage positively with your audience is to make sure you establish your credibility. In terms of **credibility**, you want the audience to see you as competent, trustworthy, and engaging. If the audience is already familiar with you, they may already see you as a credible speaker because they have seen you speak before, have heard other people evaluate you positively, or know that you have credentials and/or experience that make you competent. If you know you have a reputation that is not as positive, you will want to work hard to overcome those perceptions. To establish your trustworthiness, you want to incorporate good supporting material into your speech, verbally cite sources, and present information and arguments in a balanced, non-coercive, and non-manipulative way. To establish yourself as engaging, you want to have a well-delivered speech, which requires you to practice, get feedback, and practice some more. Your verbal and nonverbal delivery should be fluent and appropriate to the audience and occasion.

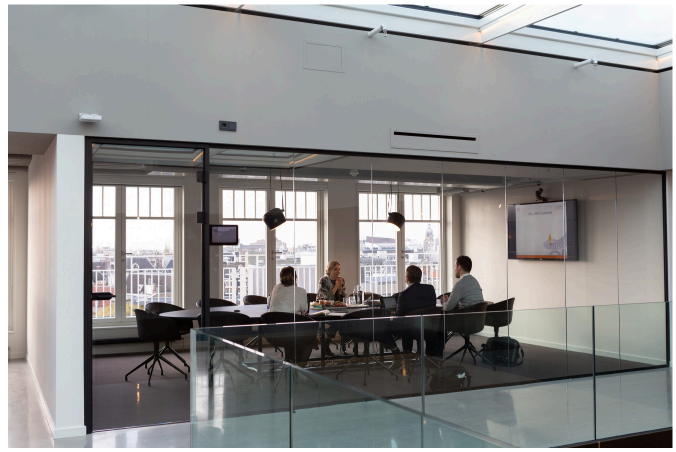

Figure 8.1: Mandatory work meetings are an example of captive audiences.

The circumstances that led your audience to attend your speech will affect their view of the occasion (Dlugan, 2012). A **captive audience** includes people who are required to attend your presentation. Mandatory meetings are common in workplace settings. Whether you are presenting for a group of your employees, coworkers, classmates, or even residents in your dorm if you are a resident advisor, you should not let the fact that the meeting is required give you license to give a half-hearted speech. In fact, you may want to build common ground with your audience to overcome any potential resentment for the required gathering. In your speech class, your classmates are captive audience members.

View having a captive classroom audience as a challenge, and use this space as a public speaking testing laboratory. You can try new things and push your boundaries more, because this audience is very forgiving and understanding since they have to go through the same things you do. In general, you may have to work harder to maintain the attention of a captive audience. Since coworkers may expect to hear the same content they hear every time at this particular meeting (and classmates have to sit through dozens and dozens of speeches), use your speech as an opportunity to stand out from the crowd or from what has been done before.

A **voluntary audience** includes people who have decided to come hear your speech. To help adapt to a voluntary audience, ask yourself what the audience members expect (Dlugan, 2012). Why are they here? If they have decided to come and see you, they must be interested in your topic or you as a speaker. Perhaps you have a reputation for being humorous, being able to translate complicated information into more digestible parts, or being interactive with the audience and responding to questions. Whatever the reason or reasons, it is important to make sure you deliver on those aspects. If people are voluntarily giving up their time to hear you, you want to make sure they get what they expected.

A final aspect of psychological audience analysis involves considering the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and values, as they will influence all the perceptions mentioned previously (Dlugan, 2012). As you can see in the figure below, think of our attitudes, beliefs, and values as layers that make up our perception and knowledge.

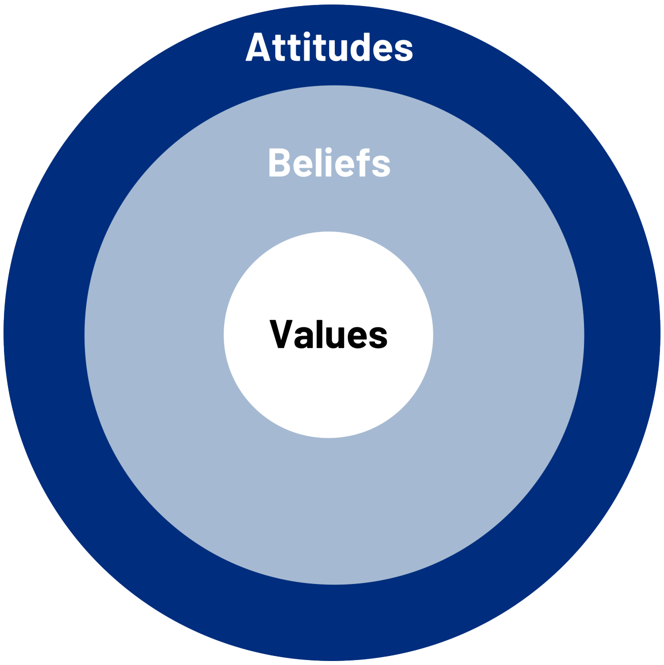

Figure 8.2: Layers that make up our perception and knowledge.

At the outermost level, attitudes are our likes and dislikes, and they are easier to influence than beliefs or values because they are often reactionary (Dlugan, 2012). If you have ever followed the approval rating of a politician, you know that people's likes and dislikes change frequently and can change dramatically based on recent developments. This is also true interpersonally. For those of you who have siblings, think about how you can go from liking your sisters or brothers, maybe because they did something nice for you, to disliking them because they upset you. This seesaw of attitudes can go up and down over the course of a day or even a few minutes, but it can still be useful for a speaker to consider. If there is something going on in popular culture or current events that has captured people's attention and favor or disfavor, then you can tap into that as a speaker to better relate to your audience.

When considering beliefs, we are dealing with what we believe "is or isn't" or "true or false." We come to hold our beliefs based on what we are taught, experience for ourselves, or believe (Dlugan, 2012). Our beliefs change if we encounter new information or experiences that counter previous ones. As people age and experience more, their beliefs are likely to change, which is natural.

Our values deal with what we view as right or wrong, good or bad (Dlugan, 2012). Our values do change over time but usually because of a life transition or life-changing event such as a birth, death, or trauma. For example, when many people leave their parents' control for the first time and move away from home, they have a shift in values that occurs as they make this important and challenging life transition. In summary, audiences enter a speaking situation with various psychological dispositions, and considering what those may be can help speakers adapt their messages and better meet their speech goals.

General Purpose

Your speeches will usually fall into one of three categories. In some cases, we speak to inform, meaning we attempt to teach our audience using factual objective evidence. In other cases, we speak to persuade, as we try to influence an audience's beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors. Last, we may speak to entertain or amuse our audience. In summary, the **general purpose** of your speech will be to inform, to persuade, or to entertain.

You can see various topics that may fit into the three general purposes for speaking in the table below "General Purposes and Speech Topics". Some of the topics listed could fall into another general purpose category depending on how the speaker approached the topic, or they could contain elements of more than one general purpose. For example, you may have to inform your audience about your topic in one main point before you can persuade them, or you may include some entertaining elements in an informative or persuasive speech to help make the content more engaging for the audience. There should not be elements of persuasion included in an informative speech, however, since persuading is contrary to the objective approach that defines an informative general purpose. In any case, while there may be some overlap between general purposes, we place most speeches into one of the categories based on the overall content of the speech.

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Choosing a Topic

Once you have determined (or been assigned) your general purpose, you can begin the process of choosing a topic (James Madison University Communication Center, 2021). In class, an instructor may give you the option of choosing any topic for your informative or persuasive speech, but in most academic, professional, and personal settings, there will be some parameters set that will help guide your topic selection. It is likely that speeches will be organized around the content covered in the class. Speeches delivered at work will usually be directed toward a specific goal, such as welcoming new employees, informing employees about changes in workplace policies, or presenting quarterly sales figures. We are also usually compelled to speak about specific things in our personal lives, like addressing a problem at our child's school by speaking out at a school board meeting. In short, it is not often that you will be starting from scratch when you begin to choose a topic.

Whether you have received parameters that narrow your topic range or not, the first step in choosing a topic is brainstorming (James Madison University Writing Center, 2021).

Brainstorming involves generating many potential topic ideas in a fast-paced and nonjudgmental manner. Brainstorming can take place multiple times, as you narrow your topic. For example, you may begin by brainstorming a list of your personal interests that you can narrow down to a speech topic. It makes sense that you will enjoy speaking about something that you care about or find interesting. The research and writing will be more interesting, and the delivery will be easier since you will not have to fake enthusiasm for your topic. Speaking about something you are familiar with and interested in can also help you manage speaking anxiety.

While it is good to start with your personal interests, some speakers may be stuck here if they do not feel like they can make their interests relevant to the audience. In that case, you can look around for ideas. If your topic is something being discussed in newspapers, on television, in the lounge of your dorm, or around your family's dinner table, then it is likely to be of interest and be relevant, since it is current. Figure 8.3 shows how brainstorming works in stages. A list of topics that interest the speaker are on the top row. The speaker can brainstorm subtopics for each idea to see which one may work the best. In this case, the speaker could decide to focus his or her informative speech on three common ways people come to own dogs: through breeders, pet stores, or shelters.

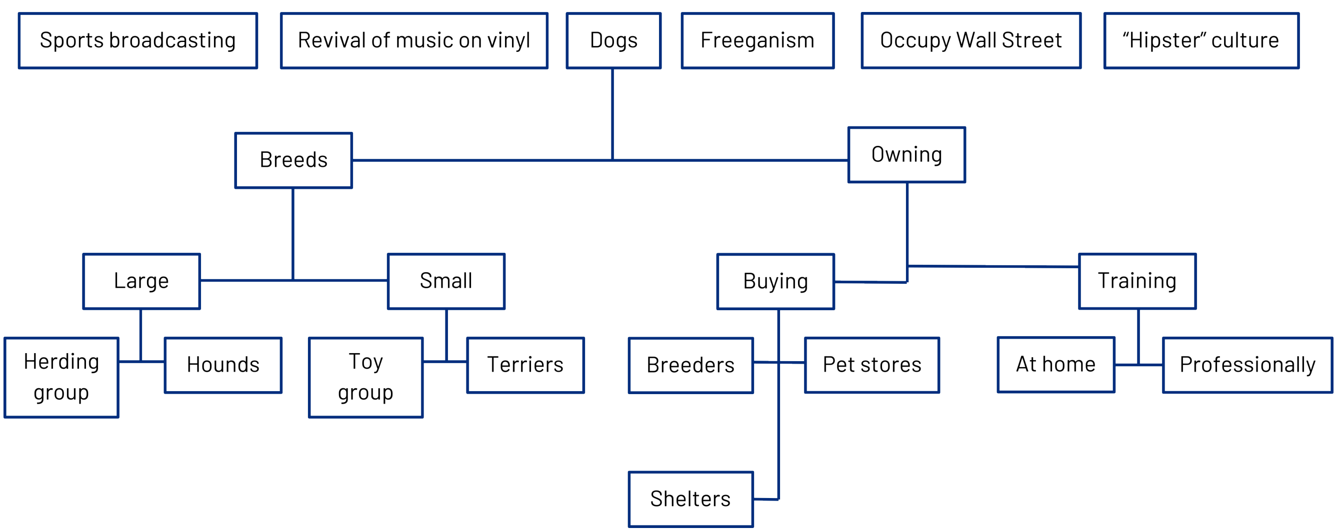

Figure 8.3: Brainstorming and narrowing a topic.

Overall, you can follow these tips as you select and narrow your topic:

1. Brainstorm topics that you are familiar with, interest you, and/or are currently topics of discussion.
2. Choose a topic appropriate for the assignment/occasion.

3. Choose a topic that you can make relevant to your audience.
4. Choose a topic that you have the resources to research (access to information, people to interview, etc.).

Specific Purpose

Once you have brainstormed, narrowed, and chosen your topic, you can begin to draft your specific purpose statement (James Madison University Communication Center, 2021). Your **specific purpose** is a one-sentence statement that includes the objective you want to accomplish in your speech. You do not speak aloud your specific purpose during your speech; you use it to guide your researching, organizing, and writing. A good specific purpose statement is audience centered, agrees with the general purpose, addresses one main idea, and is realistic.

An audience-centered specific purpose statement usually contains an explicit reference to the audience—for example, "my audience" or "the audience." Since a speaker may want to see if he or she effectively met his or her specific purpose, write the objective so that it could be measured or assessed. Moreover, since a speaker actually wants to achieve his or her speech goal, the specific purpose should also be realistic. You will not be able to teach the audience a foreign language or persuade an atheist to Christianity in a six- to nine-minute speech. The following is a good example of a good specific purpose statement for an informative speech: "By the end of my speech, the audience will be better informed about the effects the green movement has had on schools." The statement is audience-centered and matches with the general purpose by stating, "The audience will be better informed." The speaker could also test this specific purpose by asking the audience to write down, at the end of the speech, three effects the green movement has had on schools.

Thesis Statement

Your **thesis statement** is a one-sentence summary of the central idea of your speech that you either explain or defend (James Madison University Communication Center, 2021). You would explain the thesis statement for an informative speech, since these speeches are based on factual, objective material. You would defend your thesis statement for a persuasive speech, because these speeches are argumentative and your thesis should clearly indicate a stance on a particular issue. In order to make sure your thesis is argumentative and your stance clear, it is helpful to start your thesis with the words "I believe." When starting to work on a persuasive speech, it can also be beneficial to write out a counterargument to your thesis to ensure that it is arguable.

The thesis statement is different from the specific purpose in two main ways. First, the thesis statement is content centered, while the specific purpose statement is audience centered. Second, the thesis statement is incorporated into the spoken portion of your speech, while the specific purpose serves as a guide for your research and writing and an objective that you can measure (Goodwin, 2017). A good thesis statement is declarative, agrees with the general and specific purposes, and focuses and narrows your topic. Although you will likely end up revising and refining your thesis as you research and write, it is good to draft a thesis statement soon after drafting a specific purpose to help guide your progress. As with the specific purpose statement, your thesis helps ensure that your research, organizing, and writing are focused so you don't end up wasting time with irrelevant materials. Keep your specific purpose and thesis statement handy (drafting them at the top of your working outline is a good idea) so you can reference them often. The following examples show how a general purpose, specific purpose, and thesis statement match up with a topic area:

Example 1

Topic: My Craziest Adventure

General purpose: To Entertain

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will appreciate the lasting memories that result from an eighteen-year-old visiting New Orleans for the first time.

Thesis statement: New Orleans offers young tourists many opportunities for fun and excitement.

Example 2

Topic: Renewable Energy

General purpose: To Inform

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will be able to explain the basics of using biomass as fuel.

Thesis statement: Biomass is a renewable resource that releases gases that can be used for fuel.

Example 3

Topic: Privacy Rights

General purpose: To Persuade

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, my audience will believe that parents should not be able to use tracking devices to monitor their teenage child's activities.

Thesis statement: I believe that it is a violation of a child's privacy to be electronically monitored by his or her parents.

8.2 Researching and Supporting Your Speech

We live in an age where access to information is more convenient than ever before. The days of photocopying journal articles in the stacks of the library or looking up newspaper articles on microfilm are over for most. Yet, even though we have all this information readily available, research skills are more important than ever. Our challenge now is not accessing information but discerning what information is credible and relevant. Even though it may sound inconvenient to have to go physically to the library, students who did research before the digital revolution did not have to worry as much about discerning. If you found a source in the library, you could be assured of its credibility because a librarian had subscribed to or purchased that content. When you use Internet resources like Google or Wikipedia, you have no guarantees about some of the content that comes up.

Finding Supporting Material

As was noted earlier, it is good to speak about something with which you are already familiar. So existing knowledge forms the first step of your research process. Depending on how familiar you are with a topic, you will need to do more or less background research before you actually start incorporating sources to support your speech. Background research is just a review of summaries available for your topic that helps refresh or create your knowledge about the subject. It is not the more focused and academic research that you will actually use to support and verbally cite in your speech.

Your first step for research in college should be library resources, not Google, Bing, or other general search engines. In most cases, you can still do your library research from the comfort of a computer, which makes it as accessible as Google but gives you much better results. Excellent and underutilized resources at college and university libraries are reference librarians. **Reference librarians** are not like the people who likely staffed your high school library. They are information-retrieval experts. At most colleges and universities, you can find a reference librarian who has at least a master's degree in library and information sciences, and at some larger or specialized schools, reference librarians have doctoral degrees. Research can seem like a maze, and reference librarians can help you navigate the maze. There may be dead ends, but there is always another way around to reach the end goal.

Unfortunately, many students hit their first dead end and give up or assume that there is not enough research out there to support their speech. If you have thought of a topic to do your speech on, someone else has thought of it, too, and people have written and published about it. Reference librarians can help you find that information (Matook, 2020). Meet with a reference librarian face-to-face and take your assignment sheet and topic idea with you. In most cases, students report that they came away with more information than they needed, which is good because you can then narrow that down to the best information. If you cannot meet with a reference librarian face-to-face, many schools now offer the option to do a live chat with a reference librarian, and you can contact them by e-mail or phone.

Figure 8.4: If you get stuck in your research, ask a reference librarian!

Aside from the human resources available in the library, you can also use electronic resources such as library **databases**. Library databases help you access more credible and scholarly information than what you will find using general Internet searches. These databases are quite expensive, and you cannot access them as a regular citizen without paying for them. Luckily, some of your student fee dollars go to pay for subscriptions to these databases so that you can access them as a student. Through these databases, you can access newspapers, magazines, journals, and books from around the world. Of course, libraries also house stores of physical resources like DVDs, books, academic journals, newspapers, and popular magazines (James Madison University Libraries, 2021). You can usually browse your library's physical collection through an online catalog search. A trip to the library to browse is especially useful for books. Since most university libraries use the Library of Congress classification system, books are organized by topic. That means if you find a good book using the online catalog and go to the library to get it, you should take a moment to look around that book, because the other books in that area will be topically related. On many occasions, I have used this tip and gone to the library for one book but left with several.

Although Google is not usually the best first stop for conducting college-level research, Google Scholar is a separate search engine that narrows results down to scholarly materials. This version of Google has improved much over the past few years and has served as a good resource for my research, even for this book. A strength of Google Scholar is that you can easily search for and find articles not confined to a particular library database. The pool of resources you are searching in is much larger than what you would find by using a library database. The challenge is that you have no way of knowing if the articles that come up are available to you in full-text format. As noted earlier, you will find most academic journal articles in databases that require users to pay subscription fees. Therefore, you are often only able to access the abstracts of articles or excerpts from books that come up in a Google Scholar search. You can use that information to check your library to see if the article is available in full-text format, but if it is not, you have to go back to the search results. When you access Google Scholar on a campus network that subscribes to academic databases, however, you can sometimes click through directly to full-text articles. Although this resource is still being improved, it may be a useful alternative or backup when other search strategies are leading to dead end.

Types of Sources

Periodicals

Periodicals include magazines and journals that are published periodically. Many library databases can access periodicals from around the world and from years past. A common database is Academic Search Premiere (a similar version is Academic Search Complete). Many databases, like this one, allow you to narrow your search terms, which can be very helpful as you try to find good sources that are relevant to your topic. You may start by typing a key word into the first box and searching. Sometimes a general search like this can yield thousands of results, which you obviously would not have time to look through. In this case, you may limit your search to results that have your keyword in the **abstract**, which is the author-supplied summary of the source. If there are still too many results, you may limit your search to results that have your keyword in the title. At this point, you may have reduced those ten thousand results down to a handful, which is much more manageable.

Within your search results, you will need to distinguish between magazines and academic journals. In general, academic journals are considered more scholarly and credible than magazines because most of the content in them is peer reviewed. The **peer-review process** is the most rigorous form of review, which takes several months to years and ensures that the information that is published has been vetted and approved by numerous experts on the subject. Academic journals are often affiliated with professional organizations rather than for-profit corporations, and neither authors nor editors are paid for their contributions.

Newspapers and Books

Newspapers and books can be excellent sources but must still be evaluated for relevance and credibility. Newspapers are good for topics that are developing quickly, as they are updated daily. While there are well-known newspapers of record like the *New York Times*, smaller local papers can also be credible and relevant if your speech topic does not have national or international reach. You can access local, national, and international newspapers through electronic databases like LexisNexis.

To evaluate the credibility of a book, you will want to know some things about the author. You can usually find this information at the front or back of the book. If an author is a credentialed and recognized expert in his or her area, the book will be more credible. However, just because someone wrote a book on a subject does not mean he or she is the most credible source. The publisher of a book can also be an indicator of credibility. Books published by university/academic presses (University of Chicago Press, Duke University Press) are considered more credible than books published by trade presses (Penguin, Random House), because they are often peer reviewed and they are not primarily profit driven.

Reference Tools

The transition to college-level research means turning more toward primary sources and away from general reference materials. **Primary sources** are written by people with firsthand experiences or by researchers/scholars who conducted original research (National WW II Museum, n.d.). Unfortunately, many college students are reluctant to give up their reliance on reference tools like dictionaries and encyclopedias. While reference tools like dictionaries and encyclopedias are excellent for providing a speaker with a background on a topic, they should not be the foundation of your research unless they are academic and/or specialized.

Dictionaries are handy tools when we are not familiar with a particular word. However, citing a dictionary like Merriam-Webster*'s* as a source in your speech is often unnecessary. A dictionary is useful when you need to challenge a Scrabble word, but it is not the best source for college-level research.

Many students have relied on encyclopedias for research in high school, but most encyclopedias, like *World Book*, *Encarta*, or *Britannica*, are not primary sources. Instead, they are examples of **secondary sources** that aggregate, or compile, research done by others in a condensed summary (James Madison University Libraries, 2019). Reference sources like encyclopedias are excellent resources to get you informed about the basics of a topic, but at the college level, primary sources are expected. Many encyclopedias are internet-based, which makes them convenient, but they are still not primary sources, and their credibility should be even more scrutinized.

Wikipedia revolutionized how many people retrieve information and pioneered an open-publishing format that allowed a community of people to post, edit, and debate content. While this is an important contribution to society, Wikipedia is not considered a scholarly or credible source. Like other encyclopedias, Wikipedia should not be used in college-level research, because it is not a primary source. In addition, since its content can be posted and edited by anyone, we cannot be sure of the credibility of the content. Even though there are self-appointed "experts" who monitor and edit some of the information on Wikipedia, we cannot verify their credentials or the review process that information goes through before it is posted.

Interviews

When conducting an interview for a speech, you should access a person who has expertise in or direct experience with your speech topic. If you follow the suggestions for choosing a topic that mentioned earlier, you may already know something about your speech topic and may have connections to people who would be good interview subjects. Previous employers, internship supervisors, teachers, community leaders, or even relatives may be appropriate interviewees, given your topic. If you do not have a connection to someone you can interview, you can often find someone via the Internet who would be willing to answer some questions. Many informative and persuasive speech topics relate to current issues, and most current issues have organizations that represent their needs.

Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" but they can provide descriptions and details that will add to your speech. Quotes and paraphrases from your interview can add a personal side to a topic or at least convey potentially complicated information in a more conversational and interpersonal way. Closed questions can be answered with one or two words and can provide a starting point to get to information that is more detailed. However, the interviewer must have prepared follow-up questions. Unless the guidelines or occasion for your speech suggest otherwise, you should balance your interview data with the other sources in your speech. Do not let your references to the interview take over your speech.

Websites

We already know that utilizing library resources can help you automatically filter out content that may not be scholarly or credible, since the content in research databases is selected and restricted. However, some information may be better retrieved from websites. Even though research databases and websites are electronic sources, two key differences between them may affect their credibility (Brigham Young University Library, 2021).

First, most of the content in research databases is or was printed but was converted to digital formats for easier and broader access. In contrast, most of the content on websites has not been printed. Second, most of the content on research databases has gone through editorial review, which means a professional editor or a peer editor has reviewed the material to make sure it is credible and worthy of publication. Most content on websites is not subjected to the same review process, as just about anyone with internet access can self-publish information on a personal website, blog, wiki, or social media page. Therefore, what sort of information may be better retrieved from websites, and how can we evaluate the credibility of a website?

A key way to evaluate the credibility of a website is to determine the site's accountability (Brigham Young University Library, 2021). Accountability means determining who is ultimately responsible for the content put out and whose interests the content meets. The more information that is included on a website, the better able you will be to determine its accountability. Ideally all or most of the following information would be included: organization/agency name, author's name and contact information, date the information was posted or published, name and contact information for person in charge of web content (i.e., web editor or webmaster), and a link to information about the organization/agency/ business mission. While not all this information has to be present to warrant the use of the material, the less accountability information is available, the more you should scrutinize the information.

You can also begin to judge the credibility of a website by its domain name. Some common domain names are *.com*, *.net*, *.org*, *.edu*, *.mil*, and *.gov*. For each type of domain, there are questions you may ask that will help you evaluate the site's credibility. You can see a summary of these questions in table 8.2.

[table id=7 /]

Types of Supporting Material

There are several types of supporting material you can add to your speech. They include examples, explanations, statistics, analogies, testimony, and visual aids. You will want to have a balance of information, and you will want to include the material that is most relevant to your audience and is most likely to engage them.

Examples

An **example** is a cited case that is representative of a larger whole. Examples are especially beneficial when presenting information that may be unfamiliar to an audience. They are also useful for repackaging or reviewing information that has been presented previously. Examples are used in many different ways, so you should let your audience, purpose and thesis, and research materials guide your use. You may pull examples directly from your research materials, making sure to cite the source. The following is an example used in a speech about the negative effects of standardized testing: "Standardized testing makes many students anxious, and even ill. On March 14, 2002, the *Sacramento Bee* reported that some standardized tests now come with instructions indicating what teachers should do with a test booklet if a student throws up on it." You may also cite examples from your personal experience, if appropriate: "I remember being sick to my stomach while waiting for my SAT to begin."

You may also use hypothetical examples, which can be useful when you need to provide an example that is extraordinary or goes beyond most people's direct experience (Beare, 2020). Capitalize on this opportunity by incorporating vivid description into the example that appeals to the audience's senses. Always make sure to indicate when you are using a hypothetical example, as it would be unethical to present an example as real when it is not. Including the word *imagine* or something similar in the first sentence of the example can easily do this.

Explanations

Explanations clarify ideas by providing information about what something is, why something is the way it is, or how something works or came to be. One of the most common types of explanation is a definition. Definitions do not have to come from the dictionary. Many times, authors will define concepts as they use them in their writing, which is a good alternative to a dictionary definition. As you do your research, think about how much your audience likely knows about a given subject. You do not need to provide definitions when information is common knowledge. Anticipate audience confusion and define legal, medical, or other forms of jargon as well as slang and foreign words.

Statistics

Statistics are numerical representations of information (Barnard, 2017). They are very credible in our society, as evidenced by their frequent use by news agencies, government offices, politicians, and academics. As a speaker, you can capitalize on the power of statistics if you use them appropriately. Unfortunately, speakers often intentionally or unintentionally misuse statistics and misconstrue the numbers to support their argument. They do so without examining the context from which the statistic emerged. All statistics are contextual, so plucking a number out of a news article or a research study and including it in your speech without taking the time to understand the statistic is unethical.

Although statistics are popular as supporting evidence, they can also be boring. There will inevitably be people in your audience who are not good at processing numbers. Even people who are good with numbers have difficulty processing through a series of statistics presented orally. Remember that we have to adapt our information to listeners who do not have the luxury of pressing a pause or rewind button. For these reasons, it is a good idea to avoid using too many statistics and to use startling examples when you do use them (Barnard, 2017). Startling statistics should defy our expectations. When you give the audience a large number that they would expect to be smaller, or vice versa, you will be more likely to engage them, as the following example shows: "Did you know that 1.3 billion people in the world do not have access to electricity? That's about 20 percent of the world's population according to a 2009 study on the International Energy Agency's official website."

Analogies

Analogies involve a comparison of ideas, items, or circumstances (Segar, 2016). When you compare two things that actually exist, you are using a literal analogy—for example, "Germany and Sweden are both European countries that have had nationalized health care for decades." Another type of literal comparison is a historical analogy. In Mary Fisher's now famous 1992 speech to the Republican National Convention, she compared the silence of many U.S. political leaders regarding the HIV/AIDS crisis to that of many European leaders in the years before the Holocaust.

A figurative analogy compares things not normally related, often relying on metaphor, simile, or other figurative language devices. In the following example, wind and revolution are compared: "Just as the wind brings changes in the weather, so does revolution bring change to countries."

When you compare differences, you are highlighting contrast—for example, "Although the United States is often thought of as the most medically advanced country in the world, other Western countries with nationalized health care have lower infant mortality rates and higher life expectancies." To use analogies effectively and ethically, you must choose ideas, items, or circumstances to compare that are similar enough to warrant the analogy.

Testimonies

Testimonies are quoted information from people with direct knowledge about a subject or situation. Expert testimony is from people who are credentialed or recognized experts in a given subject (Davis, 2020). Lay testimony is often a recounting of a person's experiences, which is more subjective. Both types of testimony are valuable as supporting material. We can see this in the testimonies of people in courtrooms and other types of hearings. Lawyers know that juries want to hear testimony from experts, eyewitnesses, and friends and family. Congressional hearings are similar.

When using testimony, make sure you indicate whether it is expert or lay by sharing with the audience the context of the quote. Share the credentials of experts (education background, job title, years of experience, etc.) to add to your credibility or give some personal context for the lay testimony (eyewitness, personal knowledge, etc.).

Visual Aids

Visual aids help a speaker reinforce speech content visually, which helps amplify the speaker's message (Beqiri, 2018). They can be used to present any of the types of supporting materials discussed previously. Speakers rely heavily on an audience's ability to learn by listening, which may not always be successful if audience members are visual or experiential learners. Even if audience members are good listeners, information overload or external or internal noise can be barriers to a speaker achieving his or her speech goals. Therefore, skillfully incorporating visual aids into a speech has many potential benefits.

Objects

Three-dimensional objects that represent an idea can be useful as a visual aid for a speech (Beqiri, 2018). They offer the audience a direct, concrete way to understand what you are saying. I often have my students do an introductory speech where they bring in three objects that represent their past, present, and future. Students have brought in a drawer from a chest that they were small enough to sleep in as a baby, a package of Ramen noodles to represent their life as a college student, and a stethoscope or other object to represent their career goals, among other things. Models also fall into this category, as they are scaled versions of objects that may be too big (the International Space Station) or too small (a molecule) to actually show to your audience.

Chalkboards, Whiteboards, and Flip Charts

Chalkboards, whiteboards, and flip charts can be useful for interactive speeches (Beqiri, 2018). If you are polling the audience or brainstorming, you can write down audience responses easily for everyone to see and for later reference. They can also be helpful for unexpected clarification. You can also have audience members write things on boards or flip charts themselves, which helps get them engaged and takes some of the pressure off you as a speaker.

Figure 8.5: Whiteboards are a great way to interact with your audience.

Posters and Handouts

Posters generally include text and graphics and often summarize an entire presentation or select main points (Beqiri, 2018). We frequently use posters to present original research, as they can be broken down into the various steps to show how a process worked. Posters can be useful if you are going to have audience members circulating around the room before or after your presentation, so they can take the time to review the poster and ask questions. Posters are not often good visual aids during a speech, because it is difficult to make the text and graphics large enough for a room full of people to see adequately. The best posters are those created using computer software and professionally printed on large laminated paper.

These professional posters come at a price. If you opt to make your own poster, take care to make it look professional. Use a computer and printer to print out your text; do not handwrite on a poster. Make sure anything you cut by hand has neat, uniform edges. You can then affix the text, photos, and any accent backing to the poster board. Double-sided tape works well for this, as it does not leave humps like those left by rolled tape or the bubbles, smearing, or sticky mess left by glue.

Handouts can be a useful alternative to posters. Think of them as mini-posters that audience members can reference and take with them. Audience members will likely appreciate a neatly laid out, one-page handout that includes the speaker's contact information. It can be appropriate to give handouts to an audience before a long presentation where note taking is expected, complicated information is presented, or the audience will be tested on or have to respond to the information presented. In most regular speeches less than fifteen minutes long, it would not be wise to distribute handouts ahead of time, as they will distract the audience from the speaker.

It is better to distribute the handouts after your speech or at the end of the program, if others speaking after you.

Pictures

Photographs, paintings, drawings, and sketches fall into the pictures category of visual aids. Pictures can be useful when you need to show an exact replication about which you are speaking. Pictures can also connect to your audience on a personal level, especially if they evoke audience emotions (Beqiri, 2018). Think about the use of pictures in television commercials asking for donations or sponsorships. Organizations like Save the Children and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals successfully use pictures of malnourished children or abused animals to pull at the heartstrings of viewers. A series of well-chosen and themed pictures can have a meaningful impact on an audience.

Diagrams and Drawings

Diagrams are good for showing the inner workings of an object or pointing out the most important or relevant parts of something (Neal, 2016). Think about diagrams as blueprints that show the inside of something—for example, key bones in the human body in a speech about common skateboarding injuries. Diagrams are good alternatives to pictures when you only need to point out certain things that may be difficult to see in a photograph.

Charts and Tables

Charts and tables are useful for compiling and cross-referencing larger amounts of information (Presentation Magazine, 2011). The combination of rows and columns allows you to create headers and then divide them up into units, categories, dates, and so on. Medical information is put into charts so that periods of recorded information, such as vital signs, can be updated and scanned by doctors and nurses. Charts and tables are also good for combining text and numbers, and they are easy to make with word processing software like Microsoft Word or spreadsheet software like Excel.

E13 *fx*

	A	B	C
1	**Color of shirt**	**Number of sales**	**Total amount earned**
2	Yellow	3471	52065
3	Blue	7164	107460
4	Black	9718	145770
5	Pink	2591	38865

Figure 8.6: Example of a sales spreadsheet.

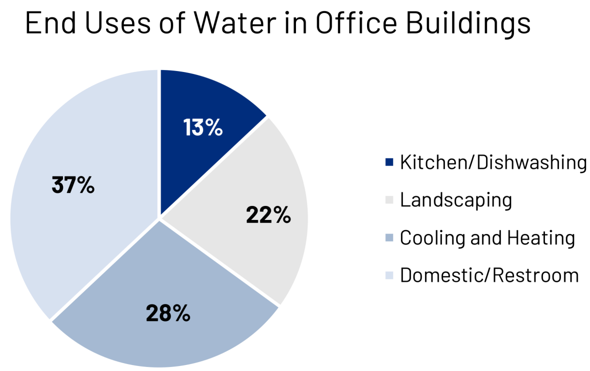

Figure 8.7: Example of a pie chart.

Think of presenting your department's budget and spending at the end of a business quarter. You could have headers in the columns with the various categories and itemized deductions in the rows ending with a final total for each column.

A pie chart is an alternative representation of textual and numerical data that offers audience members a visual representation of the relative proportions of a whole. In a pie chart, each piece of the pie corresponds to a percentage of the whole, and the size of the pie varies with the size of the percentage. As with other charts and tables, most office software programs can now make pie charts.

Graphs

Graphs are representations that point out numerical relationships or trends and include line graphs and bar graphs (Presentation Magazine, 2011). Line graphs are useful for showing trends over time. For example, you could track the rising cost of tuition for colleges and universities in a persuasive speech about the need for more merit-based financial aid.

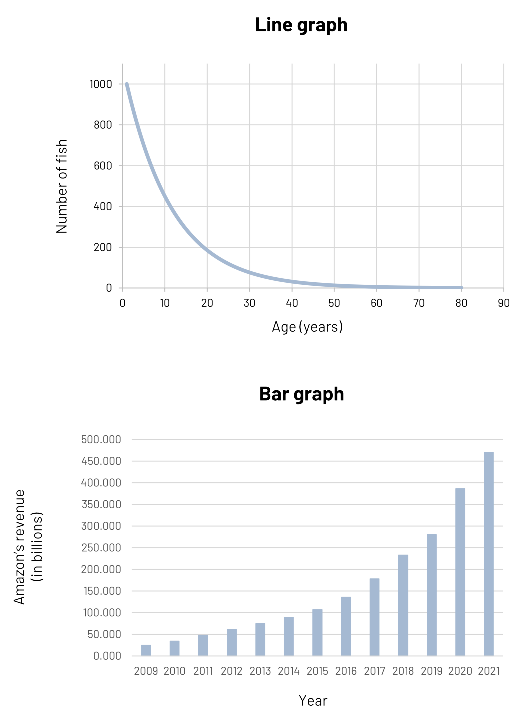

Figure 8.8: Examples of a line graph (top) and a bar graph (bottom).

Bar graphs are good for comparing amounts. In the same speech, you could compare the tuition of two-year institutions to that of four-year institutions. Graphs help make numerical data more digestible for your audience and allow you to convey an important numerical trend visually and quickly without having to go into lengthy explanations. Remember to label clearly your *x*-axis and *y*-axis and to explain the basics of your graph to your audience before you go into the specific data. If you use a graph created by someone else, make sure it is large and clear enough for the audience to read and that you cite the original source.

Video

Video clips as visual aids can be powerful and engaging for an audience, but they can also be troublesome for speakers (Gallo, 2017). Whether embedded in a PowerPoint presentation, accessed through YouTube, or played from a laptop or DVD player, video clips are notorious for tripping up speakers. They require more than one piece of electronics when they are hooked to a projector and speaker. They may also require an Internet connection. The more electronic connection points, the more chances for something to go wrong. Therefore it is very important to test your technology before your speech, have a backup method of delivery if possible, and be prepared to go on without the video if all else fails.

Although sometimes tempting, you should not let the video take over your speech (Gallo, 2017). Make sure your video is relevant and cued to where it needs to be. One useful strategy for incorporating video is to play a video without audio and speak along with the video, acting as a narrator. This allows the speaker to have more control over the visual aid and to adapt it and make it more relevant to a specific topic and audience. Additionally, video editing software like iMovie is readily available to college students and relatively easy to use. Some simple editing to cut together various clips that are meaningful or adding an introductory title or transitions can go a long way toward making your video look professional.

Presentation Software

The prevalence of computers and projectors in most schools, offices, and other presentation facilities has made using computer-generated visual aids more convenient. PowerPoint is the most commonly used presentation software and has functionality ranging from the simplest text-based slide to complicated transitions, timing features, video/sound imbedding, and even functionality with audience response systems like Turning Point that allow data to be collected live from audience members and incorporated quickly into the slideshow. Despite the fact that most college students have viewed and created numerous PowerPoint presentations, we have all seen many poorly executed slideshows that detracted from the speaker’s message. PowerPoint should be viewed as a speech amplifier. Like an amplifier for a guitar, it does not do much without a musician there to play the instrument. The speaker is the musician, the speech is the instrument, and PowerPoint is the amplifier. Just as the amplifier does not dictate what the guitar player does, neither should PowerPoint take over the speaker (Rielly, 2020).

Presentations are generally longer than speeches, at least fifteen minutes long, and are content heavy. College lectures and many professional conference presentations fall into this category. In these cases, PowerPoint generally runs along with the speaker throughout the presentation, reviewing key points and presenting visual aids such as pictures and graphs. The constant running of the slideshow also facilitates audience note taking, which is also common during presentations.

Speeches, on the other hand, are usually fifteen minutes or less, have repetition and redundancy built in (as they are adapted to a listening audience), and carry less expectation that the audience will take detailed notes. In this case, PowerPoint should be used more as a visual aid, meaning that it should be simpler and amplify particular components of the speech rather than run along with the speaker throughout the speech (Rielly, 2020).

8.3 Organizing

When organizing your speech, you want to start with the body. Even though most students want to start with the introduction, it is difficult to introduce and preview something that you have not yet developed. A well-structured speech includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Think of this structure as a human body. This type of comparison dates back to Plato, who noted, "every speech ought to be put together like a living creature" (Winans, 1917). The introduction is the head, the body is the torso and legs, and the conclusion is the feet. The information you add to this structure from your research and personal experience is the organs and muscle. The transitions you add are the connecting tissues that hold the parts together, and a well-practiced delivery is the skin and clothing that makes everything presentable.

Organizing the Body of Your Speech

Writing the body of your speech takes the most time in the speech-writing process. Your **specific purpose** and **thesis statement** should guide the initial development of the body, which will then be more informed by your research process (LibreTexts, 2021). You will determine main points that help achieve your purpose and match your thesis. You will then fill information into your main points by incorporating the various types of supporting material discussed previously. Before you move on to your introduction and conclusion, you will connect the main points together with transitions and other signposts.

Determining Your Main Points

Think of each main point as a miniature speech within your larger speech. Each **main point** will have a central idea, meet some part of your specific purpose, and include supporting material from your research that relates to your thesis. Reviewing the draft of your thesis and specific purpose statements can lead you to research materials.

As you review your research, take notes on and/or highlight key ideas that stick out to you as useful, effective, relevant, and interesting. It is likely that these key ideas will become the central ideas of your main points, or at least sub-points. Once you have researched your speech enough to achieve your specific purpose, support your thesis, and meet the research guidelines set forth by your instructor, boss, or project guidelines, you can distill the research down to a series of central ideas. As you draft these central ideas, use **parallel wording**, which is similar wording among key organizing signposts and main points that helps structure a speech. Using parallel wording in your central idea statement for each main point will also help you write parallel key signposts like the preview statement in the introduction, transitions between main points, and the review statement in the conclusion.

While writing each central idea using parallel wording is useful for organizing information at this stage in the speech-making process, you should feel free to vary the wording a little more in your actual speech delivery. You will still want some parallel key words woven throughout the speech, but sticking too close to parallel wording can make your content sound forced or artificial.

After distilling your research materials down, you may have several central idea statements. You will likely have two to five main points (depending on what your instructor prefers), time constraints, or the organizational pattern you choose. Not all of the central idea may be converted into main points; some may end up becoming sub-points and some may be discarded. Once you get your series of central ideas drafted, you will then want to consider how you might organize them, which will help you narrow your list down to what may actually end up becoming the body of your speech.

Organizing Your Main Points

There are several ways you can organize your main points. Some patterns correspond well to a particular subject area or speech type. Determining which pattern you will use helps filter through your list of central ideas generated from your research and allows you to move on to the next step of inserting supporting material into your speech. Here are some common organizational patterns.

Topical Pattern

When you use the **topical pattern**, you are breaking a large idea or category into smaller ideas or subcategories (Davis, 2021). In short, you are finding logical divisions to a whole. While you may break something down into smaller topics that will make two, three, or more main points, people tend to like groups of three. In a speech about the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, for example, you could break the main points down to (1) the musicians who performed, (2) the musicians who declined to perform, and (3) the audience. You could also break it down into three specific performances—(1) Santana, (2) The Grateful Dead, and (3) Creedence Clearwater Revival—or three genres of music—(1) folk, (2) funk, and (3) rock.

The topical pattern breaks a topic down into logical divisions but does not necessarily offer any guidance in ordering them. To help determine the order of topical main points, you may consider the primacy or recency effect (Morrison, Conway, & Chein, 2014). You prime an engine before you attempt to start it and prime a surface before you paint it. The **primacy effect** is similar in that you present your best information first in order to make a positive impression and engage your audience early in your speech. The **recency effect** is based on the idea that an audience will best remember the information they heard most recently. Therefore, you would include your best information last in your speech to leave a strong final impression. Both primacy and recency can be effective. Consider your topic and your audience to help determine which would work best for your speech.

Chronological Pattern

Figure 8.9: Example of a chronological pattern of events.

A **chronological pattern** helps structure your speech based on time or sequence. If you order a speech based on time, you may trace the development of an idea, product, or event (LibreTexts, 2020). A speech on Woodstock could cover the following: (1) preparing for the event, (2) what happened during the event, and (3) the aftermath of the event. Ordering a speech based on sequence is also chronological and can be useful when providing directions on how to do something or how a process works. This could work well for a speech on baking bread at home, refinishing furniture, or harvesting corn. The chronological pattern is often a good choice for speeches related to history or demonstration speeches.

Spatial Pattern

The **spatial pattern** arranges main points based on their layout or proximity to each other. A speech on Woodstock could focus on the layout of the venue, including (1) the camping area, (2) the stage area, and (3) the musician/crew area. A speech could also focus on the components of a typical theater stage or the layout of the new 9/11 memorial at the World Trade Center site.

Problem-Solution Pattern

The **problem-solution pattern** entails presenting a problem and offering a solution (LibreTexts, 2020). This pattern can be useful for persuasive speaking—specifically, persuasive speeches focused on a current societal issue. This can also be coupled with a call to action, asking an audience to take specific steps to implement a solution you offered. This organizational pattern can be applied to a wide range of topics and can be organized easily into two or three main points. You can offer evidence to support your claim that a problem exists in one main point and then offer a specific solution in the second main point. To be more comprehensive, you could set up the problem, review multiple solutions that have been proposed, and then add a third main point that argues for a specific solution out of the ones reviewed in the second main point. Using this pattern, you could offer solutions to the problem of rising textbook costs or offer your audience guidance on how to solve conflicts with roommates or coworkers.

Cause-Effect Pattern

The **cause-effect pattern** sets up a relationship between ideas that shows a progression from origin to result (LibreTexts, 2020). You could also start with the current situation and trace back to the root causes. You can use this pattern for informative or persuasive speeches. When used for informing, the speaker is explaining an established relationship and citing evidence to support the claim—for example, accessing unsecured, untrusted websites or e-mails leads to computer viruses. When used for persuading, the speaker is arguing for a link that is not as well established and/or is controversial—for example, violent video games lead to violent thoughts and actions. In a persuasive speech, a cause-effect argument is often paired with a proposed solution or call to action, such as advocating for stricter age restrictions on who can play violent video games. When organizing an informative speech using the cause-effect pattern, be careful not to advocate for a particular course of action.

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

Monroe's Motivated Sequence is a five-step organization pattern that attempts to persuade an audience by making a topic relevant, using positive and/or negative motivation, and including a call to action. The five steps are (1) attention, (2) need, (3) satisfaction, (4) visualization, and (5) action (Monroe & Ehninger, 1964).

You accomplish the **attention step** in the introduction to your speech. Whether your entire speech is organized using this pattern or not, any good speaker begins by getting the attention of the audience. We will discuss several strategies in Section 9 "Getting Your Audience's Attention" for getting an audience's attention. The next two steps set up a problem and solution.

After getting the audience's attention you will want to establish the **need step** and that there is a need for your topic to be addressed. You will want to cite credible research that points out the seriousness or prevalence of an issue. In the attention and need steps, it is helpful to use supporting material that is relevant and proxemic to the audience.

Once you have set up the need for the problem to be addressed, you move on to the **satisfaction step**, where you present a solution to the problem. You may propose your own solution if it is informed by your research and reasonable. You may also propose a solution that you found in your research.

The **visualization step** is next and incorporates positive and/or negative motivation as a way to support the relationship you have set up between the need and your proposal to satisfy the need. You may ask your audience to visualize a world where things are better because they took your advice and addressed this problem. This capitalizes on positive motivation. You may also ask your audience to visualize a world where things are worse because they did not address the issue, which is a use of negative motivation. Now that you have hopefully persuaded your audience to believe the problem is worthy of addressing, proposed a solution, and asked them to visualize potential positive or negative consequences, you move to the action step.

The **action step** includes a call to action where you are saying, "Now that you see the seriousness of this problem, here's what you can do about it." The call to action should include concrete and specific steps an audience can take. Your goal should be to facilitate the call to action, making it easy for the audience to complete. Instead of asking them to contact their elected officials, you could start an online petition and make the link available to everyone. You could also bring the contact information for officials that represent that region so the audience does not have to look them up on their own. Although this organizing pattern is more complicated than the others are, it offers a proven structure that can help you organize your supporting materials and achieve your speech goals.

Incorporating Supporting Material

So far, you have learned several key steps in the speech creation process. Now you will begin to incorporate more specific information from your supporting materials into the body of your speech. You can place the central ideas that fit your organizational pattern at the beginning of each main point and then plug supporting material in as sub-points.

This information will also make up the content of your formal and speaking outlines. Remember that you want to include a variety of supporting material (examples, analogies, statistics, explanations, etc.) within your speech. The information that you include as sub-points helps back up the central idea that started the main point. Depending on the length of your speech and the depth of your research, you may also have sub-sub-points that back up the claim you are making in the sub-point. Each piece of supporting material you include eventually links back to the specific purpose and thesis statement. This approach to supporting your speech is systematic and organized and helps ensure that your content fits together logically and that your main points are clearly supported and balanced.

One of the key elements of academic and professional public speaking is **verbally citing** your supporting materials so your audience can evaluate your credibility and the credibility of your sources (James Madison University Communication Center, 2010). You should include citation information in three places: verbally in your speech, on any paper or electronic information (outline, PowerPoint), and on a separate reference sheet. Since much of the supporting material you incorporate into your speech comes directly from your research, it is important that you include relevant citation information as you plug this information into your main points. Do not wait to include citation information once you have drafted the body of your speech. At that point, it may be difficult to retrace your steps to locate the source of a specific sentence or statistic. As you paraphrase or quote your supporting material, work the citation information into the sentences; do not clump the information together at the end of a sentence, or try to cite more than one source at the end of a paragraph or main point. It is important that the audience hear the citations as you use the respective information so it is clear which supporting material matches up with which source.

Writing key bibliographic information into your speech will help ensure that you remember to verbally cite your sources and that your citations will be more natural and flowing and less likely to result in fluency hiccups. At minimum, you should include the author, date, and source in a verbal citation (James Madison University Communication Center, 2010). Sometimes more information is necessary. When citing a magazine, newspaper, or journal article, it is more important to include the source name than the title of the article, since the source name—for example, *Newsweek*—is what the audience needs to evaluate the speaker's credibility. For a book, make sure to cite the title and indicate that the source is a book. When verbally citing information retrieved from a website, you do not want to try to recite a long and cumbersome URL in your speech. Most people do not even make it past the "www." before they mess up. It is more relevant to audiences for speakers to report the sponsor/author of the site and the title of the web page, or section of the website, where they obtained their information.

When getting information from a website, it is best to use "official" organization websites or government websites. When you get information from an official site, make sure you state that in your citation to add to your credibility. For an interview, state when it took place, the name of the interviewee, their credentials. Advice for verbally citing sources and examples from specific types of sources follow:

Signposts

Signposts on highways help drivers and passengers navigate places they are not familiar with and give us reminders and warnings about what to expect down the road (Amadeba, 2021). **Signposts** in speeches are statements that help audience members navigate the turns of your speech. There are several key signposts in your speech. In the order you will likely use them, they are preview statement, transition between introduction and body, transitions between main points, transition from body to conclusion, and review statement (see the table below for a review of the key signposts with examples). While the preview and review statements are in the introduction and conclusion, respectively, the other signposts are all transitions that help move between sections of your speech.

[table id=8 /]

There are also signposts that can be useful within sections of your speech. Words and phrases like *Aside from* and *While* are good ways to transition between thoughts within a main point or sub-point. Organizing signposts like *First*, *Second*, and *Third* can be used within a main point to help speaker and audience move through information (Amadeba, 2021). The preview in the introduction and review in the conclusion need not be the only such signposts in your speech. You can also include internal previews and internal reviews in your main points to help make the content more digestible or memorable.

In addition to well-written signposts, you want to have well-delivered signposts. **Nonverbal signposts** include pauses and changes in rate, pitch, or volume that help emphasize transitions within a speech. Here are some ways you can use nonverbal signposting: pause before and after your preview and review statements so they stand out, pause before and after your transitions between main points so they stand out, and slow your rate and lower your pitch on the closing line of your speech to provide closure.

Introduction

We all know that first impressions matter. Research shows that students' impressions of instructors on the first day of class persist throughout the semester (Laws, Apperson, Buchert, & Bregman, 2010). First impressions are quickly formed, sometimes spontaneous, and involve little to no cognitive effort. Despite the fact that first impressions are not formed with much conscious effort, they form the basis of inferences and judgments about a person's personality (Lass-Hennemann, Kuehl, Schulz, Oitzl, & Schachinger, 2011). For example, the student who approaches the front of the class before their speech wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt, looks around blankly, and lets out a sigh before starting has not made a very good first impression. Even if the student is prepared for the speech and delivers it well, the audience has likely already associated what they observed with personality traits of the student (i.e., lazy, indifferent), and those associations now have staying power in the face of contrary evidence that comes later.

Your introduction is only a fraction of your speech, but in that first minute or so, your audience decides whether they are interested in listening to the rest of the speech. You should accomplish four objectives in your introduction. They include getting your audience's attention, introducing your topic, establishing credibility and relevance, and previewing your main points.

Getting Your Audience's Attention

Several strategies can get the attention of your audience. Although each can be effective on its own, combining these strategies is also an option. A speaker can get their audience's attention negatively, so think carefully about your choice. The student who began his speech on Habitat for Humanity by banging on the table with a hammer definitely got his audience's attention during his 8:00 a.m. class, but he also lost credibility in that moment because many in the audience probably saw him as a joker rather than a serious speaker. The student who started her persuasive speech against animal testing with a little tap dance number ended up stumbling through the first half of her speech when she was thrown off by the confused looks the audience gave her when she finished her "attention getter." These cautionary tales point out the importance of choosing an attention getter that is appropriate, meaning that it's unusual enough to get people interested—but not over the top—and relevant to your speech topic.

Use Humor

In one of my favorite episodes of the television show *The Office*, titled "Dwight's Speech," the boss, Michael Scott, takes the stage at a regional sales meeting for a very nervous Dwight, who has been called up to accept an award. In typical Michael Scott style, he attempts to win the crowd over with humor and fails miserably.

Figure 8.10: Before using humor in your speech, reflect on if it is the right occasion.

In general, when a speech is supposed to be professional or formal, as many in-class speeches are, humor is more likely to be seen as incongruous with the occasion. However, there are other situations where a humorous opening might fit perfectly (Ginger Leadership Communications, 2019). For example, a farewell speech to a longtime colleague could start with an inside joke. When considering humor, it is good to get feedback on your idea from a trusted source.

Cite a Startling Fact or Statistic

As you research your topic, take note of any information that defies your expectations or surprises you. If you have a strong reaction to something you learn, your audience may, too. When using a startling fact or statistic as an attention getter, it is important to get the most bang for your buck. You can do this by sharing more than one fact or statistic that builds up the audience's interest (Ginger Leadership Communications, 2019).

When using numbers, it is also good to repeat and/or repackage the statistics so they stick in the audience's mind, which you can see in the following example: "In 1994, sixteen states reported that 15–19 percent of their population was considered obese. Every other state reported obesity rates less than that. In 2010, no states reported obesity rates in that same category of 15–19 percent, because every single state had at least a 20 percent obesity rate. In just six years, we went rom no states with an obesity rate higher than 19 percent, to fifty. Currently, the national obesity rate for adults is nearly 34 percent. This dramatic rise in obesity is charted on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website, and these rates are expected to continue to rise."

The speaker could have just started by stating that nearly 34 percent of the US adult population was obese in 2011. However, statistics are not meaningful without context. So sharing how that number rose dramatically over six years helps the audience members see the trend and understand what the current number means. The fourth sentence repackages and summarizes the statistics mentioned in the first three sentences, which again sets up an interesting and informative contrast. Last, the speaker provides a verbal citation for the source of the statistic.

Use a Quotation

Some quotations are attention getting and some are boring. Some quotations are relevant and moving and some are abstract and stale. If you choose to open your speech with a quotation, choose one that is attention getting, relevant, and moving.

Just because a quote seems relevant to you does not mean the audience will also notice that relevance, so it is best to make that explicit right after you use and cite the quote. Also, evaluate the credibility of the source on which you found the quote. Many websites that make quotations available care more about selling pop-up ads than the accuracy of their information. Students who do not double-check the accuracy of the quote may end up attributing the quote to the wrong person or citing a made-up quote.

Ask a Question

Starting a speech with a question is a common attention getter, but in reality many of the questions that I have heard start a speech are not very attention getting. It is important to note that just because you use one of these strategies that does not make it automatically appealing to an audience. A question can be mundane and boring just like a statistic, quotation, or story can (Ginger Leadership Communications, 2019).

A rhetorical question is different from a direct question. When a speaker asks a direct question, they actually want a response from their audience. A **rhetorical question** will elicit a mental response from the audience, not a verbal or nonverbal one. In short, a rhetorical question makes an audience think. Asking a direct question of your audience is warranted only if the speaker plans to do something with the information they get from the audience.

A safer bet is to ask a rhetorical question that elicits only a mental response. A good rhetorical question can get the audience primed to think about the content of the speech. When asked as a series of questions (and combined with startling statistics or facts), this strategy can create suspense and hook an audience.

Tell a Story

When you tell a story, whether in the introduction to your speech or not, you should aim to paint word pictures in the minds of your audience members (Ginger Leadership Communications, 2019). You might tell a story from your own life or recount a story you found in your research. You may also use a hypothetical story, which has the advantage of allowing you to use your creativity and help place your audience in unusual situations that neither you nor they have actually experienced. When using a hypothetical story, you should let your audience know it is not real, and you should present a story to which the audience can relate. Speakers often let the audience know a story is not real by starting with the word *imagine*.

Introducing the Topic

Introducing the topic of your speech is the most obvious objective of an introduction, but speakers sometimes forget to do this or do not do it clearly. As the author of your speech, you may think that what you are talking about is obvious. Sometimes a speech topic does not become obvious until the middle of a speech. By that time, however, it is easy to lose an audience that was not clearly told the topic of the speech in the introduction. Introducing the topic is done before the preview of main points and serves as an introduction to the overall topic. The following are two ways a speaker could introduce the topic of childhood obesity: "Childhood obesity is a serious problem facing our country," or "Today I'll persuade you that childhood obesity is a problem that can no longer be ignored."

Establishing Credibility and Relevance

The way you write and deliver your introduction makes an important first impression on your audience. However, you can also take a moment in your introduction to set up your credibility in relation to your speech topic. If you have training, expertise, or credentials (e.g., a degree, certificate, etc.) relevant to your topic, you can share that with your audience. It may also be appropriate to mention firsthand experience, previous classes you have taken, or even a personal interest related to your topic. For example, a student delivers a speech persuading the audience that the penalties for texting and driving should be stricter. In his introduction, he mentioned that his brother's girlfriend was killed when a car driven by someone who was texting hit her. His personal story shared in the introduction added credibility to the overall speech.

Previewing Your Main Points

The preview of main points is usually the last sentence of your introduction and serves as a map of what is to come in the speech (Davis, 2021). The preview narrows your introduction of the topic down to the main ideas you will focus on in the speech. Your preview should be one sentence, should include wording that is parallel to the key wording of your main points in the body of your speech, and should preview your main points in the same order you discuss them in your speech. Make sure your wording is concise so your audience does not think there will be four points when there are only three. The following example previews the main points for a speech on childhood obesity: "Today I'll convey the seriousness of the obesity epidemic among children by reviewing some of the causes of obesity, common health problems associated with it, and steps we can take to help ensure our children maintain a healthy weight."

Conclusion

How you conclude a speech leaves an impression on your audience (Barnard, 2017). There are three important objectives to accomplish in your conclusion. They include summarizing the importance of your topic, reviewing your main points, and closing your speech.

Summarizing the Importance of Your Topic

After you transition from the body of your speech to the conclusion, you will summarize the importance of your topic (Abhishek, 2020). This is the "take-away" message, or another place where you can answer the "so what?" question. This can often be a rewording of your thesis statement. You could summarize the speech about childhood obesity by saying, "Whether you have children or not, childhood obesity is a national problem that needs to be addressed."

Reviewing Your Main Points

Once you have summarized the overall importance of your speech, you review the main points (Abhishek, 2020). The review statement in the conclusion is very similar to the preview statement in your introduction. You do not have to use the exact same wording, but you still want to have recognizable parallelism that connects the key idea of each main point to the preview, review, and transitions. The review statement for the childhood obesity speech could be "In an effort to convince you of this, I cited statistics showing the rise of obesity, explained common health problems associated with obesity, and proposed steps that parents should take to ensure their children maintain a healthy weight."

Closing Your Speech

Like the attention getter, your closing statement is an opportunity for you to exercise your creativity as a speaker (Abhishek, 2020). Many students have difficulty wrapping up the speech with a sense of closure and completeness. In terms of closure, a well-written and well-delivered closing line signals to your audience that your speech is over, which cues their applause. You should not have to put an artificial end to your speech by saying "thank you", that is it, or that is all I have In terms of completeness, the closing line should relate to the overall speech and should provide some "take-away" message that may leave an audience thinking or propel them to action. A sample closing line could be "For your health, for our children's health, and for our country's health, we must take steps to address childhood obesity today." You can also create what I call the "ribbon and bow" for your speech by referring back to the introduction in the closing of your speech. For example, you may finish an illustration or answer a rhetorical question you started in the introduction.

Although the conclusion is likely the shortest part of the speech, students should practice it often. Even a well-written conclusion can be ineffective if the delivery is not good. Conclusions often turn out bad because they are not practiced enough. If you only practice your speech starting from the beginning, you may not get to your conclusion very often because you stop to fix something in one of the main points, get interrupted, or run out of time. Once you have started your speech, anxiety may increase as you near the end and your brain becomes filled with thoughts of returning to your seat, so even a well-practiced conclusion can fall short. Practicing your conclusion by itself several times can help prevent this.

Outlining

Think of your outline as a living document that grows and takes form throughout your speech-making process. When you first draft your general purpose, specific purpose, and thesis statement, you could create a new document on your computer and plug those in, essentially starting your outline. As you review your research and distill the information down into separate central ideas that support your specific purpose and thesis, type those statements into the document. After choosing your organizational pattern and are ready to incorporate supporting material, you can quote and paraphrase your supporting material along with the bibliographic information needed for your verbal citations into the document. By this point, you have a good working outline, and you can easily cut and paste information to move it around and see how it fits into the main points, sub-points, and sub-sub-points (James Madison University Communication Center, n. d.). As your outline continues to take shape, you will want to follow established principles of outlining to ensure a quality speech.

The Formal Outline

The **formal outline** is a full-sentence outline that helps you prepare for your speech. It includes the introduction and conclusion, the main content of the body, key supporting materials, citation information written into the sentences in the outline, and a references page for your speech (Dlugan, 2008). The formal outline also includes a title, the general purpose, specific purpose, and thesis statement. It is important to note that an outline is different from a script. While a script contains everything that will be said, an outline includes the main content. Therefore, you should not include every word you are going to say on your outline. This allows you more freedom as a speaker to adapt to your audience during your speech. Students sometimes complain about having to outline speeches or papers, but it is a skill that will help in other contexts. Being able to break a topic down into logical divisions and then connect the information together will help ensure that you can prepare for complicated tasks or that you are prepared for meetings or interviews.

Principles of Outlining

There are principles of outlining you can follow to make your outlining process more efficient and effective. Four principles of outlining are consistency, unity, coherence, and emphasis (DuBois, 1929). In terms of consistency, you should follow standard outlining format. In standard outlining format, you indicate main points by capital roman numerals, sub-points by capital letters, and sub-sub-points by Arabic numerals. You indicate further divisions by either lowercase letters or lowercase roman numerals.

The principle of unity means that each letter or number represents one idea. One concrete way to help reduce the amount of ideas you include per item is to limit each letter or number to one complete sentence. If you find that one sub-point has more than one idea, you can divide it into two sub-points. Limiting each component of your outline to one idea makes it easier to plug in supporting material and helps ensure that your speech is coherent.

Following the principle of unity should help your outline adhere to the principle of coherence, which states that there should be a logical and natural flow of ideas, with main points, sub-points, and sub-sub-points connecting to each other (Winans, 1917). Shorter phrases and keywords can make up the speaking outline, but you should write complete sentences throughout your formal outline to ensure coherence.

The principle of coherence can also be met by making sure that when dividing a main point or sub-point, you include at least two subdivisions. After all, it defies logic that you could divide anything into just one part. Therefore, if you have an *A*, you must have a *B*, and if you have a *1*, you must have a *2*. If you can easily think of one sub-point but are having difficulty identifying another one, that sub-point may not be robust enough to stand on its own.

The principle of emphasis states that the material included in your outline should be engaging and balanced. As you place supporting material into your outline, choose the information that will have the most impact on your audience. Choose information that is proxemic and relevant, meaning that it can be easily related to the audience's lives because it matches their interests or ties into current events or the local area.

Remember primacy and recency discussed earlier and place the most engaging information first or last in a main point depending on what kind of effect you want to have (Morrison, Conway, & Chein, 2014). Also, make sure your information is balanced. The outline serves as a useful visual representation of the proportions of your speech. You can tell by the amount of space a main point, sub-point, or sub-sub-point takes up in relation to other points of the same level whether your speech is balanced. If one sub-point is a half a page, but a main point is only a quarter of a page, then you may want to consider making the sub-point a main point. Each part of your speech does not have to be equal. The first or last point may be more substantial than a middle point if you are following primacy or recency, but overall the speech should be relatively balanced.

The Speaking Outline

The formal outline is a full-sentence outline that helps as you prepare for your speech, and the **speaking outline** is a keyword and phrase outline that helps you deliver your speech. While the formal outline is important to ensure that your content is coherent and your ideas are balanced and expressed clearly, the speaking outline helps you get that information out to the audience. Make sure you budget time in your speech preparation to work on the speaking outline. Skimping on the speaking outline will show in your delivery.

You may convert your formal outline into a speaking outline using a computer program. You may also choose, or be asked to, create a speaking outline on note cards. Note cards are a good option when you want to have more freedom to gesture or know you will not have a lectern on which to place notes printed on full sheets of paper. In either case, this entails converting the full-sentence outline to a keyword or key-phrase outline. Speakers will need to find a balance between having too much or too little content on their speaking outlines. You want to have enough information to prevent fluency hiccups as you stop to retrieve information, but you do not want to have so much information that you read your speech, which lessens your eye contact and engagement with the audience.

Budgeting sufficient time to work on your speaking outline will allow you to practice your speech with different amounts of notes to find what works best for you. Since the introduction and conclusion are so important, it may be useful to include notes to ensure that you remember to accomplish all the objectives of each.

Aside from including important content on your speaking outline, you may want to include speaking cues. Speaking cues are reminders designed to help your delivery. You may write "(PAUSE)" before and after your preview statement to help you remember that important nonverbal signpost. You might also write "(MAKE EYE CONTACT)" as a reminder not to read unnecessarily from your cards. Overall, my advice is to make your speaking outline work for you. It is your last line of defense when you are in front of an audience, so you want it to help you, not hurt you.

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9.

DELIVERING A SPEECH

Introduction

Think of a speech or presentation you have seen that was delivered poorly. How did that affect your view of the speaker and his or her topic? Is a poorly delivered speech more bearable if the information is solid and organized? In most cases, bad delivery distracts us so much from a message that we do not even evaluate or absorb the information. In short, a well-researched and well-prepared speech is not much without effective delivery. This chapter covers important information about managing public speaking anxiety, choosing the appropriate delivery method, practicing your speech, and employing effective vocal and physical delivery to enhance speaker credibility.

9.1 Managing Public Speaking Anxiety

If you feel fear, anxiety, or discomfort when confronted with the task of speaking in front of an audience, you are not alone. National polls consistently show that public speaking is among Americans' top fears (Bodie, 2010). Yet, since we all have to engage in some form of public speaking, this is a fear that many people must face regularly. Effectively managing speaking anxiety has many positive effects on your speech. One major area that can improve with less anxiety is delivery. Although speaking anxiety is natural and normal, it can interfere with verbal and nonverbal delivery, which makes a speech less effective. In this chapter, we will explore causes of speaking anxiety, ways to address it, and best practices of vocal and physical delivery.

Sources of Speaking Anxiety

Aside from the self-reported data in national surveys that rank the fear of public speaking high for Americans, decades of research conducted by communication scholars shows that communication apprehension is common among college students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). **Communication apprehension (CA)** is fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to real or perceived communication with another person or persons. CA is a more general term that includes multiple forms of communication, not just public speaking. Seventy percent of college students experience some CA, which means that addressing communication anxiety in a class like the one you are taking now stands to benefit the majority of students (Priem & Solomon, 2009). Think about the jitters you get before a first date, a job interview, or the first day of school. The novelty or uncertainty of some situations is a common trigger for communication anxiety, and public speaking is a situation that is novel and uncertain for many.

Public speaking anxiety is a type of CA that produces physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions in people when faced with a real or imagined presentation (Bodie, 2010). Physiological responses to public speaking anxiety include increased heart rate, flushing of the skin or face, and sweaty palms, among other things. These reactions are the result of natural chemical processes in the human body. The fight or flight instinct helped early humans survive threatening situations. When faced with a ferocious saber-toothed tiger, for example, the body released adrenaline, cortisol, and other hormones that increased heart rate and blood pressure to get more energy to the brain, organs, and muscles in order to respond to the threat. We can be thankful for this evolutionary advantage, but our physiology has not caught up with our new ways of life. Our body does not distinguish between the causes of stressful situations, so facing down an audience releases the same hormones as facing down a wild beast.

Cognitive reactions to public speaking anxiety often include intrusive thoughts that can increase anxiety: "People are judging me," "I'm not going to do well," and "I'm going to forget what to say." These thoughts are reactions to the physiological changes in the body but also bring in the social/public aspect of public speaking in which speakers fear being negatively judged or evaluated because of their anxiety. The physiological and cognitive responses to anxiety lead to behavioral changes. All these thoughts may lead someone to stop their speech and return to their seat or leave the classroom. Anticipating these reactions can also lead to avoidance behavior where people intentionally avoid situations where they will have to speak in public.

Addressing Public Speaking Anxiety

While we cannot stop the innate physiological reactions related to anxiety from occurring, we do have some control over how we cognitively process them and the behaviors that result. Research on public speaking anxiety has focused on three key ways to address this common issue: systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring, and skills training (Bodie,2010).

Figure 9.1: Systematic desensitization can include giving more public speeches, taking communication courses, or imagining public speaking scenarios.

Although **systematic desensitization** may sound like something done to you while strapped down in the basement of a scary hospital, it actually refers to the fact that we become less anxious about something when we are exposed to it more often (Bodie, 2010). As was mentioned earlier, the novelty and uncertainty of public speaking is a source for many people's anxiety. So becoming more familiar with public speaking by speaking more often can logically reduce the novelty and uncertainty of it.

Systematic desensitization can result from imagined or real exposure to anxiety-inducing scenarios. In some cases, an instructor leads a person through a series of relaxation techniques. Once relaxed, the person is asked to imagine a series of scenarios including speech preparation and speech delivery. This is something you could also try to do on your own before giving a speech. Imagine yourself going through the process of preparing and practicing a speech, then delivering the speech, then returning to your seat, which concludes the scenario. Aside from this imagined exposure to speaking situations, taking a communication course like this one is a great way to engage directly in systematic desensitization. Almost all students report that they have less speaking anxiety at the end of a semester than when they started, which is at least partially due to the fact they engaged with speaking more than they would have done if they were not taking the class.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring entails changing the way we think about something. A first step in restructuring how we deal with public speaking anxiety is to cognitively process through our fears to realize that many of the thoughts associated with public speaking anxiety are irrational (Allen, Hunter & Donohue, 2009). For example, people report a fear of public speaking over a fear of snakes, heights, financial ruin, or even death. It's irrational to think that the consequences of giving a speech in public are more dire than getting bit by a rattlesnake, falling off a building, or dying. People also fear being embarrassed because they mess up. Well, you cannot literally die from embarrassment, and in reality, audiences are very forgiving and overlook or do not even notice many errors that we, as speakers, may dwell on. Once we realize that the potential negative consequences of giving a speech are not as dire as we think they are, we can move on to other cognitive restructuring strategies.

Communication-orientation modification therapy (COM therapy) is a type of cognitive restructuring that encourages people to think of public speaking as a conversation rather than a performance (Motley, 2009). Many people have a performance-based view of public speaking. This can easily be seen in the language that some students use to discuss public speaking. They say that they "rehearse" their speech, deal with "stage fright," then "perform" their speech on a "stage." There is no stage at the front of the classroom; it is a normal floor. To get away from a performance orientation, we can reword the previous statements to say that they "practice" their speech, deal with "public speaking anxiety," then "deliver" their speech from the front of the room. Viewing public speaking as a conversation also helps with confidence. After all, you obviously have some conversation skills, or you would not have made it to college. We engage in conversations every day. We do not have to write everything we are going to say out on a note card, we do not usually get nervous or anxious in regular conversations, and we are usually successful when we try. Even though we do not engage in public speaking as much, we speak to others in public all the time. Thinking of public speaking as a type of conversation helps you realize that you already have accumulated experiences and skills that you can draw from, so you are not starting from scratch.

Last, **positive visualization** is another way to engage in cognitive restructuring. Speaking anxiety often leads people to view public speaking negatively. They are more likely to judge a speech they gave negatively, even if it was good. They are also likely to set up negative self-fulfilling prophecies that will hinder their performance in future speeches. To use positive visualization, it is best to engage first in some relaxation exercises such as deep breathing or stretching, and then play through vivid images in your mind of giving a successful speech. Do this a few times before giving the actual speech. Students sometimes question the power of positive visualization, thinking that it sounds corny. Ask an Olympic diver what his or her coach says to do before jumping off the diving board and the answer will probably be "Coach says to image completing a perfect 10 dive." Likewise a Marine sharpshooter would likely say his commanding officer says to imagine hitting the target before pulling the trigger. In both instances, positive visualization is being used in high-stakes situations. If it is good enough for Olympic athletes and snipers, it is good enough for public speakers.

Skills training is a strategy for managing public speaking anxiety that focuses on learning skills that will improve specific speaking behaviors. These skills may relate to any part of the speech-making process, including topic selection, research and organization, delivery, and self-evaluation. Skills training, like systematic desensitization, makes the public speaking process more familiar for a speaker, which lessens uncertainty. In addition, targeting specific areas and then improving on them builds more confidence, which can in turn lead to more improvement. Feedback is important to initiate and maintain this positive cycle of improvement. You can use the constructive criticism that you get from your instructor and peers in this class to target specific areas of improvement.

Self-evaluation is also an important part of skills training. Make sure to evaluate yourself within the context of your assignment or job and the expectations for the speech. Do not get sidetracked by a small delivery error if the expectations for content far outweigh the expectations for delivery. Combine your self-evaluation with the feedback from your instructor, boss, and/or peers to set specific and measurable goals and then assess whether or not you meet them in subsequent speeches. Once you achieve a goal, mark it off your list and use it as a confidence booster. If you do not achieve a goal, figure out why and adjust your strategies to try to meet it in the future.

Physical Relaxation Exercises

Suggestions for managing speaking anxiety typically address its cognitive and behavioral components, while the physical components are left unattended. While we cannot block these natural and instinctual responses, we can engage in **physical relaxation exercises** to counteract the general physical signs of anxiety caused by cortisol and adrenaline release, which include increased heart rate, trembling, flushing, high blood pressure, and speech disfluency.

Some breathing and stretching exercises release endorphins, which are your body's natural antidote to stress hormones. Deep breathing is a proven way to release endorphins. It also provides a general sense of relaxation and can be done discretely, even while waiting to speak. In order to get the benefits of deep breathing, you must breathe into your diaphragm. The diaphragm is the muscle below your lungs that helps you breathe and stand up straight, which makes it a good muscle for a speaker to exercise. To start, breathe in slowly through your nose, filling the bottom parts of your lungs up with air. While doing this, your belly should pooch out. Hold the breath for three to five full seconds and then let it out slowly through your mouth. After doing this only a few times, many students report that they can actually feel a flooding of endorphins, which creates a brief "light-headed" feeling. Once you practice and are comfortable with the technique, you can do this before you start your speech, and no one sitting around you will even notice. You might also want to try this technique during other stressful situations. Deep breathing before dealing with an angry customer or loved one, or before taking a test, can help you relax and focus.

Stretching is another way to release endorphins. Very old exercise traditions like yoga, tai chi, and Pilates teach the idea that stretching is a key component of having a healthy mind and spirit. Exercise in general is a good stress reliever, but many of us do not have the time or willpower to do it. However, we can take time to do some stretching. Obviously, it would be distracting for the surrounding audience if a speaker broke into some planking or Pilates just before his or her speech. Simple and discrete stretches can help get the body's energy moving around, which can make a speaker feel more balanced and relaxed. Our blood and our energy/ stress have a tendency to pool in our legs, especially when we are sitting.

Vocal Warm-Up Exercises

Figure 9.2: Vocal warm-up exercises.

Vocal warm-up exercises are a good way to warm up your face and mouth muscles, which can help prevent some of the fluency issues that occur when speaking. Newscasters, singers, and other professional speakers use vocal warm-ups. I lead my students in vocal exercises before speeches, which also helps lighten the mood. We all stand in a circle and look at each other while we go through our warm-up list. For the first warm-up, we all make a motorboat sound, which makes everybody laugh. The full list of warm-ups follows and contains specific words and exercises designed to warm up different muscles and different aspects of your voice. After going through just a few, you should be able to feel the blood circulating in your face muscles more. It is a surprisingly good workout!

Top Ten Ways to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

Many factors contribute to speaking anxiety. There are also many ways to address it. The following is a list of the top ten ways to reduce speaking anxiety that I developed with my colleagues, which helps review what we have learned.

1. Remember, you are not alone. Public speaking anxiety is common, so do not ignore it—confront it.
2. Remember, you cannot literally "die of embarrassment." Audiences are forgiving and understanding.
3. Remember, it always feels worse than it looks.
4. Take deep breaths. It releases endorphins, which naturally fight the adrenaline that causes anxiety.
5. Look the part. Dress professionally to enhance confidence.
6. Channel your nervousness into positive energy and motivation.
7. Start your outline and research early. Better information = higher confidence.
8. Practice and get feedback from a trusted source. (Do not just practice for your cat.)
9. Visualize success through positive thinking.
10. Prepare, prepare, prepare! Practice is a speaker's best friend.

9.2 Delivery Methods and Practice Sessions

There are many decisions to make during the speech-making process. Making informed decisions about delivery can help boost your confidence and manage speaking anxiety. In this section, we will learn about the strengths and weaknesses of various delivery methods. We will also learn how to make the most of your practice sessions.

Delivery Methods

Different speaking occasions call for different delivery methods. While it may be acceptable to speak from memory in some situations, lengthy notes may be required in others. The four most common delivery methods are impromptu, manuscript, memorized, and extemporaneous.

Impromptu Delivery

When using **impromptu delivery**, a speaker has little to no time to prepare for a speech (LibreTexts, 2021). This means there is little time for research, audience analysis, organizing, and practice. For this reason, impromptu speaking often evokes higher degrees of speaking anxiety than other delivery types. Although impromptu speaking arouses anxiety, it is also a good way to build public speaking skills. Using some of the exercises for managing speaking anxiety discussed earlier in this chapter can help a speaker manage the challenges of impromptu speaking (LibreTexts, 2021). Only skilled public speakers with much experience are usually able to "pull off" an impromptu delivery without looking unprepared. Otherwise, a speaker who is very familiar with the subject matter can sometimes be a competent impromptu speaker, because their expertise can compensate for the lack of research and organizing time.

When Mark Twain famously said, "It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech," he was jokingly pointing out the difficulties of giving a good impromptu speech, essentially saying that there is no such thing as a good impromptu speech, as good speeches take time to prepare. We do not always have the luxury of preparation, though. So when speaking impromptu, be brief, stick to what you know, and avoid rambling. Quickly organize your thoughts into an introduction, body, and conclusion. Try to determine three key ideas that will serve as the basis of your main points.

When would impromptu speaking be used? Since we have already started thinking of the similarities between public speaking and conversations, we can clearly see that most of our day-to-day interactions involve impromptu speaking. When your roommate asks you what your plans for the weekend are, you do not pull a few note cards out of your back pocket to prompt your response. This type of conversational impromptu speaking is not anxiety inducing because we are talking about our lives, experiences, or something with which we are familiar. This is also usually the case when we are asked to speak publicly with little to no advance warning.

For example, if you are at a meeting for work and you are representing the public relations department, a colleague may ask you to say a few words about a recent news story involving a public relations misstep of a competing company. In this case, you are being asked to speak on the spot because of your expertise. A competent communicator should anticipate instances like this when they might be asked to speak. Of course, being caught completely off guard or being asked to comment on something unfamiliar to you creates more anxiety. In such cases, do not pretend to know something you do not, as that may come back to hurt you later. You can usually mention that you do not have the necessary background information at that time but will follow up later with your comments.

Manuscript Delivery

Speaking from a written or printed document that contains the entirety of a speech is known as **manuscript delivery**. Manuscript delivery can be the best choice when a speech has complicated information and/or the contents of the speech are going to be quoted or published (LibreTexts, 2021). Despite the fact that most novice speakers are not going to find themselves in that situation, many are drawn to this delivery method because of the security they feel with having everything they are going to say in front of them. Unfortunately, the security of having every word you want to say at your disposal translates to a poorly delivered and unengaging speech (LibreTexts, 2021). Even with every word written out, speakers can still have fluency hiccups and verbal fillers as they lose their place in the manuscript or trip over their words. The alternative, of course, is that a speaker reads the manuscript the whole time, effectively cutting himself or herself off from the audience. One way to make a manuscript delivery more engaging is to use a teleprompter. Almost all politicians who give televised addresses use them.

To make the delivery seem more natural, print the speech out in a larger-than-typical font, triple-space between lines so you can easily find your place, use heavier-than-normal paper so it is easy to pick up and turn the pages as needed, and use a portfolio so you can carry the manuscript securely.

Memorized Delivery

Completely memorizing a speech and delivering it without notes is known as **memorized delivery** (LibreTexts, 2021). Some students attempt to memorize their speech because they think it will make them feel more confident if they do not have to look at their notes; however, when their anxiety level spikes at the beginning of their speech and their mind goes blank for a minute, many admit they should have chosen a different delivery method. When using any of the other delivery methods, speakers still need to rely on their memory. An impromptu speaker must recall facts or experiences related to their topic, and speakers using a manuscript want to have some of their content memorized so they do not read their entire speech to their audience. The problem with memorized delivery overall is that it puts too much responsibility on our memory, which we all know from experience is fallible (LibreTexts, 2021).

Even with much practice, our memories can fail. If you do opt to use memorized delivery, make sure you have several "entry points" determined, so you can pick up at spots other than the very beginning of a speech if you lose your place and have to start again. Memorized delivery is very useful for speakers who are going to be moving around during a speech when carrying notes would be burdensome. I only recommend memorized delivery in cases where the speech is short (only one to two minutes), the speech is personal (like a brief toast), or the speech will be repeated numerous times (like a tour guide's story), and even in these cases, it may be perfectly fine to have notes. Many students think that their anxiety and/or delivery challenges will vanish if they just memorize their speech only to find that they are more anxious and have more problems.

Extemporaneous Delivery

Extemporaneous delivery entails memorizing the overall structure and main points of a speech and then speaking from keyword/key-phrase notes (LibreTexts, 2021). This delivery mode brings together many of the strengths of the previous three methods. Since you only internalize and memorize the main structure of a speech, you do not have to worry as much about the content and delivery seeming stale. Extemporaneous delivery brings in some of the spontaneity of impromptu delivery but still allows a speaker to carefully plan the overall structure of a speech and incorporate supporting materials that include key facts, quotations, and paraphrased information (LibreTexts, 2021). You can also more freely adapt your speech to fit various audiences and occasions, since not every word and sentence is predetermined. This can be especially beneficial when you deliver a speech multiple times.

When preparing a speech that you will deliver extemporaneously, you will want to start practicing your speech early and then continue to practice as you revise your content. Investing quality time and effort into the speech-outlining process helps with extemporaneous delivery. As you put together your outline, you are already doing the work of internalizing the key structure of your speech. Read parts of your outline aloud as you draft them to help ensure they are written in a way that makes sense and is easy for you to deliver.

By the time you complete the formal, full-sentence outline, you should have already internalized much of the key information in your speech. Now, you can begin practicing with the full outline. As you become more comfortable with the content of your full outline, start to convert it into your speaking outline. Take out information that you know well and replace it with a keyword or key phrase that prompts your memory. You will probably want to leave key quotes, facts, and other paraphrased information, including your verbal source citation information, on your delivery outline so you make sure to include it in your speech. Once you've converted your full outline into your speaking outline, practice it a few more times, making sure to take some time between each practice session so you don't inadvertently start to memorize the speech word for word. The final product should be a confident delivery of a well-organized and structured speech that is conversational and adaptable to various audiences and occasions.

Practicing Your Speech

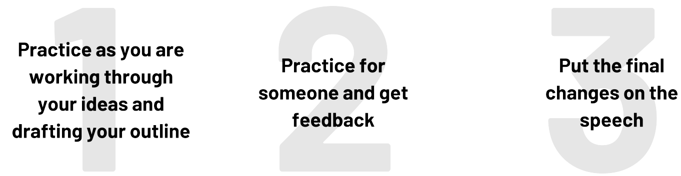

Figure 9.3: Primary phases to the practice process.

Practicing a speech is essential, and practice sessions can be more or less useful depending on how you approach them (Dlugan, 2008). There are three primary phases to the practice process. In the first phase, you practice as you are working through your ideas and drafting your outline. In the second, you practice for someone and get feedback (Dlugan, 2008). In the third, you put the final changes on the speech.

Start practicing your speech early, as you are working through your ideas, by reading sections aloud as you draft them into your working outline. This will help ensure your speech is fluent and sounds good for the audience. Start to envision the audience while you practice and continue to think about them throughout the practicing process. This will help minimize anxiety when you actually have them sitting in front of you. Once you have completed your research and finished a draft of your outline, you will have already practiced your speech several times, as you were putting it together. Now, you can get feedback on the speech as a whole.

You begin to solicit feedback from a trusted source in the second phase of practicing your speech (Dlugan, 2008). This is the most important phase of practicing, and the one that most speakers do not complete. Beginning speakers may be nervous to practice in front of someone. That is normal. However, review the strategies for managing anxiety discussed earlier in this chapter and try to face that anxiety. After all, you will have to face a full audience when you deliver the speech, so getting used to speaking in front of someone can only help you at this point. Choose someone who will give you constructive feedback on your speech. Before you practice for them, explain the assignment or purpose of the speech. When practicing for a classroom speech, you may even want to give the person the assignment guidelines or a feedback sheet that has some key things for them to look for. Ask them for feedback on content and delivery. Almost anyone is good at evaluating delivery, but it is more difficult to evaluate content. In addition, in most cases, the content of your speech will be account for more of your grade. Also, begin to time your speech at this point, so you can determine if it meets any time limits that you have.

In addition to practicing for a trusted source for feedback, you may want to audio or video record your speech (Dlugan, 2008). This can be useful because it provides an objective record that you can then compare with the feedback you got from your friend and to your own evaluation of your speech. The most important part of this phase is incorporating the feedback you receive into your speech. If you practice for someone, get feedback, and then do not do anything with the feedback, then you have wasted your time and theirs. Use the feedback to assess whether or not you met your speaking goals. Was your thesis supported? Was your specific purpose met? Did your speech conform to any time limits that were set? Based on your answers to these questions, you may need to make some changes to your content or delivery, so do not put this part of practicing off to the last minute. Once the content has been revised as needed, draft your speaking outline and move on to the next phase of practice.

During the third and final phase of practice, you are putting the final changes on your speech. You should be familiar with the content based on your early practice sessions. You have also gotten feedback and incorporated that feedback into the speech. Your practice sessions at this point should pre-create, as much as possible, the conditions in which you will be giving your speech. You should have your speaking outline completed so you can practice with it. It is important to be familiar with the content on your note cards or speaking outline so you will not need to rely on it so much during the actual delivery. You may also want to practice in the type of clothing you will be wearing on speech day. This can be useful if you are wearing something you do not typically wear—a suit for example—so you can see how it might affect your posture, gestures, and overall comfort level.

If possible, at least one practice session in the place you will be giving the speech can be very helpful; especially if it is a room you are not familiar with. Make sure you are practicing with any visual aids or technology you will use so you can be familiar with it and it does not affect your speech fluency. (Dlugan, 2008).Continue to time each practice round. If you are too short or too long, you will need to go back and adjust your content some more. Always adjust your content to fit the time limit; do not try to adjust your delivery. Trying to speed talk or stretch things out to make a speech faster or longer is a mistake that will ultimately hurt your delivery, which will hurt your credibility. The overall purpose of this phase of practicing is to minimize surprises that might throw you off on speech day.

Vocal Delivery

Vocal delivery includes components of speech delivery that relate to your voice. These include rate, volume, pitch, articulation, pronunciation, and fluency. Our voice is important to consider when delivering our speech for two main reasons. First, vocal delivery can help us engage and interest the audience. Second, vocal delivery helps ensure we communicate our ideas clearly.

Speaking for Engagement

We have all had the displeasure of listening to an unengaging speaker. Even though the person may care about his or her topic, an unengaging delivery that does not communicate enthusiasm will translate into a lack of interest for most audience members (Davis, 2021). Although a speaker can be visually engaging by incorporating movement and gestures, a flat or monotone vocal delivery can be sedating or even annoying. Incorporating vocal variety in terms of rate, volume, and pitch is key to being a successful speaker.

Rate

Rate of speaking refers to how fast or slow you speak (Barnard, 2018). If you speak too fast, your audience will not be able to absorb the information you present. If you speak too slowly, the audience may lose interest. The key is to vary your rate of speaking in a middle range, staying away from either extreme, in order to keep your audience engaged. In general, a higher rate of speaking signals that a speaker is enthusiastic about his or her topic. Speaking slowly may lead the audience to infer that the speaker is uninterested, uninformed, or unprepared to present his or her own topic. These negative assumptions, whether they are true or not, are likely to hurt the credibility of the speaker (Barnard, 2018). The goal is to speak at a rate that will interest the audience and will effectively convey your information. Speaking at a slow rate throughout a speech would likely bore an audience, but that is not a common occurrence.

Volume

Volume refers to how loud or soft your voice is. As with speaking rate, you want to avoid the extremes of being too loud or too soft, but still vary your volume within an acceptable middle range (Packard, 2020). When speaking in a typically sized classroom or office setting that seats about twenty-five people, using a volume a few steps above a typical conversational volume is usually sufficient. When speaking in larger rooms, you will need to project your voice. You may want to look for nonverbal cues from people in the back rows or corners, like leaning forward or straining to hear, to see if you need to adjust your volume more. Obviously, in some settings, a microphone will be necessary so the entire audience can hear you. Like rate, audiences use volume to make a variety of judgments about a speaker. Sometimes, softer speakers are judged as meek (Packard, 2020). This may lead to lowered expectations for the speech or less perceived credibility. Loud speakers may be seen as overbearing or annoying, which can lead audience members to disengage from the speaker and message. Be aware of the volume of your voice and, when in doubt, increase your volume a notch, since beginning speakers are more likely to have an issue of speaking too softly rather than too loudly.

Pitch

Pitch refers to how high or low a speaker's voice is. As with other vocal qualities, there are natural variations among people's vocal pitch. Unlike rate and volume, we have less control over pitch. For example, males generally have lower pitched voices than females. Despite these limitations, each person still has the capability to change their pitch across a range large enough to engage an audience. Changing pitch is a good way to communicate enthusiasm and indicate emphasis or closure (Scotti, 2015). In general, our pitch goes up when we are discussing something exciting. Our pitch goes down slightly when we emphasize a serious or important point. Lowering pitch is also an effective way to signal transitions between sections of your speech or the end of your speech, which cues your audience to applaud and avoids an awkward ending.

Of the vocal components of delivery discussed so far, pitch seems to give beginning speakers the most difficulty. It is as if giving a speech temporarily numbs their ability to vary their pitch. Record yourself practicing your speech to help determine if the amount of pitch variety and enthusiasm you think you convey while speaking actually comes through. Speakers often assume that their pitch is more varied and their delivery more enthusiastic than the audience actually perceives it to be (Scotti, 2015). Many students note this on the self-evaluations they write after viewing their recorded speech.

Vocal Variety

Overall, the lesson to take away from this section on vocal delivery is that variety is key. **Vocal variety** includes changes in your rate, volume, and pitch that can make you look more prepared, seem more credible, and be able to engage your audience better (Moore, 2015). Employing vocal variety is not something that takes natural ability or advanced skills training. It is something that beginning speakers can start working on immediately and everyone can accomplish. The key is to become aware of how you use your voice when you speak, and the best way to do this is to record yourself (Moore, 2015). We all use vocal variety naturally without thinking about it during our regular conversations, and many of us think that this tendency will translate over to our speaking voices. This is definitely not the case for most beginning speakers. Unlike in your regular conversations, it will take some awareness and practice to use vocal variety in speeches. I encourage students to make this a delivery priority early on. Since it is something anyone can do, improving in this area will add to your speaking confidence, which usually translates into better speeches and better grades further on.

Speaking for Clarity

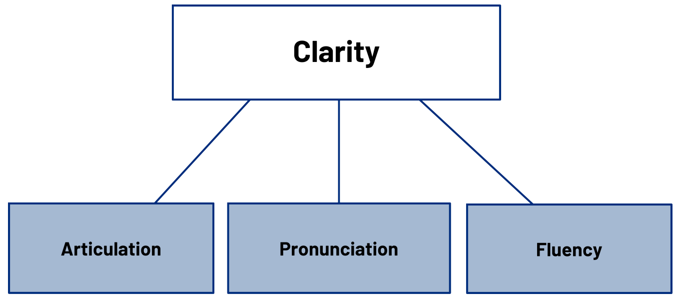

Figure 9.4: Three facets of speaking for clarity.

In order to be an effective speaker, your audience should be able to understand your message and digest the information you present (Rampton, 2021). Audience members will make assumptions about our competence and credibility based on how we speak. As with other aspects of speech delivery, many people are not aware that they have habits of speech that interfere with their message clarity. Since most of our conversations are informal and take place with people we know, many people do not make a concerted effort to articulate every word clearly and pronounce every word correctly (Rampton, 2021). Most of the people we talk to either do not notice our errors or do not correct us if they do notice. Since public speaking is generally more formal than our conversations, we should be more concerned with the clarity of our speech.

Articulation

Articulation refers to the clarity of sounds and words we produce. If someone is articulate, they speak words clearly, and speakers should strive to speak clearly. Poor articulation results when speakers do not speak clearly (Ward, 2020). For example, a person may say *dinnt* instead of *didn't*, *gonna* instead of *going to*, *wanna* instead of *want to*, or *hunnerd* instead of *hundred*. Unawareness and laziness are two common challenges to articulation. As with other aspects of our voice, many people are unaware that they regularly have errors in articulation. Recording yourself speak and then becoming a higher self-monitor are effective ways to improve your articulation. Laziness, on the other hand, requires a little more motivation to address. Some people just get in the habit of not articulating their words well. Both mumbling and slurring are examples of poor articulation. In informal settings, this type of speaking may be acceptable, but in formal settings, it will be evaluated negatively. It will hurt a speaker's credibility. Perhaps the promise of being judged more favorably is enough to motivate a mumbler to speak more clearly.

When combined with a low volume, poor articulation becomes an even greater problem. Doing vocal warm-ups like the ones listed in Section 10.1 "Managing Public Speaking Anxiety" or tongue twisters can help prime your mouth, lips, and tongue to articulate words more clearly. When you notice that you have trouble articulating a particular word, you can either choose a different word to include in your speech or you can repeat it a few times in a row in the days leading up to your speech to get used to saying it.

Pronunciation

Unlike articulation, which focuses on the clarity of words, **pronunciation** refers to speaking words correctly, including the proper sounds of the letters and the proper emphasis (Shtern, 2017). Mispronouncing words can damage a speaker's credibility, especially when the correct pronunciation of a word is commonly known. We all commonly run into words that we are unfamiliar with and therefore may not know how to pronounce. Here are three suggestions when faced with this problem. First, look the word up in an online dictionary. Many dictionaries have a speaker icon with their definitions, and when you click on it, you can hear the correct pronunciation of a word. Some words have more than one pronunciation—for example, *Caribbean*—so choosing either of the accepted pronunciations is fine. Just remember to use consistently that pronunciation to avoid confusing your audience. If a word does not include an audio pronunciation, you can usually find the phonetic spelling of a word, which is the word spelled out the way it sounds.

Second, there will occasionally be words that you cannot locate in a dictionary. These are typically proper nouns or foreign words. In this case, use the "phone-a-friend" strategy. Call up the people you know who have large vocabularies or are generally smart when it comes to words, and ask them if they know how to pronounce it. If they do, and you find them credible, you are probably safe to take their suggestion.

Third, "fake it 'til you make it" should only be used as a last resort. If you cannot find the word in a dictionary and your smart friends do not know how to pronounce it, it is likely that your audience will also be unfamiliar with the word. In that case, using your knowledge of how things are typically pronounced, decide on a pronunciation that makes sense and confidently use it during your speech. Most people will not question it. In the event that someone does correct you on your pronunciation, thank him or her for correcting you and adjust your pronunciation.

Fluency

Fluency refers to the flow of your speaking. To speak with fluency means that your speech flows well and that there are not many interruptions to that flow. Two main disfluencies or problems affect the flow of a speech. **Fluency hiccups** are unintended pauses in a speech that usually result from forgetting what you were saying, being distracted, or losing your place in your speaking notes. Fluency hiccups are not the same as intended pauses, which are useful for adding emphasis or transitioning between parts of a speech. While speakers should try to minimize fluency hiccups, even experienced speakers need to take an unintended pause sometimes to get their bearings or to recover from an unexpected distraction. Fluency hiccups become a problem when they happen regularly enough to detract from the speaker's message.

Verbal fillers are words that speakers use to fill in a gap between what they were saying and what they are saying next (Hennessy, 2019). Common verbal fillers include *um*, *uh*, *ah*, *er*, *you know*, and *like*. The best way to minimize verbal fillers is to become a higher self-monitor and realize that you use them. Many students are surprised when they watch the video of their first speech and realize they said "um" thirty times in three minutes. Gaining that awareness is the first step in eliminating verbal fillers, and students make noticeable progress with this between their first and second speeches (Hennessy, 2019). If you do lose your train of thought, having a brief fluency hiccup is better than injecting a verbal filler, because the audience may not even notice the pause or may think it was intentional.

9.3 Physical Delivery

Physical Delivery

Many speakers are more nervous about physical delivery than vocal delivery. Putting our bodies on the line in front of an audience often makes us feel more vulnerable than putting our voice out there. Yet most audiences are not as fixated on our physical delivery as we think they are. Knowing this can help relieve some anxiety, but it does not give us a free pass when it comes to physical delivery. We should still practice for physical delivery that enhances our verbal message. Physical delivery of a speech involves nonverbal communication through the face and eyes, gestures, and body movements.

Physical Delivery and the Face

We tend to look at a person's face when we are listening to them (Hoffler, 2016). Again, this often makes people feel uncomfortable and contributes to their overall speaking anxiety. Many speakers do not like the feeling of having "all eyes" on them, even though having a room full of people avoiding making eye contact with you would be much more awkward. Remember, it is a good thing for audience members to look at you, because it means they are paying attention and interested. Audiences look toward the face of the speaker for cues about the tone and content of the speech.

Facial Expressions

Figure 9.5: Facial expressions set the tone for a speech, and should be consistent with your message.

Facial expressions can help bring a speech to life when used by a speaker to communicate emotions and demonstrate enthusiasm for the speech (Hoffler, 2016). As with vocal variety, we tend to use facial expressions naturally and without conscious effort when engaging in day-to-day conversations. Yet many speakers' expressive faces turn "deadpan" when they stand in front of an audience. Some people naturally have more expressive faces than others do have—think about the actor Jim Carey's ability to contort his face as an example. However, we can also consciously control and improve on our facial expressions to be speakers that are more effective. As with other components of speech delivery, becoming a higher self-monitor and increasing your awareness of your typical delivery habits can help you understand, control, and improve your delivery. Although you should not only practice your speech in front of a mirror, doing so can help you get an idea of how expressive or unexpressive your face is while delivering your speech.

Facial expressions help set the emotional tone for a speech, and it is important that your facial expressions stay consistent with your message (Hoffler, 2016). In order to set a positive tone before you start speaking, briefly look at the audience and smile. A smile is a simple but powerful facial expression that can communicate friendliness, openness, and confidence. Facial expressions communicate a range of emotions and are associated with various moods or personality traits.

For example, combinations of facial expressions can communicate that a speaker is tired, excited, angry, confused, frustrated, sad, confident, smug, shy, or bored, among other things. Even if you are not bored, for example, a slack face with little animation may lead an audience to think that you are bored with your own speech, which is not likely to motivate them to be interested. So make sure your facial expressions are communicating an emotion, mood, or personality trait that you think your audience will view favorably. Also, make sure your facial expressions match with the content of your speech. When delivering something lighthearted or humorous, a smile, bright eyes, and slightly raised eyebrows will nonverbally enhance your verbal message. When delivering something serious or somber, a furrowed brow, a tighter mouth, and even a slight head nod can enhance that message. If your facial expressions and speech content are not consistent, your audience could become confused by the conflicting messages, which could lead them to question your honesty and credibility.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is an important element of nonverbal communication in all communication settings. **Eye contact** can also be used to establish credibility and hold your audience's attention (Barnard, 2017). We often interpret a lack of eye contact to mean that someone is not credible or not competent, and as a public speaker, you do not want your audience thinking either of those things. Eye contact holds attention because an audience member who knows the speaker is making regular eye contact will want to reciprocate that eye contact to show that they are paying attention. This will also help your audience remember the content of your speech better, because acting as if we are paying attention actually leads us to pay attention and better retain information.

Norms for eye contact vary among cultures (Barnard, 2017). Therefore, it may be difficult for speakers from countries that have higher power distances or are more collectivistic to get used to the idea of making direct and sustained eye contact during a speech. In these cases, it is important for the speaker to challenge himself or herself to integrate some of the host culture's expectations and for the audience to be accommodating and understanding of the cultural differences.

Physical Delivery and the Body

Have you ever gotten dizzy as an audience member because the speaker paced back and forth? Anxiety can lead us to do some strange things with our bodies, like pacing, that we do not normally do, so it is important to consider the important role that your body plays during your speech. We call extra movements caused by anxiety **nonverbal adaptors.** Most of them manifest as distracting movements or gestures. These nonverbal adaptors, like tapping a foot, wringing hands, playing with a paper clip, twirling hair, jingling change in a pocket, scratching, and many more, can definitely detract from a speaker's message and credibility. Conversely, a confident posture and purposeful gestures and movement can enhance both.

Posture

Posture is the position we assume with our bodies, either intentionally or out of habit. Although people, especially young women, used to be trained in posture, often by having them walk around with books stacked on their heads, you should use a posture that is appropriate for the occasion while still positioning yourself in a way that feels natural. In a formal speaking situation, it is important to have an erect posture that communicates professionalism and credibility (Clayton, 2018). However, a military posture of standing at attention may feel and look unnatural in a typical school or business speech. In informal settings, it may be appropriate to lean on a table or lectern, or even sit among your audience members (Clayton, 2018). Head position is also part of posture. In most speaking situations, it is best to keep your head up, facing your audience. A droopy head does not communicate confidence. Consider the occasion important, as an inappropriate posture can hurt your credibility.

Gestures

Gestures include arm and hand movements. We all go through a process of internalizing our native culture from childhood. An obvious part of this process is becoming fluent in a language. Perhaps less obvious is the fact that we also become fluent in nonverbal communication, gestures in particular. We all use hand gestures while we speak, but we didn't ever take a class in matching verbal communication with the appropriate gestures; we just internalized these norms over time based on observation and put them into practice. By this point in your life, you have a whole vocabulary of hand movements and gestures that spontaneously come out while you are speaking. Some of these gestures are emphatic and some are descriptive (Koch, 2007).

Emphatic gestures are the most common hand gestures we use, and they function to emphasize our verbal communication and often relate to the emotions we verbally communicate (Toastmasters International, 2011). Pointing with one finger or all the fingers straight out is an emphatic gesture. We can even bounce that gesture up and down to provide more emphasis. Moving the hand in a circular motion in front of our chest with the fingers spread apart is a common emphatic gesture that shows excitement and often accompanies an increased rate of verbal speaking. We make this gesture more emphatic by using both hands. Descriptive gestures function to illustrate or refer to objects rather than emotions (Toastmasters International, 2011). We use descriptive gestures to indicate the number of something by counting with our fingers or the size, shape, or speed of something. Our hands and arms are often the most reliable and easy-to-use visual aids a speaker can have.

While the best beginning strategy is to gesture naturally, you also want to remain a high self-monitor and take note of your typical patterns of gesturing. If you notice that you naturally gravitate toward one particular gesture, make an effort to vary your gestures more. You also want your gestures to be purposeful, not limp or lifeless.

Movement

Figure 9.6: To make your movements appear natural, time them to coincide with a key point.

Sometimes movement of the whole body, instead of just gesturing with hands, is appropriate in a speech. When students are given the freedom to move around, it often ends up becoming floating or pacing, which are both movements that comfort a speaker by expending nervous energy but only serve to distract the audience (Toastmasters International, 2011). *Floating* refers to speakers who wander aimlessly around, and *pacing* refers to speakers who walk back and forth in the same path. To prevent floating or pacing, make sure that your movements are purposeful. Many speakers employ the triangle method of body movement where they start in the middle, take a couple steps forward and to the right, then take a couple steps to the left, then return to the center. Obviously, you do not need to do this multiple times in a five- to ten-minute speech, as doing so, just like floating or pacing, tends to make an audience dizzy.

To make your movements appear more natural, time them to coincide with a key point you want to emphasize or a transition between key points. Minimize other movements from the waist down when you are not purposefully moving for emphasis. Speakers sometimes tap or shuffle their feet, rock, or shift their weight back and forth from one leg to the other. Keeping both feet flat on the floor, and still, will help avoid these distracting movements (Toastmasters International, 2011).

Credibility and Physical Delivery

Audience members primarily take in information through visual and auditory channels. Just as the information you present verbally in your speech can add to or subtract from your credibility, nonverbal communication that accompanies your verbal messages affects your credibility.

Professional Dress and Appearance

No matter what professional field you go into, you will need to consider the importance of personal appearance (Caffrey, 2020). Although it may seem petty or shallow to put so much emphasis on dress and appearance, impressions matter, and people make judgments about our personality, competence, and credibility based on how we look. In some cases, you may work somewhere with a clearly laid out policy for personal dress and appearance. In many cases, the suggestion is to follow guidelines for "business casual."

Despite the increasing popularity of this notion over the past twenty years, people's understanding of what business casual means is not consistent (Caffrey, 2020). The formal dress codes of the mid-1900s, which required employees to wear suits and dresses, gave way to the trend of business casual dress, which seeks to allow employees to work comfortably while still appearing professional. While most people still dress more formally for job interviews or high-stakes presentations, the day-to-day dress of working professionals varies.

Visual Aids and Delivery

Visual aids play an important role in conveying supporting material to your audience. They also tie to delivery, since using visual aids during a speech usually requires some physical movements. It is important not to let your use of visual aids detract from your credibility (Beqiri, 2018). Many good speeches are derailed by posters that fall over, videos with no sound, and uncooperative PowerPoint presentations.

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Figures

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Figure 9.5: Facial expressions set the tone for a speech, and should be consistent with your message. Afif Kusuma. 2021. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/F3dFVKj6q8I

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10.

INFORMATIVE SPEAKING

Introduction

Communicative messages surround us. Most try to teach us something and/or influence our thoughts or behaviors. As with any type of communication, some messages are more engaging and effective than others. You have probably experienced the displeasure of sitting through a boring class lecture that did not seem to relate to your interests or a lecture so packed with information that your brain felt overloaded. Likewise, you have probably been persuaded by a message only to find out later that the argument was faulty or the speaker was misleading. As senders and receivers of messages, it is important that we be able to distinguish between informative and persuasive messages and know how to create and deliver them.

10.1 Informative Speeches

Many people would rather go see an impassioned political speech or a comedic monologue than a lecture. Although informative speaking may not be the most exciting form of public speaking, it is the most common. Reports, lectures, training seminars, and demonstrations are all examples of informative speaking. That means you are more likely to give and listen to informative speeches in a variety of contexts. Some organizations, like consulting firms, and career fields, like training and development, are aimed solely at conveying information. College alumni have reported that out of many different speech skills, informative speaking is most important (Verderber, 1991). Since your exposure to informative speaking is inevitable, why not learn how to be a better producer and consumer of informative messages?

Creating an Informative Speech

The goal of **informative speaking** is to teach an audience something using objective, factual information. Interestingly, informative speaking is a newcomer in the world of public speaking theorizing and instruction, which began thousands of years ago with the ancient Greeks (Olbricht, 1968). Ancient philosophers and public officials like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian conceived of public speaking as rhetoric, which is inherently persuasive. During that time, and until the 1800s, almost all speaking was argumentative. Teaching and instruction were performed as debates, and even fields like science and medicine relied on argumentative reasoning instead of factual claims.

Choosing an Informative Speech Topic

Being a successful informative speaker starts with choosing a topic that can engage and educate the audience. Your topic choices may be influenced by the level at which you are speaking. Informative speaking usually happens at one of three levels: formal, vocational, and impromptu (Verderber, 1991). Formal informative speeches occur when an audience has assembled specifically to hear what you have to say. Being invited to speak to a group during a professional meeting, a civic gathering, or a celebration gala brings with it high expectations.

Whether at the formal, vocational, or impromptu level, informative speeches can emerge from a range of categories, which include objects, people, events, processes, concepts, and issues. An extended speech at the formal level may include subject matter from several of these categories, while a speech at the vocational level may convey detailed information about a process, concept, or issue relevant to a specific career.

You can tailor a broad informative speech topic to fit any of these categories. As you draft your specific purpose and thesis statements, think about which category or categories will help you achieve your speech goals, and then use it or them to guide your research. The table below "Sample Informative Speech Topics by Category" includes an example of how a broad informative subject area like renewable energy can be adapted to each category as well as additional sample topics.

[table id=9 /]

Speeches about objects convey information about any nonhuman material things. Mechanical objects, animals, plants, and fictional objects are all suitable topics of investigation. Given that this is such a broad category, strive to pick an object that your audience may not be familiar with or highlight novel relevant and interesting facts about a familiar object.

Speeches about people focus on real or fictional individuals who are living or dead. These speeches require in-depth biographical research; an encyclopedia entry is not sufficient. Introduce a new person to the audience or share little-known or surprising information about a person we already know. Although we may already be familiar with the accomplishments of historical figures and leaders, audiences often enjoy learning the "personal side" of their lives.

Speeches about concepts are less concrete than speeches about objects or people, as they focus on ideas or notions that may be abstract or multifaceted. A concept can be familiar to us, like equality, or could literally be a foreign concept like *qi* (or *chi*), which is the Chinese conception of the energy that flows through our bodies. Use the strategies discussed in this book for making content relevant and proxemic to your audience to help make abstract concepts more concrete.

Speeches about events focus on past occasions or ongoing occurrences. A particular day in history, an annual observation, or a seldom-occurring event can each serve as interesting informative topics. As with speeches about people, it is important to provide a backstory for the event, but avoid rehashing commonly known information.

Informative speeches about processes provide a systematic account of a procedure or natural occurrence. Speakers may walk an audience through, or demonstrate, a series of actions that take place to complete a procedure, such as making homemade cheese. Speakers can also present information about naturally occurring processes like cell division or fermentation.

Last, informative speeches about issues provide objective and balanced information about a disputed subject or a matter of concern for society. It is important that speakers view themselves as objective reporters rather than commentators to avoid tipping the balance of the speech from informative to persuasive. Rather than advocating for a particular position, the speaker should seek to teach or raise the awareness of the audience.

Researching an Informative Speech Topic

Having sharp research skills is a fundamental part of being a good informative speaker. Since informative speaking is supposed to convey factual information, speakers should take care to find sources that are objective, balanced, and credible. Periodicals, books, newspapers, and credible websites can all be useful sources for informative speeches.

Aside from finding credible and objective sources, informative speakers also need to take time to find engaging information. This is where you need sharp research skills to cut through all the typical information in order to find novel information. Novel information is atypical or unexpected, but it takes more skill and effort to locate. You can even bring seemingly boring informative speech topics like the history of coupons to life with information that defies the audience's expectations. During a recent student speech, we learned that coupons have been around for 125 years, are used most frequently by wealthier and more educated households, and that a coupon fraud committed by an Italian American businessman named Charles Ponzi was the basis for the term *Ponzi scheme*, which is still commonly used today. As we learned earlier, finding proxemic and relevant information and examples is typically a good way to be engaging. The basic information may not change quickly, but the way people use it and the way it relates to our lives changes. Finding current, relevant examples and novel information are both difficult tasks.

Figure 10.1: Taking the time to research quality information will bring more credibility to your speech and make it more interesting.

The goal for informative speaking is to teach your audience. An audience is much more likely to remain engaged when they are actively learning. This is like a balancing act. You want your audience to be challenged enough by the interesting information, but not so challenged that they become overwhelmed. You should take care to consider how much information your audience already knows about a topic. Be aware that speakers who are very familiar with their speech topic tend to overestimate their audience's knowledge about the topic. It is better to engage your topic at a level slightly below your audience's knowledge level than above. Most people will not be bored by a brief review, but many people become lost and give up listening if they cannot connect to the information right away or feel it is over their heads.

A good informative speech leaves the audience thinking long after the speech ends. Try to include some practical "takeaways" in your speech. Audiences learn many interesting and useful things from the informative speeches students have done. For example, they learned how Prohibition in the United States (a nationwide constitutional ban on the production, importation, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933) led to the creation of NASCAR. Other takeaways are more practical and useful—for example, how to get wine stains out of clothing and carpet or explanations of various types of student financial aid.

10.2 Organizing and Supporting an Informative Speech

You can already see that informing is not as easy as we may initially think. To teach effectively, a speaker must present quality information in an organized and accessible way. Once you have chosen an informative speech topic and put your research skills to the test in order to locate novel and engaging information, it is time to organize and support your speech.

Organizational Patterns

Three organizational patterns that are particularly useful for informative speaking are topical, chronological, and spatial. To organize a speech topically, you break a larger topic down into logical subdivisions. An informative speech about labor unions could focus on unions in three different areas of employment, three historically significant strikes, or three significant legal/legislative decisions. Speeches organized chronologically trace the development of a topic or overview the steps in a process. An informative speech could trace the rise of the economic crisis in Greece or explain the steps in creating a home compost pile. Speeches organized spatially convey the layout or physical characteristics of a location or concept. An informative speech about the layout of a fire station or an astrology wheel would follow a spatial organization pattern.

10.3 Methods of Informing

Informing Through Definition

Informing through definition entails defining concepts clearly and concisely and is an important skill for informative speaking. There are four ways a speaker can inform through definition (Verderber, 1991). Defining a concept using a synonym or an antonym is a short and effective way to convey meaning. Synonyms are words that have the same or similar meanings, and antonyms are words that have opposite meanings. In a speech about how to inform an audience, you could claim that using concrete words helps keep an audience engaged. You could enhance the audience's understanding of what *concrete* means by defining it with synonyms like *tangible* and *relatable*. Alternatively, you could define *concrete* using antonyms like *abstract* and *theoretical*.

Identifying the use or function of an object, item, or idea is also a short way of defining. We may think we already know the use and function of most of the things we interact with regularly. This is true in obvious cases like cars, elevators, and smartphones. However, there are many objects and ideas that we may rely on and interact with but not know the use or function. For example, QR codes (or quick response codes) are popping up in magazines, at airports, and even on t-shirts (Vuong, 2011). Many people may notice them but not know what they do. As a speaker, you could define QR codes by their function by informing the audience that QR codes allow businesses, organizations, and individuals to get information to consumers/receivers through a barcode-like format that can be easily scanned by most smartphones.

A speaker can also define a topic using examples, which are cited cases that are representative of a larger concept. In an informative speech about anachronisms in movies and literature, a speaker might provide these examples. First, the film *Titanic* shows people on lifeboats using flashlights to look for survivors from the sunken ship (such flashlights were not invented until two years later) (Farry, 2015). Second, Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* includes a reference to a clock, even though no mechanical clocks existed during Caesar's time (Rafiq, 2020). Examples are a good way to repackage information that has already been presented to help an audience retain and understand the content of a speech. Later we will learn more about how repackaging information enhances informative speaking.

Etymology refers to the history of a word. Defining by etymology entails providing an overview of how a word came to its current meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* is the best source for finding etymology and often contains interesting facts that you can present as novel information to engage your audience. For example, the word *assassin*, which refers to a person who intentionally murders another, literally means "hashish-eater" and comes from the Arabic word *hashshashin*. The current meaning emerged during the Crusades as a result of the practices of a sect of Muslims who would get high on hashish before killing Christian leaders—in essence, assassinating them (Fine, 2010).

Informing Through Description

As the saying goes, "Pictures are worth a thousand words." **Informing through description** entails creating verbal pictures for your audience. Description is also an important part of informative speeches that use a spatial organizational pattern, since you need to convey the layout of a space or concept. Good descriptions are based on good observations, as they convey what is taken in through the senses and answer these type of questions: What did that look like? Smell like? Sound like? Feel like? Taste like? If descriptions are vivid and well written, they can actually invoke a sensory reaction in your audience. Just as your mouth probably begins to salivate when someone suggests you imagine biting into a fresh, bright yellow, freshly cut, juicy lemon wedge, so you can transport your audience to a setting or situation through your descriptions. Once, a student set up his speech about the history of streaking by using the following description: "Imagine that you are walking across campus to your evening class. You look up to see a parade of hundreds upon hundreds of your naked peers jogging by wearing little more than shoes."

Informing Through Demonstration

When **informing through demonstration**, a speaker gives verbal directions about how to do something while also physically demonstrating the steps. Early morning infomercials are good examples of demonstrative speaking, even though they are also trying to persuade us to buy their "miracle product." Whether straightforward or complex, it is crucial that a speaker be familiar with the content of their speech and the physical steps necessary for the demonstration. Speaking while completing a task requires advanced psychomotor skills that most people cannot wing and therefore need to practice. Tasks suddenly become much more difficult than we expect when we have an audience. Have you ever had to type while people are reading along with you? Even though we type all the time, even one extra set of eyes seems to make our fingers more clumsy than usual.

Television chefs are excellent examples of speakers who frequently inform through demonstration. While many of them make the process of speaking while cooking look effortless, it took much practice over many years to make viewers think it is effortless.

Informing Through Explanation

Informing through explanation entails sharing how something works, how something came to be, or why something happened. This method of informing may be useful when a topic is too complex or abstract to demonstrate. When presenting complex information make sure to break the topic up into manageable units, avoid information overload, and include examples that make the content relevant to the audience. Informing through explanation works well with speeches about processes, events, and issues. For example, a speaker could explain the context surrounding the Lincoln-Douglas debates or the process that takes place during presidential primaries.

10.4 Effective Informative Speaking

There are several challenges to overcome to be an effective informative speaker. They include avoiding persuasion, avoiding information overload, and engaging your audience.

Avoiding Persuasion

We should avoid thinking of informing and persuading as dichotomous, meaning that it is either one or the other. It is more accurate to think of informing and persuading as two poles on a continuum, as in the figure 10.2 (Olbricht, 1968). Most persuasive speeches rely on some degree of informing to substantiate the reasoning. Moreover, informative speeches, although meant to secure the understanding of an audience, may influence audience members' beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors.

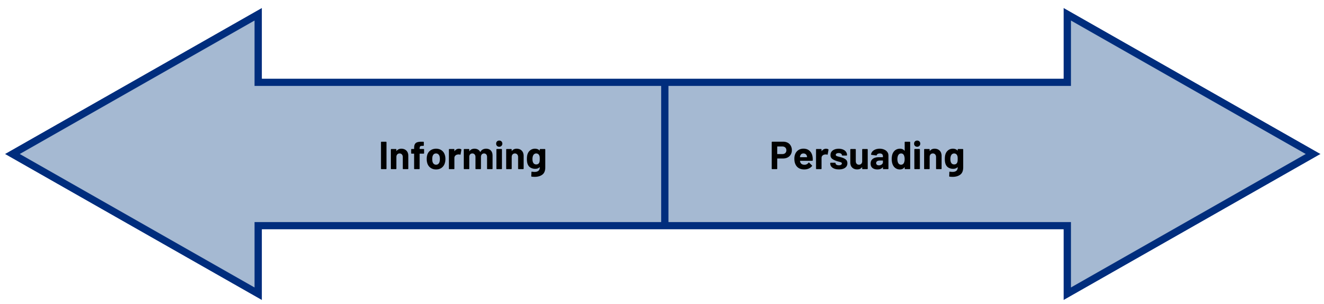

Figure 10.2: Continuum of informing and persuading.

Speakers can look to three areas to help determine if their speech is more informative or persuasive: speaker purpose, function of information, and audience perception (Verderber, 1991). First, for informative speaking, a speaker's purpose should be to create understanding by sharing objective, factual information. Specific purpose and thesis statements help establish a speaker's goal and purpose and can serve as useful reference points to keep a speech on track. When reviewing your specific purpose and thesis statement, look for words like *should*/*shouldn't*, *good*/*bad*, and *right*/*wrong* because these words often indicate a persuasive slant in the speech. Second, information should function to clarify and explain in an informative speech. Supporting materials should not function to prove a thesis or to provide reasons for an audience to accept the thesis, as they do in persuasive speeches. Although informative messages can end up influencing the thoughts or behaviors of audience members, that should not be the goal.

Third, an audience's perception of the information and the speaker helps determine whether to classify a speech as informative or persuasive. The audience must perceive that the information being presented is not controversial or disputed because this could lead audience members to view the information as factual. The audience must also accept the speaker as a credible source of information. Being prepared, citing credible sources, and engaging the audience help establish a speaker's credibility. Last, an audience must perceive the speaker to be trustworthy and not have a hidden agenda. Avoiding persuasion is a common challenge for informative speakers, but it is something to consider, as violating the speaking occasion may be perceived as unethical by the audience. Be aware of the overall tone of your speech by reviewing your specific purpose and thesis to make sure your speech is not tipping from informative to persuasive.

Avoiding Information Overload

Many informative speakers have a tendency to pack a ten-minute speech with as much information as possible. This can result in **information overload**, which is a barrier to effective listening that occurs when a speech contains more information than an audience can process. Editing can be a difficult task, but it is an important skill to hone, because you will be editing more than you think. Whether it is reading an e-mail before you send it, condensing a report down to an executive summary, or figuring out how to fit a client's message on the front page of a brochure, you will have to learn how to discern what information to keep and what to delete. In speaking, being a discerning editor is useful because it helps avoid information overload. While a receiver may not be attracted to a text-heavy brochure, they could take the time to read it, and reread it, if necessary. Audience members cannot conduct their own review while listening to a speaker live. Unlike readers, audience members cannot review words over and over (Verderber, 1991). Therefore, competent speakers, especially informative speakers who are trying to teach their audience something, should adapt their message to a listening audience. To help avoid information overload, adapt your message to make it more listenable.

Although the results vary, research shows that people only remember a portion of a message days or even hours after receiving it (Janusik, 2020). If you spend 100 percent of your speech introducing new information, you have wasted approximately 30 percent of your time and your audience's time. Information overload is a barrier to effective listening, and as good speakers, we should be aware of the limitations of listening and compensate for that in our speech preparation and presentation. I recommend that my students follow a guideline that suggests spending no more than 30 percent of your speech introducing new material and 70 percent of your speech repackaging that information. I specifically use the word *repackaging* and not *repeating*. Simply repeating the same information would also be a barrier to effective listening, since people would just get bored. Repackaging will help ensure that your audience retains most of the key information in the speech. Even if they do not remember every example, they will remember the main underlying point.

Engaging Your Audience

As a speaker, you are competing for the attention of your audience against other internal and external stimuli. Getting an audience engaged and then keeping their attention is a challenge for any speaker, but it can be especially difficult when speaking to inform. As was discussed earlier, once you are in the professional world, you will most likely be speaking informatively about topics related to your experience and expertise. Some speakers fall into the trap of thinking that their content knowledge is enough to sustain them through an informative speech or that their position in an organization means that an audience will listen to them and appreciate their information despite their delivery. Content expertise is not enough to be an effective speaker. A person must also have speaking expertise (Verderber, 1991). Effective speakers, even renowned experts, must still translate their wealth of content knowledge into information that is suited for oral transmission, audience centered, and well organized. We are all probably familiar with the stereotype of the absentminded professor or the genius who thinks elegantly in his or her head but cannot convey that same elegance verbally. Having well-researched and organized supporting material is an important part of effective informative speaking, but having good content is not enough.

Audience members are more likely to stay engaged with a speaker they view as credible. So complementing good supporting material with a practiced and fluent delivery increases credibility and audience engagement. In addition, as we discussed earlier, good informative speakers act as translators of information. Repackaging information into concrete familiar examples is also a strategy for making your speech more engaging. Understanding relies on being able to apply incoming information to life experiences.

Repackaging information is also a good way to appeal to different learning styles, as you can present the same content in various ways, which helps reiterate a point. While this strategy is useful with any speech, since the goal of informing is teaching, it makes sense to include a focus on learning within your audience adaptation. There are three main **learning styles** that help determine how people most effectively receive and process information: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Half, 2016). Visual learners respond well to information presented via visual aids, so repackage information by using text, graphics, charts and other media. Public speaking is a good way to present information for auditory learners who process information well when they hear it. Kinesthetic learners are tactile; they like to learn through movement and "doing." Asking volunteers to help with a demonstration, if appropriate, is a way to involve kinesthetic learners in your speech. You can also have an interactive review activity at the end of a speech, much as many teachers incorporate an activity after a lesson to reinforce the material.

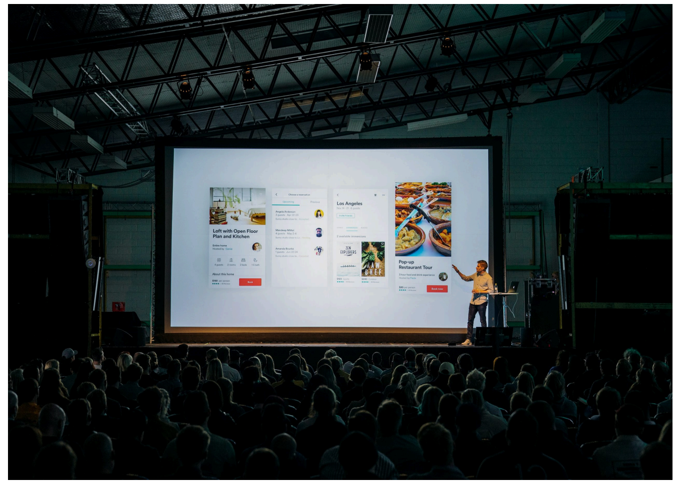

Figure 10.3: Visual aids can be a good way to repackage information so the audience can learn the information in a different way.

10.5 Sample Informative Speech

Title: Going Green in the World of Education

General purpose: To inform

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, the audience will be able to describe some ways in which schools are going green.

Thesis statement: The green movement has transformed school buildings, how teachers teach, and the environment in which students learn.

Introduction

Attention getter: Did you know that attending or working at a green school can lead students and teachers to have less health problems? Did you know that allowing more daylight into school buildings increases academic performance and can lessen attention and concentration challenges? Well, my research supports both of these claims. And these are just two of the many reasons why more schools, both grade schools and colleges, are going green.

Introduction of topic: Today, I am going to tell you about the green movement and how it is affecting many schools.

Credibility and relevance: Because of my own desire to go into the field of education, I decided to research how schools are going green in the United States. However, not just current and/or future teachers will be affected by this trend.

As students at James Madison University, you are already asked to make "greener" choices. Whether it is the little signs in the dorm rooms that ask you to turn off your lights when you leave the room, the reusable water bottles that we received on move-in day, or even our new Renewable Energy Center. The list is endless. Additionally, younger people in our lives, whether they be future children or younger siblings or relatives, will likely be affected by this continuing trend.

Preview statement: In order to understand what makes a "green school," we need to learn about how K–12 schools are going green, how college campuses are going green, and how these changes affect students and teachers.

Transition: I will begin with how K–12 schools are going green.

Body

A. The U.S. Green Building Council was established in 1993 with the mission to promote sustainability in the building and construction industry, and it is this organization that is responsible for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, which is a well-respected green building certification system. While homes, neighborhoods, and businesses can also pursue LEED certification, I will focus today on K–12 schools and college campuses.

1. It is important to note that principles of "going green" can be applied to the planning of a building from its first inception or be retroactively applied to existing buildings.

a. A 2011 article by Ash in *Education Week* notes that the pathway to creating a greener school is flexible based on the community and its needs.

b. In order to garner support for green initiatives, the article recommends that local leaders like superintendents, mayors, and college administrators become involved in the green movement.

2. Once local leaders are involved, the community, students, parents, faculty, and staff can be involved by serving on a task force, hosting a summit or conference, and implementing lessons about sustainability into everyday conversations and school curriculum.

a. The US Green Building Council's website also includes a tool kit with a lot of information about how to "green" existing schools.

b. Much of the efforts to green schools have focused on K–12 schools and districts, but what makes a school green?

3. According to the U.S. Green Building Council's Center for Green Schools, green school buildings conserve energy and natural resources.

a. For example, Fossil Ridge High School in Fort Collins, Colorado, was built in 2006 and received LEED certification because it has automatic light sensors to conserve electricity and uses wind energy to offset nonrenewable energy use.

b. To conserve water, the school uses a pond for irrigation, has artificial turf on athletic fields, and installed low-flow toilets and faucets.

c. According to the 2006 report by certified energy manager Gregory Kats titled "Greening America's Schools," a LEED certified school uses 30–50 percent less energy, 30 percent less water, and reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 40 percent compared to a conventional school.

4. The Center for Green Schools also presents case studies that show how green school buildings also create healthier learning environments.

a. Many new building materials, carpeting, and furniture contain chemicals that are released into the air, which reduces indoor air quality.

b. So green schools purposefully purchase materials that are low in these chemicals.

c. Natural light and fresh air have also been shown to promote a healthier learning environment, so green buildings allow more daylight in and include functioning windows.

Transition: As you can see, K–12 schools are becoming greener; college campuses are also starting to go green.

B. Examples from the University of Denver show some of the potential for greener campuses around the country.

1. The University of Denver is home to the nation's first "green" law school.

a. According to the Sturm College of Law's website, the building was designed to use 40 percent less energy than a conventional building through the use of movement-sensor lighting; high-performance insulation in the walls, floors, and roof; and infrared sensors on water faucets and toilets.

b. Electric car recharging stations were also included in the parking garage, and the building has extra bike racks and even showers that students and faculty can use to freshen up if they bike or walk to school or work.

2. James Madison University has also made strides toward a more green campus.

a. Some of the dining halls on campus have gone "trayless," which according to a 2009 article by Calder in the journal *Independent School* has the potential to reduce dramatically the amount of water and chemical use, since there are no longer trays to wash, and helps reduce food waste since people take less food without a tray.

b. The biggest change on campus has been the opening of the Renewable Energy Center in 2011, which according to EIU's website is one of the largest biomass renewable energy projects in the country.

1. The Renewable Energy Center uses slow-burn technology to use wood chips that are a byproduct of the lumber industry. These chips would normally be discarded.

2. This helps reduce our dependency on our old coal-fired power plant, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

3. The project was the first known power plant to be registered with the U.S. Green Building Council and is on track to receive LEED certification.

Transition: All these efforts to go green in K–12 schools and on college campuses will obviously affect students and teachers at the schools.

C. The green movement affects students and teachers in a variety of ways.

1. Research shows that going green positively affects a student's health.

a. Many schools are literally going green by including more green spaces such as recreation areas, gardens, and greenhouses, which according to a 2010 article in the *Journal of Environmental Education* by University of Colorado professor Susan Strife has been shown to benefit a child's cognitive skills, especially in the areas of increased concentration and attention capacity.

b. Additionally, the report I cited earlier, "Greening America's Schools," states that the improved air quality in green schools can lead to a 38 percent reduction in asthma incidents and that students in "green schools" had 51 percent less chance of catching a cold or the flu compared to children in conventional schools.

2. Standard steps taken to green schools can also help students academically.

a. The report "Greening America's Schools" notes that a recent synthesis of fifty-three studies found that more daylight in the school building leads to higher academic achievement.

b. The report also provides data that show how the healthier environment in green schools leads to better attendance and that in Washington, DC, and Chicago, schools improved their performance on standardized tests by 3–4 percent.

3. Going green can influence teachers' lesson plans as well their job satisfaction and physical health. There are several options for teachers who want to "green" their curriculum.

a. According to the article in *Education Week* that I cited earlier, the Sustainability Education Clearinghouse is a free online tool that provides K–12 educators with the ability to share sustainability-oriented lesson ideas.

b. The Center for Green Schools also provides resources for all levels of teachers, from kindergarten to college that can be used in the classroom.

c. The report "Greening America's Schools" claims that the overall improved working environment that a green school provides leads to higher teacher retention and less teacher turnover.

d. Just as students see health benefits from green schools, so do teachers, as the same report shows that teachers in these schools get sick less, resulting in a decrease of sick days by 7 percent.

Conclusion

Transition to conclusion and summary of importance: In summary, the going-green era has affected every aspect of education in our school systems.

Review of main points: From K–12 schools to college campuses like ours, to the students and teachers in the schools, the green movement is changing the way we think about education and our environment.

Closing statement: As Glenn Cook, the editor in chief of the *American School Board Journal*, states on the Center for Green Schools' website, "The green schools movement is the biggest thing to happen to education since the introduction of technology to the classroom."

References

Figures

Figure 10.1: Taking the time to research quality information will bring more credibility to your speech and make it more interesting. Windows. 2020. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/v94mlgvsza4

Figure 10.2: Continuum of informing and persuading. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 10.3: Visual aids can be a good way to repackage information so the audience can learn the information in a different way. Teemu Paananen. 2017. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/bzdhc5b3Bxs

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11.

PERSUASIVE SPEAKING

Introduction

We produce and receive persuasive messages daily, but we do not often stop to think about how we make the arguments we do or the quality of the arguments that we receive. In this section, we will learn the components of an argument, how to choose a good persuasive speech topic, and how to adapt and organize a persuasive message.

11.1 Foundation of Persuasion

Persuasive speaking seeks to influence the beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors of audience members. In order to persuade, a speaker has to construct arguments that appeal to audience members (Poggi, 2005). Arguments form around three components: claim, evidence, and warrant.

The **claim** is the statement that will be supported by evidence. Your thesis statement is the overarching claim for your speech, but you will make other claims within the speech to support the larger thesis (Nordquist, 2020). **Evidence**, also called grounds, supports the claim (McCroskey, 1969). The main points of your persuasive speech and the supporting material you include serve as evidence. For example, a speaker may make the following claim: "There should be a national law against texting while driving." The speaker could then support the claim by providing the following evidence: "Research from the US Department of Transportation has found that texting while driving creates a crash risk that is twenty-three times worse than driving while not distracted." The **warrant** is the underlying justification that connects the claim and the evidence (McCroskey, 1966). One warrant for the claim and evidence cited in this example is that the U.S. Department of Transportation is an institution that funds research conducted by credible experts. An additional and more implicit warrant is that people should not do things they know are unsafe.

As you put together a persuasive argument, you act as the judge. You can evaluate arguments that you come across in your research by analyzing the connection (the warrant) between the claim and the evidence (McCroskey, 1966). If the warrant is strong, you may want to highlight that argument in your speech. You may also be able to point out a weak warrant in an argument that goes against your position, which you could then include in your speech. Every argument starts by putting together a claim and evidence, but arguments grow to include many interrelated units.

11.2 Adapting Persuasive Messages

Competent speakers should consider their audience throughout the speech-making process. Given that persuasive messages seek to influence directly the audience in some way, audience adaptation becomes even more important (Hamm, 2006).

When you have audience members who already agree with your proposition, you should focus on intensifying their agreement. You can also assume that they have foundational background knowledge of the topic, which means you can take the time to inform them about lesser-known aspects of a topic or cause to reinforce further their agreement. Rather than move these audience members from disagreement to agreement, you can focus on moving them from agreement to action. Remember, calls to action should be as specific as possible to help you capitalize on audience members' motivation in the moment, so they are more likely to follow through on the action (Hamm, 2006).

There are two main reasons audience members may be neutral about your topic: (1) they are uninformed about the topic or (2) they do not think the topic affects them. In this case, you should focus on instilling a concern for the topic. Uninformed audiences may need background information before they can decide if they agree or disagree with your proposition. If the issue is familiar but audience members are neutral because they do not see how the topic affects them, focus on getting the audience's attention and demonstrating relevance. Remember that concrete and proxemic supporting materials will help an audience find relevance in a topic. Students who pick narrow or unfamiliar topics will have to work harder to persuade their audience, but neutral audiences often provide the most chance of achieving your speech goal since even a small change may move them into agreement (Williams, 2018).

When audience members disagree with your proposition, you should focus on changing their minds. To persuade effectively, you must be seen as a credible speaker. When an audience is hostile to your proposition, establishing credibility is even more important, as audience members may be quick to discount or discredit someone who does not appear prepared or does not present well-researched and supported information. Do not give an audience a chance to write you off before you even get to share your best evidence. When facing a disagreeable audience, the goal should also be small change. You may not be able to switch someone's position completely but influencing him or her is still a success. Aside from establishing your credibility, you should also establish common ground with an audience. Acknowledging areas of disagreement and logically refuting counterarguments in your speech is also a way to approach persuading an audience in disagreement, as it shows that you are open-minded enough to engage with other perspectives (Williams, 2018).

11.3 Determining Your Proposition

The proposition of your speech is the overall direction of the content and how that content relates to the speech goal. A persuasive speech will fall primarily into one of three categories: propositions of fact, value, or policy (Mackay, 2012). A speech may have elements of any of the three propositions, but you can usually determine the overall proposition of a speech from the specific purpose and thesis statements.

Propositions of fact focus on beliefs and try to establish that something "is or isn't." Propositions of value focus on persuading audience members that something is "good or bad," "right or wrong," or "desirable or undesirable." Propositions of policy advocate that something "should or shouldn't" be done (Mackay, 2012). Since most persuasive speech topics can be approached as propositions of fact, value, or policy, it is a good idea to start thinking about what kind of proposition you want to make, as it will influence how you go about your research and writing. As you can see in the following example using the topic of global warming, the type of proposition changes the types of supporting materials you would need:

- Proposition of fact. Increased greenhouse gases related to human activity cause global warming.
- Proposition of value. America's disproportionately large amount of pollution relative to other countries is wrong.
- Proposition of policy. There should be stricter emission restrictions on individual cars.

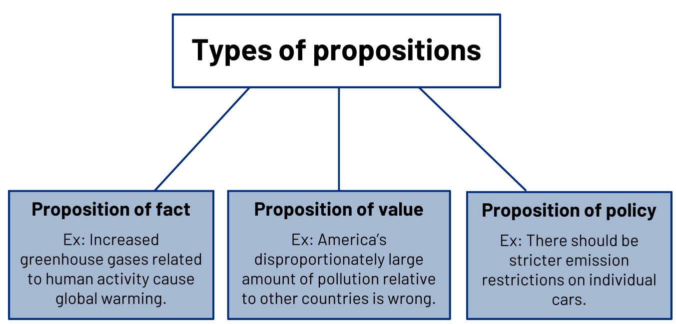

Figure 11.1: Types of propositions with examples.

To support propositions of fact, you would want to present a logical argument based on objective facts that can then be used to build persuasive arguments. Propositions of value may require you to appeal more to your audience's emotions and cite expert and lay testimony. Persuasive speeches about policy usually require you to research existing and previous laws or procedures and determine if any relevant legislation or propositions are currently being considered (Barton & Tucker, 2021).

11.4 Organizing a Persuasive Speech

We have already discussed several patterns for organizing your speech, but some organization strategies are specific to persuasive speaking. Some persuasive speech topics lend themselves to a topical organization pattern, which breaks the larger topic up into logical divisions. Recency and primacy, as well as adapting a persuasive speech based on the audience's orientation toward the proposition can be connected when organizing a persuasive speech topically. Primacy means putting your strongest information first. It is based on the idea that audience members put more weight on what they hear first. This strategy can be especially useful when addressing an audience that disagrees with your proposition, as you can try to win them over early. Recency means putting your strongest information last to leave a powerful impression. This can be useful when you are building to a climax in your speech, specifically if you include a call to action (Morrison, 2015).

The problem-solution pattern is an organizational pattern that advocates for a particular approach to solve a problem. You would provide evidence to show that a problem exists and then propose a solution with additional evidence or reasoning to justify the course of action (Macasieb, 2018). One main point addressing the problem and one main point addressing the solution may be sufficient, but you are not limited to two. You could add a main point between the problem and solution that outlines other solutions that have failed. You can also combine the problem-solution pattern with the cause-effect pattern or expand the speech to fit with Monroe's Motivated Sequence.

The cause-effect pattern can be used for informative speaking when the relationship between the cause and effect is not contested. The pattern is more fitting for persuasive speeches when the relationship between the cause and effect is controversial or unclear. There are several ways to use causes and effects to structure a speech. You could have a two-point speech that argues from cause to effect or from effect to cause. You could also have more than one cause that leads to the same effect or a single cause that leads to multiple effects. The following are some examples of thesis statements that correspond to various organizational patterns. As you can see, the same general topic area, prison overcrowding, is used for each example. This illustrates the importance of considering your organizational options early in the speech-making process, since the pattern you choose will influence your researching and writing.

- Problem-solution. Prison overcrowding is a serious problem that we can solve by finding alternative rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.
- Problem–failed solution–proposed solution. Prison overcrowding is a serious problem that should not be solved by building more prisons; instead, we should support alternative rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.
- Cause-effect. Prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to lesser sentences for violent criminals.
- Cause-cause-effect. State budgets are being slashed and prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to lesser sentences for violent criminals.
- Cause-effect-effect. Prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to increased behavioral problems among inmates and lesser sentences for violent criminals.
- Cause-effect-solution. Prisons are overcrowded with nonviolent offenders, which leads to lesser sentences for violent criminals; therefore, we need to find alternative rehabilitation for nonviolent offenders.

Monroe's motivated sequence is an organizational pattern designed for persuasive speaking that appeals to audience members' needs and motivates them to action (Watt & Barnett, 2021). If your persuasive speaking goals include a call to action, you may want to consider this organizational pattern. Here is an example of that pattern:

Step 1: Attention

- Hook the audience by making the topic relevant to them.
- Imagine living a full life, retiring, and slipping into your golden years. As you get older, you become more dependent on others and move into an assisted-living facility. Although you think life will be easier, things get worse as you experience abuse and mistreatment from the staff. You report the abuse to a nurse and wait, but nothing happens and the abuse continues. Elder abuse is a common occurrence, and unlike child abuse, there are no laws in our state that mandate complaints of elder abuse be reported or investigated.

Step 2: Need

- Cite evidence to support the fact that the issue needs to be addressed.
- According to the American Psychological Association, one to two million elderly Americans have been abused by their caretakers. In our state, those in the medical, psychiatric, and

social work field are required to report suspicion of child abuse but are not mandated to report suspicions of elder abuse.

Step 3: Satisfaction

- Offer a solution and persuade the audience that it is feasible and well thought out.
- There should be a federal law mandating that suspicion of elder abuse be reported and that all claims of elder abuse be investigated.

Step 4: Visualization

- Take the audience beyond your solution and help them visualize the positive results of implementing it or the negative consequences of not.
- Elderly people should not have to live in fear during their golden years. A mandatory reporting law for elderly abuse will help ensure that the voices of our elderly loved ones will be heard.

Step 5: Action

- Call your audience to action by giving them concrete steps to follow to engage in a particular action or to change a thought or behavior.
- I urge you to take action in two ways. First, raise awareness about this issue by talking to your own friends and family. Second, contact your representatives at the state and national level to let them know that elder abuse should be taken seriously and given the same level of importance as other forms of abuse. I brought cards with the contact information for our state and national representatives for this area. Please take one at the end of my speech. A short e-mail or phone call can help end the silence surrounding elder abuse.

11.5 Persuasive Reasoning and Fallacies

Persuasive speakers should be concerned with what strengthens and weakens an argument. Knowing different types of reasoning can help you put claims and evidence together in persuasive ways and help you evaluate the quality of arguments that you encounter. Further, being able to identify common fallacies of reasoning can help you be a more critical consumer of persuasive messages.

Reasoning

Reasoning refers to the process of making sense of things around us. In order to understand our experiences, draw conclusions from information, and present new ideas, we must use reasoning. We often reason without being aware of it, however, becoming more aware of how we think can empower us to be better producers and consumers of communicative messages. The three types of reasoning we will explore are inductive, deductive, and causal.

Inductive Reasoning

Inductive reasoning reaches conclusions through the citation of examples and is the most frequently used form of logical reasoning (Walter, 1966). While introductory speakers are initially attracted to inductive reasoning because it seems easy, it can be difficult to employ well. Inductive reasoning, unlike deductive reasoning, does not result in true or false conclusions. Instead, since conclusions are generalized based on observations or examples, conclusions are "more likely" or "less likely." Despite the fact that this type of reasoning is not definitive, it can still be valid and persuasive.

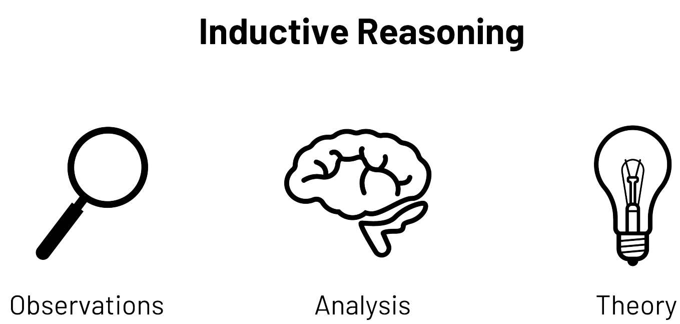

Figure 11.2: Inductive reasoning.

Some arguments based on inductive reasoning will be more cogent, or convincing and relevant, than others. For example, inductive reasoning can be weak when claims are made too generally. An argument that fraternities should be abolished from campus because they contribute to underage drinking and do not uphold high academic standards could be countered by providing examples of fraternities that sponsor alcohol education programming for the campus and have members that have excelled academically (Walter, 1966). In this case, one overly general claim is countered by another general claim, and both of them have some merit. It would be more effective to present a series of facts and reasons and then share the conclusion or generalization that you have reached from them.

You can see inductive reasoning used in the following speech excerpt from President George W. Bush's address to the nation on the evening of September 11, 2001. Notice how he lists a series of events from the day, which builds to his conclusion that the terrorist attacks failed in their attempt to shake the foundation of America.

"Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices: secretaries, business men and women, military and federal workers, moms and dads, friends, and neighbors. Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror. The pictures of airplanes flying into building, fires burning, huge—huge structures collapsing have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong. A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America."

If a speaker is able to provide examples that are concrete, proxemic, and relevant to the audience, as Bush did in this example, audience members are prompted to think of additional examples that connect to their own lives. Inductive reasoning can be useful when an audience disagrees with your proposition. As you present logically connected examples as evidence that build to a conclusion, the audience may be persuaded by your evidence before they realize that the coming conclusion will counter what they previously thought. This also sets up cognitive dissonance, which is a persuasive strategy we will discuss later.

Reasoning by analogy is a type of inductive reasoning that argues that what is true in one set of circumstances will be true in another (Walter, 1966). Reasoning by analogy has been criticized and questioned by logicians, since two sets of circumstances are never exactly the same. While this is true, our goal when using reasoning by analogy in persuasive speaking is not to create absolutely certain conclusions but to cite cases and supporting evidence that can influence an audience. For example, let's say you are trying to persuade a university to adopt an alcohol education program by citing the program's success at other institutions. Since two universities are never exactly the same, the argument cannot be airtight. To better support this argument, you could first show that the program was actually successful using various types of supporting material such as statistics from campus offices and testimony from students and staff. Second, you could show how the cases relate by highlighting similarities in the campus setting, culture, demographics, and previous mission. Since you cannot argue that the schools are similar in all ways, choose to highlight significant similarities. In addition, it is better to acknowledge significant limitations of the analogy and provide additional supporting material to address them than it is to ignore or hide such limitations.

So how do we evaluate inductive reasoning? When inductive reasoning is used to test scientific arguments, there is rigorous testing and high standards that must be met for a conclusion to be considered valid. Inductive reasoning in persuasive speaking is employed differently. A speaker cannot cite every example that exists to build to a conclusion, so to evaluate inductive reasoning you must examine the examples that are cited in ways other than quantity. First, the examples should be sufficient, meaning that enough are cited to support the conclusion. If not, you risk committing the hasty generalization fallacy. A speaker can expect that the audience will be able to think of some examples as well, so there is no set number on how many examples is sufficient. If the audience is familiar with the topic, then fewer examples are probably sufficient, while more may be needed for unfamiliar topics. A speaker can make his or her use of reasoning by example more powerful by showing that the examples correspond to the average case, which may require additional supporting evidence in the form of statistics. Arguing that teacher salaries should be increased by providing an example of a teacher who works side jobs and pays for his or her own school supplies could be effectively supported by showing that this teacher's salary corresponds to the national average (Walter, 1966).

Second, the examples should be typical, meaning they were not cherry-picked to match the point being argued. A speaker who argues to defund the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) because the organization supports art that is "pornographic and offensive" may cite five examples of grants given for projects that caused such controversy. Failing to mention that these examples were pulled from the more than 128,000 grants issued by the NEA would be an inappropriate use of inductive reasoning since the examples are not sufficient or typical enough to warrant the argument. Another way to support inductive arguments is to show that the examples are a fair sample, meaning they are representative of the larger whole. Arguing that college athletes should not receive scholarships because they do not have the scholastic merit of other students and have less academic achievement could be supported by sharing several examples. However, if those examples were not representative, then they are biased, and the reasoning faulty. A speaker would need to show that the athletes used in the example are representative, in terms of their race, gender, sport, and background, of the population of athletes at the university.

Deductive Reasoning

Deductive reasoning derives specifics from what is already known. It was the preferred form of reasoning used by ancient rhetoricians like Aristotle to make logical arguments (Cooper & Nothstine, 1996).

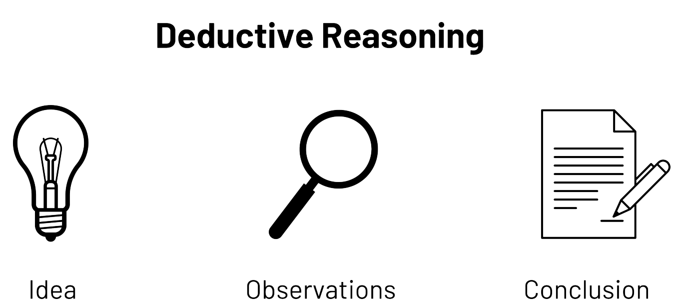

Figure 11.3: Deductive reasoning.

A syllogism is an example of deductive reasoning that is commonly used when teaching logic. A **syllogism** is an example of deductive reasoning in which a conclusion is supported by major and minor premises. The conclusion of a valid argument can be deduced from the major and minor premises. A commonly used example of a syllogism is "All humans are mortal. Socrates is a human. Socrates is mortal." In this case, the conclusion, "Socrates is mortal," is derived from the major premise, "All humans are mortal," and the minor premise, "Socrates is a human." In some cases, the major and minor premises of a syllogism may be taken for granted as true. In the previous example, the major premise is presumed true because we have no knowledge of an immortal person to disprove the statement. The minor premise is presumed true because Socrates looks and acts like other individuals we know to be human. Detectives or scientists using such logic would want to test their conclusion. We could test our conclusion by stabbing Socrates to see if he dies, but since the logic of the syllogism is sound, it may be better to cut Socrates a break and deem the argument valid. Since most arguments are more sophisticated than the previous example, speakers need to support their premises with research and evidence to establish their validity before deducing their conclusion.

A syllogism can lead to incorrect conclusions if one of the premises is not true, as in the following example:

- All presidents have lived in the White House. (Major premise)
- George Washington was president. (Minor premise)
- George Washington lived in the White House. (Conclusion)

In the previous example, the major premise was untrue, since John Adams, our second president, was the first president to live in the White House. This causes the conclusion to be false. A syllogism can also exhibit faulty logic even if the premises are both true but are unrelated, as in the following example:

- Penguins are black and white. (Major premise)
- Some old television shows are black and white. (Minor premise)
- Some penguins are old television shows. (Conclusion)

Causal Reasoning

Causal reasoning argues to establish a relationship between a cause and an effect. When speakers attempt to argue for a particular course of action based on potential positive or negative consequences that may result, they are using causal reasoning. Such reasoning is evident in the following example: Eating more local foods will boost the local economy and make you healthier. The "if/then" relationship that is set up in causal reasoning can be persuasive, but the reasoning is not always sound. Rather than establishing a true cause-effect relationship, speakers more often set up a correlation, which means there is a relationship between two things but there are other contextual influences.

To use causal reasoning effectively and ethically, speakers should avoid claiming a direct relationship between a cause and an effect when such a connection cannot be proven. Instead of arguing "x caused y," it is more accurate for a speaker to say "x influenced y." Causal thinking is often used when looking to blame something or someone, as can be seen in the following example: It's the president's fault that the economy has not recovered more. While such a statement may garner a speaker some political capital, it is not based on solid reasoning.

Economic and political processes are too complex to distill to such a simple cause-effect relationship. A speaker would need to use more solid reasoning, perhaps inductive reasoning through examples, to build up enough evidence to support that a correlation exists and a causal relationship is likely. When using causal reasoning, present evidence that shows the following: (1) the cause occurred before the effect, (2) the cause led to the effect, and (3) it is unlikely that other causes produced the effect.

11.6 Persuasive Strategies

Do you think you are easily persuaded? If you are like most people, you are not swayed easily to change your mind about something. Persuasion is difficult because changing views often makes people feel like they were either not informed or ill informed, which also means they have to admit they were wrong about something. We will learn about nine persuasive strategies that you can use to influence more effectively audience members' beliefs, attitudes, and values. They are ethos, logos, pathos, positive motivation, negative motivation, cognitive dissonance, appeal to safety needs, appeal to social needs, and appeal to self-esteem needs.

Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

Ethos, logos, and pathos were Aristotle's three forms of rhetorical proof, meaning they were primary to his theories of persuasion. **Ethos** refers to the credibility of a speaker and includes three dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism. The two most researched dimensions of credibility are competence and trustworthiness (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003).

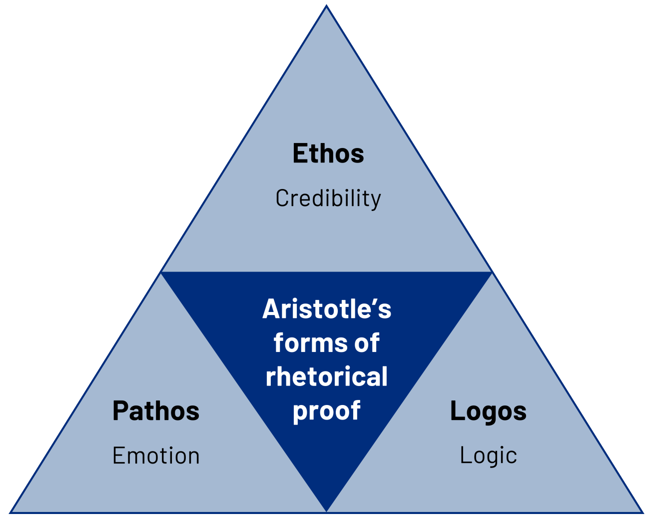

Figure 11.4: Aristotle's modes of persuassion.

Competence refers to the perception of a speaker's expertise in relation to the topic being discussed. A speaker can enhance their perceived competence by presenting a speech based in solid research and that is well organized and practiced. Competent speakers must know the content of their speech and be able to deliver that content. **Trustworthiness** refers to the degree that audience members perceive a speaker to be presenting accurate, credible information in a non-manipulative way. Perceptions of trustworthiness come from the content of the speech and the personality of the speaker. In terms of content, trustworthy speakers consider the audience throughout the speech-making process, present information in a balanced way, do not coerce the audience, cite credible sources, and follow the general principles of communication ethics. In terms of personality, trustworthy speakers are also friendly and warm (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003).

Dynamism refers to the degree to which audience members perceive a speaker to be outgoing and animated (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). Two components of dynamism are charisma and energy. Charisma refers to a mixture of abstract and concrete qualities that make a speaker attractive to an audience. Charismatic people usually know they are charismatic because they have been told that in their lives, and people have been attracted to them.

Unfortunately, charisma is difficult to develop intentionally, and some people seem to have a naturally charismatic personality, while others do not. Even though not everyone can embody the charismatic aspect of dynamism, the other component of dynamism, energy, is something that everyone can fathom. Communicating enthusiasm for your topic and audience by presenting relevant content and using engaging delivery strategies such as vocal variety and eye contact can increase your dynamism.

Logos refers to the reasoning or logic of an argument. The presence of fallacies would obviously undermine a speaker's appeal to logos. Speakers employ logos by presenting credible information as supporting material and verbally citing their sources during their speech. Using the guidelines from our earlier discussion of reasoning will also help a speaker create a rational appeal. Research shows that messages are more persuasive when arguments and their warrants are made explicit (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). Carefully choosing supporting material that is verifiable, specific, and unbiased can help a speaker appeal to logos. Speakers can also appeal to logos by citing personal experience and providing the credentials and/or qualifications of sources of information (Cooper & Nothstine, 1996). Presenting a rational and logical argument is important, but speakers can be more effective if they bring in and refute counterarguments. The most effective persuasive messages are those that present two sides of an argument and refute the opposing side, followed by single argument messages, followed by messages that present counterarguments but do not refute them (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). In short, by clearly showing an audience why one position is superior to another, speakers do not leave an audience to fill in the blanks of an argument, which could diminish the persuasive opportunity.

Pathos refers to emotional appeals. Aristotle was suspicious of too much emotional appeal, yet this appears to have become more acceptable in public speaking. Stirring emotions in an audience is a way to get them involved in the speech, and involvement can create more opportunities for persuasion and action. Reading in the paper that a house was burglarized may get your attention but think about how different your reaction would be if you found out it was your own home. Intentionally stirring someone's emotions to get them involved in a message that has little substance would be unethical. Yet such spellbinding speakers have taken advantage of people's emotions to get them to support causes, buy products, or engage in behaviors that they might not otherwise, if given the chance to see the faulty logic of a message.

Effective speakers should use emotional appeals that are also logically convincing, since audiences may be suspicious of a speech that is solely based on emotion. Emotional appeals are effective when you are trying to influence a behavior or you want your audience to take immediate action (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). Emotions lose their persuasive effect more quickly than other types of persuasive appeals. Since emotions are often reactionary, they fade relatively quickly when a person is removed from the provoking situation (Fletcher, 2001).

Emotional appeals are also difficult for some because they require honed delivery skills and the ability to use words powerfully and dramatically. The ability to use vocal variety, cadence, and repetition to rouse an audience's emotion is not easily attained. Think of how stirring Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was due to his ability to evoke the emotions of the audience. Dr. King used powerful and creative language in conjunction with his vocalics to deliver one of the most famous speeches in our history. Using concrete and descriptive examples can paint a picture in your audience member's minds. Speakers can also use literal images, displayed using visual aids, to appeal to pathos.

Speakers should strive to appeal to ethos, logos, and pathos within a speech. A speech built primarily on ethos might lead an audience to think that a speaker is full of himself or herself. A speech full of facts and statistics appealing to logos would result in information overload.

Speakers who rely primarily on appeals to pathos may be seen as overly passionate, biased, or unable to see other viewpoints.

Dissonance, Motivation, and Needs

Aristotle's three rhetorical proofs—ethos, logos, and pathos—have been employed as persuasive strategies for thousands of years. More recently, persuasive strategies have been identified based on theories and evidence related to human psychology. Although based in psychology, such persuasive strategies are regularly employed and researched in communication due to their role in advertising, marketing, politics, and interpersonal relationships. The psychologically based persuasive appeals we will discuss are cognitive dissonance, positive and negative motivation, and appeals to needs.

Cognitive Dissonance

If you have studied music, you probably know what dissonance is. Some notes, when played together on a piano, produce a sound that is pleasing to our ears. When dissonant combinations of notes are played, we react by wincing or cringing because the sound is unpleasant to our ears. So dissonance is that unpleasant feeling we get when two sounds clash. The same principle applies to **cognitive dissonance**, which refers to the mental discomfort that results when new information clashes with or contradicts currently held beliefs, attitudes, or values. Using cognitive dissonance as a persuasive strategy relies on three assumptions: (1) people have a need for consistency in their thinking; (2) when inconsistency exists, people experience psychological discomfort; and (3) this discomfort motivates people to address the inconsistency to restore balance (Stiff & Mongeau, 2003). In short, when new information clashes with previously held information, an unpleasantness results, and we have to try to reconcile the difference.

Cognitive dissonance is not a single-shot persuasive strategy. As we have learned, people are resistant to change and not easy to persuade. While we might think that exposure to conflicting information would lead a rational person to change his or her mind, humans are not as rational as we think.

There are many different mental and logical acrobatics that people do to get themselves out of dissonance. Some frequently used strategies to resolve cognitive dissonance include discrediting the speaker or source of information, viewing yourself as an exception, seeking selective information that supports your originally held belief, or intentionally avoiding or ignoring sources of cognitive dissonance (Cooper & Nothstine, 1996). As you can see, none of those actually results in a person modifying their thinking, which means persuasive speech goals are not met. Of course, people cannot avoid dissonant information forever, so multiple attempts at creating cognitive dissonance can actually result in thought or behavior modification.

Positive and Negative Motivation

Positive and negative motivation are common persuasive strategies used by teachers, parents, and public speakers. Rewards can be used for positive motivation, and the threat of punishment or negative consequences can be used for negative motivation. We have already learned the importance of motivating an audience to listen to your message by making your content relevant and showing how it relates to their lives. We also learned an organizational pattern based on theories of motivation: Monroe's Motivated Sequence. When using **positive motivation**, speakers implicitly or explicitly convey to the audience that listening to their message or following their advice will lead to positive results. Conversely, **negative motivation** implies or states that failure to follow a speaker's advice will result in negative consequences. Positive and negative motivation as persuasive strategies match well with appeals to needs.

Appeals to Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that there are several layers of needs that human beings pursue. They include physiological, safety, social, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). Since these needs are fundamental to human survival and happiness, tapping into needs is a common persuasive strategy. Appeals to needs are often paired with positive or negative motivation, which can increase the persuasiveness of the message.

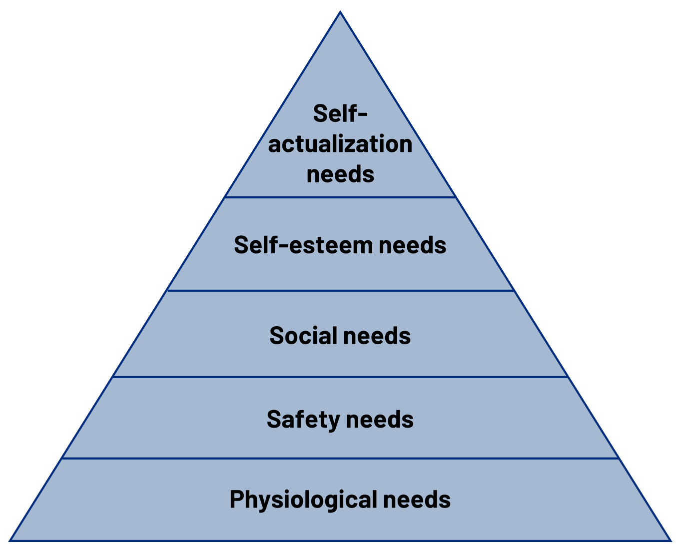

Figure 11.5: Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Physiological needs form the base of the hierarchy of needs. The closer the needs are to the base, the more important they are for human survival. Speakers do not appeal to physiological needs. After all, a person who does not have food, air, or water is not very likely to want to engage in persuasion, and it would not be ethical to deny or promise these things to someone for persuasive gain. Some speakers attempt to appeal to self-actualization needs, but I argue that this is difficult to do ethically. Self-actualization refers to our need to achieve our highest potential, and these needs are much more intrapersonal than the others are. We achieve our highest potential through things that are individual to us, and these are often things that we protect from outsiders. Some examples include pursuing higher education and intellectual fulfillment, pursuing art or music, or pursuing religious or spiritual fulfillment. These are often things we do by ourselves and for ourselves, so I like to think of this as sacred ground that should be left alone. Speakers are more likely to be successful at focusing on safety, social, and self-esteem needs.

We satisfy our safety needs when we work to preserve our safety and the safety of our loved ones. Speakers can combine appeals to safety with positive motivation by presenting information that will result in increased safety and security. Combining safety needs and negative motivation, a speaker may convey that audience members' safety and security will be put at risk if the speaker's message is not followed. Combining negative motivation and safety needs depends on using some degree of fear as a motivator. Think of how the insurance industry relies on appeals to safety needs for their business. While this is not necessarily a bad strategy, it can be done more or less ethically.

Our **social needs** relate to our desire to belong to supportive and caring groups. We meet social needs through interpersonal relationships ranging from acquaintances to intimate partnerships. We also become part of interest groups or social or political groups that help create our sense of identity. The existence and power of peer pressure is a testament to the motivating power of social needs. People go to great lengths and sometimes make poor decisions they later regret to be a part of the "in-group." Advertisers often rely on creating a sense of exclusivity to appeal to people's social needs. Positive and negative motivation can be combined with social appeals. Positive motivation is present in messages that promise the receiver "in-group" status or belonging, and negative motivation can be seen in messages that persuade by saying, "Don't be left out." Although these arguments may rely on the bandwagon fallacy to varying degrees, they draw out insecurities people have about being in the "out-group."

We all have a need to think well of ourselves and have others think well of us, which ties to our **self-esteem needs**. Messages that combine appeals to self-esteem needs and positive motivation often promise increases in respect and status. A financial planner may persuade by inviting a receiver to imagine prosperity that will result from accepting his or her message. A publicly supported radio station may persuade listeners to donate money to the station by highlighting a potential contribution to society. The health and beauty industries may persuade consumers to buy their products by promising increased attractiveness. While it may seem shallow to entertain such ego needs, they are an important part of our psychological makeup. Unfortunately, some sources of persuasive messages are more concerned with their own gain than the well-being of others and may take advantage of people's insecurities in order to advance their persuasive message. Instead, ethical speakers should use appeals to self-esteem that focus on prosperity, contribution, and attractiveness in ways that empower listeners.

11.7 Sample Persuasive Speech

Title: Education behind Bars Is the Key to Rehabilitation

General purpose: To persuade

Specific purpose: By the end of my speech, my audience will believe that prisoners should have the right to an education.

Thesis statement: There should be education in all prisons, because denying prisoners an education has negative consequences for the prisoner and society, while providing them with an education provides benefits for the prisoner and society.

Introduction

Attention getter: "We must accept the reality that to confine offenders behind walls without trying to change them is an expensive folly with short-term benefits—winning battles while losing the war." Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger spoke these words more than thirty years ago, and they support my argument today that prisoners should have access to education.

Introduction of topic: While we value education as an important part of our society, we do not value it equally for all. Many people do not believe that prisoners should have access to an education, but I believe they do.

Credibility and relevance: While researching this topic, my eyes were opened up to how much an education can truly affect a prisoner, and given my desire to be a teacher, I am invested in preserving the right to learn for everyone, even if they are behind bars. While I know from our audience analysis activity that some of you do not agree with me, you never know when this issue may hit close to home. Someday, someone you love might make a mistake in their life and end up in prison, and while they are there, I know you all would want them to receive an education so that when they get out, they will be better prepared to contribute to society.

Preview: Today, I invite you listen with an open mind as I discuss the need for prisoner education, a curriculum that will satisfy that need, and some benefits of prisoner education.

Transition: First, I will explain why prisoners need access to education.

Body

1. According to a 2012 article in the journal *Corrections Today* on correctional education programs, most states have experienced an increase in incarceration rates and budgetary constraints over the past ten years, which has led many to examine best practices for reducing prison populations.

    a. In that same article, criminologist and former research director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons states that providing correctional education is one of the most productive and important reentry services that our prisons offer.

    b. His claim is supported by data collected directly from prisoners, 94 percent of whom identify education as a personal reentry need—ranking it above other needs such as financial assistance, housing, or employment.

    c. Despite the fact that this need is clearly documented, funding for adult and vocational education in correctional education has decreased.

        1. Many prisoners have levels of educational attainment that are far below those in the general population.

        2. According to statistics from 2010, as cited in the *Corrections Today* article, approximately 40 percent of state prison inmates did not complete high school, as compared to 19 percent of the general population.

        3. Additionally, while about 48 percent of the public have taken college classes, only about 11 percent of state prisoners have.

    d. At the skill level, research from the United Kingdom, cited in the 2003 article from *Studies in the Education of Adults* titled "Learning behind Bars: Time to Liberate Prison Education," rates of illiteracy are much higher among the prison population than the general population, and there is a link between poor reading skills and social exclusion that may lead people to antisocial behavior.

1. Prisoner education is also needed to break a cycle of negativity and stigma to which many prisoners have grown accustomed.

2. The article from *Studies in the Education of Adults* that I just cited states that prisoners are often treated as objects or subjected to objectifying labels like "*addict*, *sexual offender*, and *deviant*."

3. While these labels may be accurate in many cases, they do not do much to move the prisoner toward rehabilitation.

4. The label *student*, however, has the potential to do so because it has positive associations and can empower the prisoner to make better choices to enhance his or her confidence and self-worth.

Transition: Now that I have established the need for prisoner education, let's examine how we can meet that need.

2. In order to meet the need for prisoner education that I have just explained, it is important to have a curriculum that is varied and tailored to various prisoner populations and needs.

a. The article from *Corrections Today* notes that education is offered to varying degrees in most US prisons, but its presence is often debated and comes under increased scrutiny during times of budgetary stress.

b. Some states have implemented programs that require inmates to attend school for a certain amount of time if they do not meet minimum standards for skills such as reading or math.

c. While these are useful programs, prisoner education should not be limited to or focused on those with the least amount of skills.

d. The article notes that even prisoners who have attended or even graduated from college may benefit from education, as they can pursue specialized courses or certifications.

e. Based on my research, I would propose that the prison curriculum have four tiers: one that addresses basic skills that prisoners may lack, one that prepares prisoners for a GED, one that prepares prisoners for college-level work, and one that focuses on life and social skills.

1. The first tier of the education program should focus on remediation and basic skills, which is the most common form of prisoner education as noted by Foley and

Gao in their 2004 article from the *Journal of Correctional Education* that studied educational practices at several institutions.

a. These courses will teach prisoners basic reading, writing, and math skills that may be lacking.

b. Since there is a stigma associated with a lack of these basic skills, early instruction should be one-one-one or in small groups.

2. The second tier should prepare prisoners who have not completed the equivalent of high school to progress on to a curriculum modeled after that of most high schools, which will prepare them for a GED.

3. The third tier should include a curriculum based on the general education learning goals found at most colleges and universities and/or vocational training.

a. Basic general education goals include speaking, writing, listening, reading, and math.

b. Once these general education requirements have been met, prisoners should be able to pursue specialized vocational training or upper-level college courses in a major of study, which may need to be taken online through distance learning, since instructors may not be available to come to the actual prisons to teach.

4. The fourth tier includes training in social and life skills that most people learn through family and peer connections, which many prisoners may not have had.

a. Some population-specific areas of study that would not be covered in a typical classroom include drug treatment and anger management.

b. Life skills such as budgeting, money management, and healthy living can increase confidence.

c. Classes that focus on social skills, parenting, or relational communication can also improve communication skills and relational satisfaction; for example, workshops teaching parenting skills have been piloted to give fathers the skills needed to communicate effectively with their children, which can increase feelings of self-worth.

f. According to a 2007 article by Behan in the *Journal of Correctional Education*, prisons should also have extracurricular programs that enhance the educational experience.

1. Under the supervision of faculty and/or staff, prisoners could be given the task of organizing an outside speaker to come to the prison or put together a workshop.

2. Students could also organize a debate against students on the outside, which could allow the prisoners to interact (face-to-face or virtually) with other students and allow them to be recognized for their academic abilities.

3. Even within the prison, debates, trivia contests, paper contests, or speech contests could be organized between prisoners or between prisoners and prison staff as a means of healthy competition.

4. Finally, prisoners who are successful students should be recognized and put into peer-mentoring roles, because, as Behan states in the article, "a prisoner who…has had an inspirational learning experience acts as a more positive advocate for the school than any [other method]."

Transition: The model for prisoner education that I have just outlined will have many benefits.

3. Educating prisoners can benefit inmates, those who work in prisons, and society.

a. The article I just cited from the *Journal of Correctional Education* states that the self-reflection and critical thinking that are fostered in an educational setting can help prisoners reflect on how their actions affected them, their victims, and/or their communities, which may increase self-awareness and help them better reconnect with a civil society and reestablish stronger community bonds.

1. The *Corrections Today* article I cited earlier notes that a federally funded three-state survey provided the strongest evidence to date that prisoner education reduces the recidivism rate and increases public safety.

2. The *Corrections Today* article also notes that prisoners who completed a GED reoffended at a rate 20 percent lower than the general prison population, and those that completed a college degree reoffended at a rate 44 percent lower than the general prison population.

b. So why does prisoner education help reduce recidivism rates?

1. Simply put, according to the article in the *Studies in the Education of Adults* I cited earlier, the skills gained through good prison education programs make released prisoners more desirable employees, which increases their wages and helps remove them from a negative cycles of stigma and poverty that led many of them to crime in the first place.

2. Further, the ability to maintain consistent employment has been shown to reduce the rate of reoffending.

3. Education does not just improve the lives of the prisoners; it also positively affects the people who work in prisons.

c. An entry on eHow.com by Kinney about the benefits of prisoners getting GEDs notes that a successful educational program in a prison can create a more humane environment that will positively affect the officers and staff as well.

1. Such programs also allow prisoners to do more productive things with their time, which lessens violent and destructive behavior and makes prison workers' jobs safer.

2. Prisoner education can also save cash-strapped states money.

3. Giving prisoners time-off-sentence credits for educational attainment can help reduce the prison population, as eligible inmates are released earlier because of their educational successes.

4. As noted by the *Corrections Today* article, during the 2008–9 school year the credits earned by prisoners in the Indiana system led to more than $68 million dollars in avoided costs.

Conclusion

Transition to conclusion and summary of importance: In closing, it is easy to see how beneficial a good education can be to a prisoner. Education may be something the average teenager or adult takes for granted, but for a prisoner it could be the start of a new life.

Review of main points: There is a clear need for prisoner education that can be met with a sound curriculum that will benefit prisoners, those who work in prisons, and society.

Closing statement: While education in prisons is still a controversial topic, I hope you all agree with me and Supreme Court Justice Burger, whose words opened this speech, when we say that locking a criminal away may offer a short-term solution in that it gets the criminal out of regular society, but it doesn't better the prisoner and it doesn't better us in the long run as a society.

References

Figures

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Figure 11.2: Inductive reasoning. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0. Includes Lightbulb by Maxim Kulikov from NounProject, Magnifying Glass by Pedro Santos from NounProject, and Brain by Bernar Novalyi from NounProject (all Noun Project license).

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Figure 11.4: Aristotle's modes of persuassion. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 11.5: Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Section 11. 1-11.4

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12.

SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

Introduction

When you think of small groups, you probably think of the much dreaded "group assignment" that you have endured in high school and college. You are less likely to think of the numerous other groups to which you belong that bring more positive experiences, such as your family and friendship groups or shared-interest groups. Group communication scholars are so aware of this common negative sentiment toward group communication that they coined the term *grouphate* to describe it (Myers & Goodboy, 2005). Small groups, however, are not just entities meant to torture students; they have served a central purpose in human history and evolution. Groups make it easier for us to complete a wide variety of tasks; help us establish meaningful social bonds; and help us create, maintain, and change our sense of self (Hargie, 2011).

Negative group experiences are often exacerbated by a lack of knowledge about group communication processes. We are just expected to know how to work in groups without much instruction or practice. This lack of knowledge about group communication can lead to negative group interactions, which creates a negative cycle that perpetuates further negative experiences. Fortunately, as with other areas of communication, instruction in group communication can improve people's skills and increase people's satisfaction with their group experiences.

12.1 Understanding Small Groups

Most of the communication skills discussed in this book are directed toward dyadic communication, meaning that they are applied in two-person interactions. While many of these skills can be transferred to and used in small group contexts, the more complex nature of group interaction necessitates some adaptation and some additional skills. **Small group communication** refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity (Evans, 2019). In this section, we will learn about the characteristics, functions, and types of small groups.

Characteristics of Small Groups

Different groups have different characteristics, serve different purposes, and can lead to positive, neutral, or negative experiences. While our interpersonal relationships primarily focus on relationship building, small groups usually focus on some sort of task completion or goal accomplishment (Evans, 2019). A college learning community focused on math and science, a campaign team for a state senator, and a group of local organic farmers are examples of small groups that would all have a different size, structure, identity, and interaction pattern.

Structure of Small Groups

Internal and external influences affect a group's structure. In terms of internal influences, member characteristics play a role in initial group formation. For instance, a person who is well informed about the group's task and/ or highly motivated as a group member may emerge as a leader and set into motion internal decision-making processes, such as recruiting new members or assigning group roles that affect the structure of a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Different members will also gravitate toward different roles within the group and will advocate for certain procedures and courses of action over others. External factors such as group size, task, and resources also affect group structure. Some groups will have more control over these external factors through decision making than others.Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections (Evans, 2019). In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. This type of formal network is especially important in groups that have to report to external stakeholders. These external stakeholders may influence the group's formal network, leaving the group little or no control over its structure. Conversely, groups have more control over their informal networks, which are connections among individuals within the group and among group members and people outside of the group that are not official. For example, a group member's friend or relative may be able to secure a space to hold a fundraiser at a discounted rate, which helps the group achieve its task. Both types of networks are important because they may help facilitate information exchange within a group and extend a group's reach in order to access other resources.

Size and structure also affect communication within a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. Reachability refers to the way in which one member is or is not connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in figure 12.1 shows that each group member is connected to two other members. This can make coordination easy when only one or two people need to be brought in for a decision. In this case, Erik and Callie are very reachable by Winston, who could easily coordinate with them. However, if Winston needed to coordinate with Bill or Stephanie, he would have to wait on Erik or Callie to reach that person, which could create delays. The circle can be a good structure for groups who are passing along a task and in which each member is expected to build progressively on the others' work. A group of scholars coauthoring a research paper may work in such a manner, with each person adding to the paper and then passing it on to the next person in the circle. In this case, they can ask the previous person questions and write with the next person's area of expertise in mind.

The "Wheel" group structure in the figure below shows an alternative organization pattern. In this structure, Tara is very reachable by all members of the group. This can be a useful structure when Tara is the person with the most expertise in the task or the leader who needs to review and approve work at each step before it is passed along to other group members. However, Phillip and Shadow, for example, would not likely work together without Tara being involved.

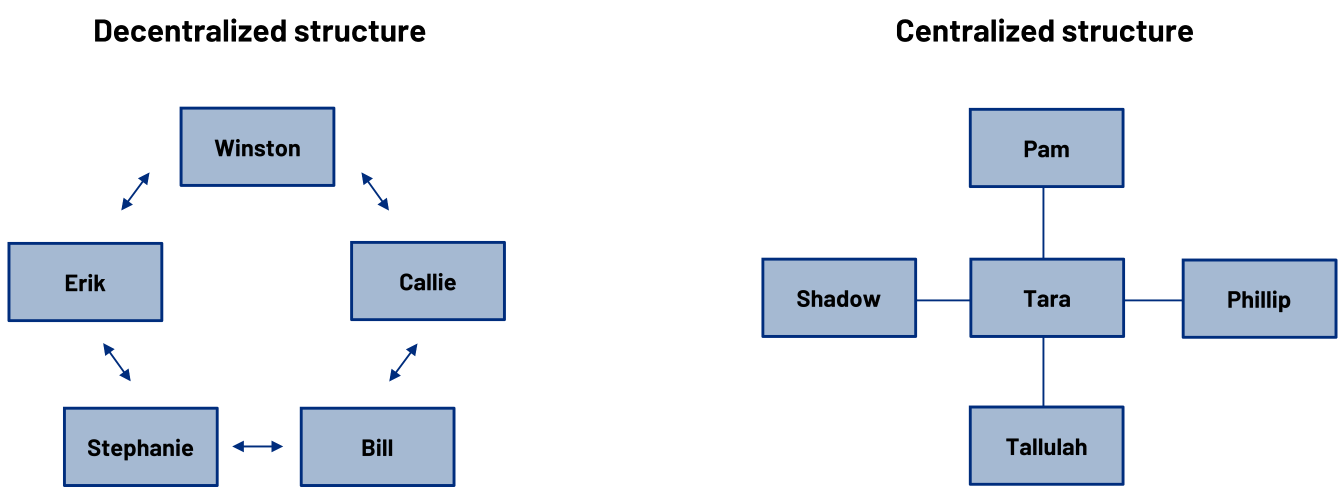

Figure 12.1: Small group structures.

Looking at the group structures, we can make some assumptions about the communication that takes place in them. The wheel is an example of a centralized structure, while the circle is decentralized. Research has shown that centralized groups are better than decentralized groups in terms of speed and efficiency (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Nevertheless, decentralized groups are more effective at solving complex problems. In centralized groups like the wheel, the person with the most connections, person C, is also more likely to be the leader of the group or at least have more status among group members, largely because that person has a broad perspective of what is going on in the group. The most central person can also act as a gatekeeper. Since this person has access to the most information, which is usually a sign of leadership or status, he or she could consciously decide to limit the flow of information.

But in complex tasks, that person could become overwhelmed by the burden of processing and sharing information with all the other group members. The circle structure is more likely to emerge in groups where collaboration is the goal and a specific task and course of action is not required under time constraints. While the person who initiated the group or has the most expertise in regards to the task may emerge as a leader in a decentralized group, the equal access to information lessens the hierarchy and potential for gatekeeping that is present in the more centralized groups.

Interdependence

Small groups exhibit **interdependence**, meaning they share a common purpose and a common fate (Bonito & Staggs, 2018). If the actions of one or two group members lead to a group deviating from or not achieving their purpose, then all members of the group are affected. Conversely, if the actions of only a few of the group members lead to success, then all members of the group benefit. This is a major contributor to many college students' dislike of group assignments, because they feel a loss of control and independence that they have when they complete an assignment alone.

This concern is valid in that their grades might suffer because of the negative actions of someone else or their hard work may go to benefit the group member who just skated by. Group meeting attendance is a clear example of the interdependent nature of group interaction. Many of us have arrived at a group meeting only to find half of the members present. In some cases, the group members who show up have to leave and reschedule because they cannot accomplish their task without the other members present. Group members who attend meetings but withdraw or do not participate can also derail group progress. Although it can be frustrating to have your job, grade, or reputation partially dependent on the actions of others, the interdependent nature of groups can also lead to higher-quality performance and output, especially when group members are accountable for their actions.

Shared Identity

The shared identity of a group manifests in several ways. Groups may have official charters or mission and vision statements that lay out the identity of a group. For example, the Girl Scout mission states, "Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place" (Girl Scouts, 2012). The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds dynamism to the group as it looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

A key element of the formation of a shared identity within a group is the establishment of the in-group as opposed to the out-group (Greenaway, Wright, Willingham, Reynolds, & Haslam, 2015). The degree to which members share in the in-group identity varies from person to person and group to group. Even within a family, some members may not attend a reunion or get as excited about the matching t-shirts as others get. Shared identity also emerges as groups become cohesive, meaning they identify with and like the group's task and other group members. The presence of cohesion and a shared identity leads to a building of trust, which can also positively influence productivity and members' satisfaction.

Groups Meet Instrumental Needs

Groups have long served the instrumental needs of humans, helping with the most basic elements of survival since ancient humans first evolved (Wakefield, Sani, Madhok, Norbury, Dugard, Gabbanelli, Arnetoli, Beconcini, Botindari, Grifoni, Paoli, & Poggesi, 2017). Groups helped humans survive by providing security and protection through increased numbers and access to resources. Today, groups are rarely such a matter of life and death, but they still serve important instrumental functions. Labor unions, for example, pool efforts and resources to attain material security in the form of pay increases and health benefits for their members, which protects them by providing a stable and dependable livelihood. Some groups also meet our informational needs. Although they may not provide material resources, they enrich our knowledge or provide information that we can use to meet our own instrumental needs. Many groups provide referrals to resources or offer advice. For example, several consumer protection and advocacy groups have been formed to offer referrals for people who have been the victim of fraudulent business practices. Whether a group forms to provide services to members that they could not get otherwise, advocate for changes that will affect members' lives, or provide information, many groups meet some type of instrumental need.

Groups Meet Interpersonal Needs

Group membership meets interpersonal needs by giving us access to inclusion, control, and support. In terms of inclusion, people have a fundamental drive to be a part of a group and to create and maintain social bonds (Osborne, 2020). As we have learned, humans have always lived and worked in small groups. Family and friendship groups, shared-interest groups, and activity groups all provide us with a sense of belonging and being included in an in-group. People also join groups because they want to have some control over a decision-making process or to influence the outcome of a group. Being a part of a group allows people to share opinions and influence others. Conversely, some people join a group to be controlled, because they do not want to be the sole decision maker or leader and instead want to be given a role to follow.

Groups Meet Identity Needs

Our affiliations are building blocks for our identities, because group membership allows us to use reference groups for social comparison—in short, identifying us with some groups and characteristics and separating us from others. Some people join groups to be affiliated with people who share similar or desirable characteristics in terms of beliefs, attitudes, values, or cultural identities. For example, people may join the National Organization for Women because they want to affiliate with others who support women's rights or a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because they want to affiliate with African Americans, people concerned with civil rights, or a combination of the two. Group memberships vary in terms of how much they affect our identity, as some are more prominent than others at various times in our lives. While religious groups as a whole are too large to be considered small groups, the work that people do as a part of a religious community—as a lay leader, deacon, member of a prayer group, or committee—may have deep ties to a person's identity.

12.2 Types of Small Groups

Figure 12.2: Group projects are an example of a task-oriented small group.

There are many types of small groups, but the most common distinction made between types of small groups is that of task-oriented and relational-oriented groups (Hargie, 2011). **Task-oriented groups** are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). In such groups, like a committee or study group, interactions and decisions are primarily evaluated based on the quality of the final product or output. The three main types of tasks are production, discussion, and problem-solving tasks (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Groups faced with production tasks are asked to produce something tangible from their group interactions such as a report, design for a playground, musical performance, or fundraiser event. Groups faced with discussion tasks are asked to talk through something without trying to come up with a right or wrong answer. Examples of this type of group include a support group for people with HIV/AIDS, a book club, or a group for new fathers. Groups faced with problem-solving tasks have to devise a course of action to meet a specific need. These groups also usually include a production and discussion component, but the end goal is not necessarily a tangible product or a shared social reality through discussion. Instead, the end goal is a well-thought-out idea. Task-oriented groups require honed problem-solving skills to accomplish goals, and the structure of these groups is more rigid than that of relational-oriented groups.

Relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections and are more focused on quality interactions that contribute to the well-being of group members. Decision-making is directed at strengthening or repairing relationships rather than completing discrete tasks or debating specific ideas or courses of action. All groups include task and relational elements, so it is best to think of these orientations as two ends of a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive.

To more specifically look at the types of small groups that exist, we can examine why groups form. Some groups are formed based on interpersonal relationships. Our family and friends are considered **primary groups**, or long-lasting groups that are formed based on relationships and include significant others. We interact most frequently in these small groups. They form the basis of our society and our individual social realities. Kinship networks provide important support early in life and meet physiological and safety needs, which are essential for survival. They also meet higher-order needs such as social and self-esteem needs. When people do not interact with their biological family, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they can establish fictive kinship networks, which are composed of people who are not biologically related but fulfill family roles and help provide the same support.

We also interact in many **secondary groups**, which are characterized by less frequent face-to-face interactions, less emotional and relational communication, and more task-related communication than primary groups (Barker, 1991). While we are more likely to participate in secondary groups based on self-interest, our primary-group interactions are often more reciprocal or other oriented. For example, we may join groups because of a shared interest or need.

Groups formed based on shared interest include social groups and leisure groups such as a group of independent film buffs, science fiction fans, or bird watchers. Some groups form to meet the needs of individuals or of a particular group of people. Examples of groups that meet the needs of individuals include study groups or support groups like a weight loss group. These groups are focused on individual needs, even though they meet as a group, and they are also often discussion-oriented. Service groups, on the other hand, work to meet the needs of individuals but are task oriented. Service groups include Habitat for Humanity and Rotary Club chapters, among others. Still other groups form around a shared need, and their primary task is advocacy. For example, the Gay Men's Health Crisis is a group that was formed by a small group of eight people in the early 1980s to advocate for resources and support for the still relatively unknown disease that would later be known as AIDS. Similar groups form to advocate for everything from a stop sign at a neighborhood intersection to the end of human trafficking.

As we already learned, other groups are formed primarily to accomplish a task. **Teams** are task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). In professional and civic contexts, the word *team* has become popularized as a means of drawing on the positive connotations of the term—connotations such as "high-spirited," "cooperative," and "hardworking." Scholars who have spent years studying highly effective teams have identified several common factors related to their success. Successful teams have clear and inspiring shared goals, a results-driven structure, competent team members, a collaborative climate, high standards for performance, external support and recognition, and ethical and accountable leadership. (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005). Increasingly, small groups and teams are engaging in more virtual interaction. **Virtual groups** take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal. Some virtual groups may complete their task without ever being physically face-to-face.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Small Groups

As with anything, small groups have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of small groups include shared decision-making, shared resources, synergy, and exposure to diversity. It is within small groups that most of the decisions that guide our country, introduce local laws, and influence our family interactions are made. In a democratic society, participation in decision-making is a key part of citizenship. Groups also help in making decisions involving judgment calls that have ethical implications or the potential to affect people negatively. Individuals making such high-stakes decisions in a vacuum could have negative consequences given the lack of feedback, input, questioning, and proposals for alternatives that would come from group interaction. Group members also help expand our social networks, which provide access to more resources.

Synergy refers to the potential for gains in performance or heightened quality of interactions when complementary members or member characteristics are added to existing ones (Larson Jr., 2010). Because of synergy, the final group product can be better than what any individual could have produced alone. When I worked in housing and residence life, I helped coordinate a "World Cup Soccer Tournament" for the international students that lived in my residence hall. As a group, we created teams representing different countries around the world, made brackets for people to track progress and predict winners, got sponsors, gathered prizes, and ended up with a very successful event that would not have been possible without the synergy created by our collective group membership. The members of this group were also exposed to international diversity that enriched our experiences, which is also an advantage of group communication.

Participating in groups can also increase our exposure to diversity and broaden our perspectives. Although groups vary in the diversity of their members, we can strategically choose groups that expand our diversity, or we can unintentionally end up in a diverse group. When we participate in small groups, we expand our social networks, which increase the possibility to interact with people who have different cultural identities than ourselves. Since group members work together toward a common goal, shared identification with the task or group can give people with diverse backgrounds a sense of commonality that they might not have otherwise. Even when group members share cultural identities, the diversity of experience and opinion within a group can lead to broadened perspectives as alternative ideas are presented and opinions are challenged and defended.

There are also disadvantages to small group interaction. In some cases, one person can be just as or more effective than a group of people. Think about a situation in which a highly specialized skill or knowledge is needed to get something done. In this situation, one very knowledgeable person is probably a better fit for the task than a group of less knowledgeable people. Group interaction also has a tendency to slow down the decision-making process. Individuals connected through a hierarchy or chain of command often work better in situations where decisions must be made under time constraints. When group interaction does occur under time constraints, having one "point person" or leader who coordinates action and gives final approval or disapproval on ideas or suggestions for actions is best.

Group communication also presents interpersonal challenges. A common problem is coordinating and planning group meetings due to busy and conflicting schedules. Some people also have difficulty with the other-centeredness and self-sacrifice that some groups require. The interdependence of group members that we discussed earlier can also create some disadvantages. Group members may take advantage of the anonymity of a group and engage in **social loafing**, meaning they contribute less to the group than other members do or than they would if working alone (Karau & Williams, 1993). Social loafers expect that no one will notice their behaviors or that others will pick up their slack. It is this potential for social loafing that makes many students and professionals dread group work, especially those who have a tendency to cover for other group members to prevent the social loafer from diminishing the group's productivity or output.

12.3 Small Group Development

Small groups have to start somewhere. Even established groups go through changes as members come and go, as tasks are started and completed, and as relationships change. In this section, we will learn about the stages of group development, which are forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). As with most models of communication phenomena, although we order the stages and discuss them separately, they are not always experienced in a linear fashion. Additionally, some groups do not experience all five stages, may experience stages multiple times, or may experience more than one stage at a time.

Figure 12.3: Stages of group development.

Forming

During the **forming** stage, group members begin to reduce uncertainty associated with new relationships and/ or new tasks through initial interactions that lay the foundation for later group dynamics (Upwork Staff, 2021). Groups return to the forming stage as group members come and go over the life span of a group. Although there may not be as much uncertainty when one or two new people join a group as there is when a group first forms, groups spend some time in the forming stage every time group membership changes.

Early stages of role negotiation begin and members begin to determine goals for the group and establish rules and norms. Group cohesion also begins to form during this stage. **Group cohesion** refers to the commitment of members to the purpose of the group and the degree of attraction among individuals within the group (Hargie, 2011). The cohesion that begins in this stage sets the group on a trajectory influenced by group members' feelings about one another and their purpose or task. Groups with voluntary membership may exhibit high levels of optimism about what the group can accomplish. Although the optimism can be motivating, unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointment, making it important for group members to balance optimism with realism. Groups with assigned or mandatory membership may include members that carry some degree of resentment toward the group itself or the goals of the group. These members can start the group off on a negative trajectory that will lessen or make difficult group cohesiveness. Groups can still be successful if these members are balanced out by others who are more committed to and positive in regards to the group's purpose.

Many factors influence how the forming stage of group development plays out. The personalities of the individuals in the group, the skills that members bring, the resources available to the group, the group's size, and the group's charge all contribute to the creation of the early tone of and climate within a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). For example, personalities that are more dominant may take early leadership roles in the group that can affect subsequent decisions. Group members' diverse skill sets and access to resources can also influence the early stages of role differentiation. In terms of size, the bonding that begins in the forming stage becomes difficult when the number of people within the group prevents every person from having a one-on-one connection with every other member of the group. In addition, in larger groups, members that are more dominant tend to assert themselves as leaders and build smaller coalitions within the group, which can start the group on a trajectory toward more conflict during the upcoming storming stage (Ellis & Fisher, 1994).

Storming

During the **storming** stage of group development, conflict emerges as people begin to perform their various roles, have their ideas heard, and negotiate where they fit in the group's structure. The uncertainty present in the forming stage begins to give way as people begin to occupy specific roles and the purpose, rules, and norms of a group become clearer. Conflict develops when some group members are not satisfied with the role that they or others are playing or the decisions regarding the purpose or procedures of the group. For example, if a leader begins to emerge or is assigned during the forming stage, some members may feel that the leader is imposing his or her will on other members of the group. As we will learn in our section on group leadership, leaders should expect some degree of resentment from others who wanted to be the leader, have interpersonal conflicts with the leader, or just have general issues with being led.

Although the word *storming* and the concept of conflict have negative connotations, conflict can be positive and productive. Just as storms can replenish water supplies and make crops grow, storming can lead to group growth. While conflict is inevitable and should be experienced by every group, a group that is stuck at the storming stage will likely not have much success in completing its task or achieving its purpose. Influences from outside the group can also affect the conflict in the storming stage. Interpersonal conflicts that predate the formation of the group may distract the group from the more productive idea- or task-oriented conflict that can be healthy for the group and increase the quality of ideas, decision-making, and output.

Norming

During the **norming** stage of group development, the practices and expectations of the group are solidified, which leads to more stability, productivity, and cohesion within the group. Group norms are behaviors that become routine but are not explicitly taught or stated. In short, group norms help set the tone for what group members ought to do and how they ought to behave (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Many implicit norms are derived from social norms that people follow in their everyday life. Norms within the group about politeness, lateness, and communication patterns are typically similar to those in other contexts. Sometimes a norm needs to be challenged because it is not working for the group, which could lead a group back to the storming stage. Other times, group members challenge norms for no good reason, which can lead to punishment for the group member or create conflict within the group.

At this stage, there is a growing consensus among group members as to the roles that each person will play, the way group interactions will typically play out, and the direction of the group. Leaders that began to emerge have typically gained the support of other group members, and group identity begins to solidify. The group may now be recognizable by those on the outside, as slogans, branding, or patterns of interaction become associated with the group. This stage of group development is key for the smooth operation of the group. Norms bring a sense of predictability and stability that can allow a group to move on to the performing stage of group development. Norms can also bring with them conformity pressures that can be positive or negative. In general, people go along with a certain amount of pressure to conform out of a drive to avoid being abnormal. This is a natural part of our social interaction (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Too much pressure, however, can lead people to feel isolated and can create a negative group climate.

Explicit rules may also guide group interaction. Rules are explicitly stated guidelines for members and may refer to things like expected performance levels or output, attitudes, or dress codes. Rules may be communicated through verbal instructions, employee handbooks, membership policies, or codes of conduct (Hargie, 2011). Groups can even use procedures like Robert's Rules of Order to manage the flow of conversations and decision-making procedures. Group members can contest or subvert group rules just as they can norms. Violations of group rules, however, typically result in more explicit punishments than do violations of norms.

Performing

During the **performing** stage of group development, group members work relatively smoothly toward the completion of a task or achievement of a purpose (Upwork Staff, 2021). Although interactions in the performing stage are task focused, the relational aspects of group interaction provide an underlying support for the group members. Socialization outside of official group time can serve as a needed relief from the group's task. During task-related interactions, group members ideally begin to develop a synergy that results from the pooling of skills, ideas, experiences, and resources. Synergy is positive in that it can lead group members to exceed their expectations and perform better than they could individually. Glitches in the group's performance can lead the group back to previous stages of group development. Changes in membership, member roles, or norms can necessitate a revisiting of aspects of the forming, storming, or norming stages. One way to continue to build group cohesion during the performing stage is to set short-term attainable group goals. Accomplishing something, even if it is small, can boost group morale, which in turn boosts cohesion and productivity.

Adjourning

The **adjourning** stage of group development occurs when a group dissolves because it has completed its purpose or goal, membership is declining and support for the group no longer exists, or it is dissolved because of some other internal or external cause (Upwork Staff, 2021). Some groups may live on indefinitely and not experience the adjourning stage. Other groups may experience so much conflict in the storming stage that they skip norming and performing and dissolve before they can complete their task. For groups with high social cohesion, adjourning may be a difficult emotional experience. However, group members may continue interpersonal relationships that formed even after the group dissolves. In reality, many bonds, even those that were very close, end up fading after the group disbands. This does not mean the relationship was not genuine; interpersonal relationships often form because of proximity and shared task interaction. Once that force is gone, it becomes difficult to maintain friendships, and many fade away. For groups that had negative experiences, the adjourning stage may be welcomed.

To make the most out of the adjourning stage, it is important that there be some guided and purposeful reflection (Upwork Staff, 2021). Many groups celebrate their accomplishments with a party or ceremony. Even groups that had negative experiences or failed to achieve their purpose can still learn something through reflection in the adjourning stage that may be beneficial for future group interactions. Often, group members leave a group experience with new or more developed skills that can be usefully applied in future group or individual contexts. Even groups that are relational rather than task focused can increase members' interpersonal, listening, or empathetic skills or increase cultural knowledge and introduce new perspectives.

12.4 Small Group Dynamics

Any time a group of people comes together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions (Sidorenkov, 2013). The impressions we form about other people's likeability and the way we think about a group's purpose are affected by the climate within a group that is created by all members. Groups also develop norms, and new group members are socialized into a group's climate and norms just as we are socialized into larger social and cultural norms in our everyday life. The pressure to conform to norms becomes more powerful in group situations, and some groups take advantage of these forces with positive and negative results. Last, the potential for productive and destructive conflict increases as multiple individuals come together to accomplish a task or achieve a purpose. This section explores the dynamics mentioned previously in order to better prepare you for future group interactions.

Group Cohesion and Climate

When something is cohesive, it sticks together, and the cohesion within a group helps establish an overall group climate. **Group climate** refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. To understand better cohesion and climate, we can examine two types of cohesion: task and social.

Figure 12.4: Idyllic groups have an appropriate balance between task cohesion and social cohesion.

Task cohesion refers to the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group. **Social cohesion** refers to the attraction and liking among group members (Molloy, 2020). Ideally, groups would have an appropriate balance between these two types of cohesion relative to the group's purpose, with task-oriented groups having higher task cohesion and relational-oriented groups having higher social cohesion. Even the most task-focused groups need some degree of social cohesion, and vice versa, but the balance will be determined by the purpose of the group and the individual members. For example, a team of workers from the local car dealership may join a local summer softball league because they are good friends and love the game. They may end up beating the team of faculty members from the community college who joined the league just to get to know each other better and have an excuse to get together and drink beer in the afternoon. In this example, the players from the car dealership exhibit high social and task cohesion, while the faculty exhibit high social but low task cohesion.

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness (Hargie, 2011)

- set goals easily,
- exhibit a high commitment to achieving the purpose of the group,
- are more productive,
- experience fewer attendance issues,
- have group members who are willing to stick with the group during times of difficulty,
- have satisfied group members who identify with, promote, and defend the group,
- have members who are willing to listen to each other and offer support and constructive criticism, and

- experience less anger and tension.

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. Following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale (Marston & Hecht, 1988):

- **Participation.** Group members feel better when they feel included in discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages.** Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions within a group.
- **Feedback.** Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contribute to group climate.
- **Equity.** Aside from individual participation, group members also like to feel as if participation is managed equally within the group and that appropriate turn taking is used.
- **Clear and accepted roles.** Group members like to know how status and hierarchy operate within a group. Knowing the roles is not enough to lead to satisfaction, though—members must also be comfortable with and accept those roles.
- **Motivation.** Member motivation is activated by perceived connection to and relevance of the group's goals or purpose.

Socializing Group Members

Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group norms, rules, and cohesion can only be created and maintained through socialization (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). It is also through socialization that a shared identity and social reality develops among group members, but this development is dependent on several factors. For example, groups with higher levels of cohesion are more likely to have members that "buy into" rules and norms, which aids in socialization. The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's life span. If membership in a group is stable, long-term members should not need much socialization. However, when new members join a group, existing members must take time to engage in socialization. When a new group is formed, socialization will be an ongoing process as group members negotiate rules and procedures, develop norms, and create a shared history over time.

The information exchanged during socialization can be broken down into two general categories: technical and social knowledge (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Technical knowledge focuses on skills and information needed to complete a task, and social knowledge focuses on behavioral norms that guide interaction. Each type of information is usually conveyed through a combination of formal and informal means. Technical knowledge can be easily passed along through orientations, trainings, manuals, and documents, because this content is often very straightforward. Social knowledge is more ambiguous and is usually conveyed through informal means or passively learned by new members through observation. To return to our earlier terminology, technical knowledge relates more to group rules and social knowledge relates more to group norms.

Socialization continues after initial membership through the enforcement of rules and norms. When someone deviates from the rules and norms and is corrected, it serves as a reminder for all other members and performs a follow-up socializing function. Since rules are explicitly stated and documented, deviation from the rules can have consequences ranging from verbal warnings, to temporary or permanent separation from the group, to fines or other sanctions. Although norms are implicit, deviating from them can still have consequences. Even though someone may not actually verbally correct the deviation, the self-consciousness, embarrassment, or awkwardness that can result from such deviations is often enough to initiate corrective actions. Group norms can be so implicit that they are taken for granted and operate under group members' awareness.

Group rules and norms provide members with a sense of predictability that helps reduce uncertainty and increase a sense of security for one's place within the group. They also guide group members' involvement with the group, help create a shared social reality, and allow the group to function in particular ways without having actual people constantly educating, monitoring, and then correcting member behaviors (Hargie, 2011). Of course, the degree to which this is successful depends on the buy-in from group members.

Group Pressures

There must be some kind of motivating force present within groups in order for the rules and norms to help govern and guide a group. Without such pressure, group members would have no incentive to

conform to group norms or buy into the group's identity and values. In this section, we will discuss how rules and norms gain their power through internal and external pressures and how these pressures can have positive and negative effects.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others are, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity. Deviating from the group's rules and norms that a member internalized during socialization can lead to self-imposed feelings of guilt or shame that can then initiate corrective behaviors and discourage the member from going against the group.

External pressures in the form of group policies, rewards or punishments, or other forces outside of individual group members also exert conformity pressure. In terms of group policies, groups that have an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on them conforming to group expectations. Deviation from expectations during this "trial period" could lead to expulsion from the group. Supervisors, mentors, and other types of group leaders are also agents that can impose external pressures toward conformity. These group members often have the ability to provide positive or negative reinforcement in the form of praise or punishment, which are clear attempts to influence behavior.

Conformity pressure can also stem from external forces when the whole group stands to receive a reward or punishment based on its performance, which ties back to the small group characteristic of interdependence.

Although these pressures may seem negative, they also have positive results. Groups that exert an appropriate and ethical amount of conformity pressure typically have higher levels of group cohesion, which as we learned leads to increased satisfaction with group membership, better relationships, and better task performance. Groups with a strong but healthy level of conformity also project a strong group image to those outside the group, which can raise the group's profile or reputation (Hargie, 2011). Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that results from high levels of cohesion and/or high conformity pressures (Janis, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Groupthink occurs when people rush to agreement or fear argument. Decisions made because of groupthink may range from a poorly thought out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

Two primary causes of groupthink are high levels of cohesion and excessive conformity pressures. When groups exhibit high levels of social cohesion, members may be reluctant to criticize or question another group member's ideas or suggestions for fear that it would damage the relationship. When group members have a high level of task cohesion, they may feel invincible and not critically evaluate ideas. High levels of cohesion may actually lessen conformity pressures since group members who identify strongly with the group's members and mission may not feel a need to question the decisions or suggestions made by others. For those who aren't blinded by the high levels of cohesion, internal conformity pressures may still lead them to withhold criticism of an idea because the norm is to defer to decisions made by organization leaders or a majority of group members. External conformity pressures because of impending reward or punishment, time pressures, or an aggressive leader are also factors that can lead to groupthink.

Group Conflict

Figure 12.5: Members of a group experiencing conflict.

Conflict can appear in indirect or direct forms within group interaction, just as it can in interpersonal interactions. Group members may openly question each other's ideas or express anger toward or dislike for another person. Group members may also indirectly engage in conflict communication through innuendo, joking, or passive-aggressive behavior. Although we often view conflict negatively, conflict can be beneficial for many reasons. When groups get into a rut, lose creativity, or become complacent, conflict can help get a group out of a bad or mediocre routine. Conversely, conflict can lead to lower group productivity due to strain on the task and social dimensions of a group. There are three main types of conflict within groups: procedural, substantive, and interpersonal (Fujishin, 2001). Each of these types of conflict can vary in intensity, which can affect how much the conflict impacts the group and its members.

Procedural Conflict

Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations. In this type of conflict, group members differ in their beliefs about *how* something should be done (Burnett, 1993). A group leader can handle procedural conflict, especially if the leader put group procedures into place or has the individual power to change them. A vote to reach a consensus or majority can also help resolve procedural conflict.

Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group (Burnett, 1993). Rather than focusing on questions of *how*, substantive conflicts focus on questions of *what*. Substantive conflicts may emerge as a group tries to determine its purpose or mission. As members figure out how to complete a task or debate which project to start on next, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion on what something means, what is acceptable in terms of supporting evidence for a proposal, or what is acceptable for a goal or performance standard. Leaders and other group members should not rush to close this type of conflict down. As we learned in our earlier discussion of groupthink, open discussion and debate regarding ideas and suggestions for group action can lead to higher-quality output and may prevent groupthink. Leaders who make final decisions about substantive conflict for the sake of moving on run the risk of creating a win/lose competitive climate in which people feel like their ideas may be shot down, which could lead to less participation. To resolve this type of conflict, group members may want to do research to see what other groups have done in similar situations, as additional information often provides needed context for conflict regarding information and ideas. Once the information is gathered, weigh all proposals and try to discover common ground among perspectives. Civil and open discussions that debate the merits of an idea are more desirable than a climate in which people feel personally judged for their ideas.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict emerges from conflict between individual members of the group. Whereas procedural conflict deals with *how* and substantive conflict deals with *what*, interpersonal conflict deals with *who*. Such conflict can be completely irrelevant to the functioning or purpose of the group, perhaps focusing instead on personality differences. Interpersonal conflict can be the result of avoided or improperly handled procedural or substantive conflict that festers and becomes personal rather than task focused. This type of conflict can also result from differences in beliefs, attitudes, and values (when such differences are taken personally rather than substantively); different personalities; or different communication styles.

While procedural and substantive conflict may be more easily expressed because they do not directly address a person, interpersonal conflict may slowly build as people avoid openly criticizing or confronting others. Passive-aggressive behavior is a sign that interpersonal conflict may be building under the surface, and other group members may want to intervene to avoid escalation and retaliation. Leaders can also meet with people involved in interpersonal conflict privately to help them engage in perception checking and act as mediators, if needed. While people who initiate procedural or substantive conflict may be perceived by other group members as concerned about the group's welfare and seen as competent in their ability to notice areas on which the group could improve, other group members (Ellis & Fisher, 1994) often hold people who initiate interpersonal conflict in ill regard.

Managing Conflict in Small Groups

Some common ways to manage conflict include clear decision-making procedures, third-party mediation, and leader facilitation (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Decision-making is discussed in more detail in Chapter 14 "Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups", but commonly used methods such as majority vote can help or hurt conflict management efforts. While an up-and-down vote can allow a group to finalize a decision and move on, members whose vote fell on the minority side may feel resentment toward other group members. This can create a win/lose climate that leads to further conflict. Having a leader who makes ultimate decisions can also help move a group toward completion of a task, but conflict may only be pushed to the side and left not fully addressed. Third-party mediation can help move a group past a conflict and may create less feelings of animosity, since the person mediating and perhaps making a decision is not a member of the group. In some cases, the leader can act as an internal third-party mediator to help other group members work productively through their conflict.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict

Remember that a complete lack of conflict in a group is a bad sign, as it indicates either a lack of activity or a lack of commitment on the part of the members (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Conflict, when properly handled, can lead a group to have a better understanding of the issues they face.

For example, substantive conflict brings voice to alternative perspectives that may not have been heard otherwise. Additionally, when people view conflict as healthy, necessary, and productive, they can enter into a conflict episode with an open mind and an aim to learn something. This is especially true when those who initiate substantive conflict are able to share and defend their views in a competent and civil manner. Group cohesion can also increase because of well-managed conflict. Occasional experiences of tension and unrest followed by resolutions makes groups feel like they have accomplished something, which can lead them to not dread conflict and give them the confidence to more productively deal with it the next time.

Conflict that goes on for too long or is poorly handled can lead to decreased cohesiveness. Group members who try to avoid a conflict can still feel anger or frustration when the conflict drags on. Members who consistently take task-oriented conflict personally and escalate procedural or substantive conflict to interpersonal conflict are especially unpopular with other group members. Mishandled or chronic conflict can eventually lead to the destruction of a group or to a loss in members as people weigh the costs and rewards of membership (Ellis & Fisher, 1994).

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Figures

Figure 12.1: Small group structures. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 12.2: Group projects are an example of a task-oriented small group. Jason Goodman. 2019. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/bzqU01v-G54

Figure 12.3: Stages of group development. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 12.4: Idyllic groups have an appropriate balance between task cohesion and social cohesion. Windows. 2019. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/p74ndnYWRY4

Figure 12.5: Members of a group experiencing conflict. Afif Kusuma. 2021. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/mv38TB_Ljj8

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13.

LEADERSHIP, ROLES, AND PROBLEM SOLVING IN GROUPS

Introduction

What makes a good leader? What are some positive and negative roles that people play in groups? How do groups solve problems and make decisions in order to accomplish their task? This chapter will begin to answer those questions, because leadership and group member roles influence the performance of small groups. Whether you consider yourself a leader or not, all members of a group can perform leadership functions, and being familiar with these behaviors can improve your group's performance. Likewise, knowing the various roles that typically emerge in a group can help you better understand a group's dynamics and hopefully improve your overall group experience.

13.1 Group Member Roles

Just as leaders have been long studied as a part of group communication research, so too have group member roles. Group roles are more dynamic than leadership roles in that a role can be formal or informal and played by more than one group member. Additionally, one group member may exhibit various role behaviors within a single group meeting or play a few consistent roles over the course of his or her involvement with a group. Some people's role behaviors result from their personality traits, while other people act out a certain role because of a short-term mood, as a reaction to another group member, or out of necessity. Group communication scholars have cautioned us not to always think of these roles as neatly bounded all-inclusive categories. After all, we all play multiple roles within a group and must draw on multiple communication behaviors in order to play them successfully. When someone continually exhibits a particular behavior, it may be labeled as a role, but even isolated behaviors can affect group functioning.

Task-Related Roles and Behaviors

Task roles and their related behaviors contribute directly to the group's completion of a task or achievement of its goal or purpose. Task-related roles typically serve leadership, informational, or procedural functions. In this section, we will discuss the following roles and behaviors: task leader, expediter, information provider, information seeker, gatekeeper, and recorder.

Task Leader

Within any group, there may be a task leader. This person may have a high group status because of his or her maturity, problem-solving abilities, knowledge, and/or leadership experience and skills. This person acts to help the group complete its task (Cragan & Wright, 1991). This person may be a designated or emergent leader, but in either case, task leaders tend to talk more during group interactions than other group members and also tend to do more work in the group. Depending on the number of tasks a group has, there may be more than one task leader, especially if the tasks require different sets of skills or knowledge. Because of the added responsibilities of being a task leader, people in these roles may experience higher levels of stress. A task leader could lessen these stresses, however, through some of the maintenance role behaviors that will be discussed later.

We can divide task-leader behaviors two types: substantive and procedural (Pavitt, 1999). The substantive leader is the "idea person" who communicates "big picture" thoughts and suggestions that feed group discussion. The procedural leader is the person who gives the most guidance, perhaps following up on the ideas generated by the substantive leader. A skilled and experienced task leader may be able to perform both of these roles, but when the roles are filled by two different people, the person considered the procedural leader is more likely than the substantive leader to be viewed by members as the overall group leader. This indicates that task-focused groups assign more status to the person who actually guides the group toward the completion of the task (a "doer") than the person who comes up with ideas (the "thinker").

Expediter

The **expediter** is a task-related role that functions to keep the group on track toward completing its task by managing the agenda and setting and assessing goals in order to monitor the group's progress (Burke, Georganta, & Marlow, 2019). An expediter doesn't push group members mindlessly along toward the completion of their task; an expediter must have a good sense of when a topic has been sufficiently discussed or when a group's extended focus on one area has led to diminishing returns. In such cases, the expediter may say, "Now that we've had a thorough discussion of the pros and cons of switching the office from PCs to Macs, which side do you think has more support?" or "We've spent half of this meeting looking for examples of what other libraries have done and haven't found anything useful. Maybe we should switch gears so we can get something concrete done tonight."

To avoid the perception that group members are being rushed, a skilled expediter can demonstrate good active-listening skills by paraphrasing what has been discussed and summarizing what has been accomplished in such a way that makes it easier for group members to see the need to move on.

Information Provider

The **information provider** role includes behaviors that are more evenly shared compared to other roles, as ideally, all group members present new ideas, initiate discussions of new topics, and contribute their own relevant knowledge and experiences Burke, Georganta, & Marlow, 2019). When group members meet, they each possess different types of information. Early group meetings may consist of group members taking turns briefing each other on their area of expertise. In other situations, one group member may be chosen because of his or her specialized knowledge. This person may be the primary information provider for all other group members. For example, one of our colleagues was selected to serve on a university committee reviewing our undergraduate learning goals. Since her official role was to serve as the "faculty expert" on the subcommittee related to speaking, she played a more central information-provider function for the group during most of the initial meetings. Since other people on the subcommittee were not as familiar with speaking and its place within higher education curriculum, it made sense that information-providing behaviors were not as evenly distributed.

Information Seeker

The **information seeker** asks for more information, elaboration, or clarification on items relevant to the group's task Burke, Georganta, & Marlow, 2019). The information sought may include facts or group member opinions. In general, information seekers ask questions for clarification, but they can also ask questions that help provide an important evaluative function. Most groups could benefit from more critically oriented information-seeking behaviors. As our discussion of groupthink notes, critical questioning helps increase the quality of ideas and group outcomes and helps avoid groupthink. By asking for more information, people have to defend (in a non-adversarial way) and/or support their claims, which can help ensure that the information is credible, relevant, and thoroughly considered. When information seeking or questioning occurs because of poor listening skills, it risks negatively affecting the group. Skilled information providers and seekers are also good active listeners. They increase all group members' knowledge when they paraphrase and ask clarifying questions about the information presented.

Gatekeeper

The **gatekeeper** manages the flow of conversation in a group in order to achieve an appropriate balance so that all group members get to participate in a meaningful way Burke, Georganta, & Marlow, 2019). The gatekeeper may prompt others to provide information by saying something like "Let's each share one idea we have for a movie to show during Black History Month." He or she may also help correct an imbalance between members who have provided much information already and members who have been quiet by saying something like "Aretha, we've heard a lot from you today. Let us hear from someone else. Beau, what are your thoughts on Aretha's suggestion?" Gatekeepers should be cautious about "calling people out" or at least making them feel that way. Instead of scolding someone for not participating, the gatekeeper should be ask a member to contribute something specific instead of just asking if that person has anything to add. Since gatekeepers make group members feel included, they also service the relational aspects of the group.

Recorder

The **recorder** takes notes on the discussion and activities that occur during a group meeting. The recorder is the only role that is essentially limited to one person at a time since in most cases it would not be necessary or beneficial to have more than one person recording. At less formal meetings, there may be no recorder, while at formal meetings there is usually a person who records meeting minutes, which are an overview of what occurred at the meeting. Each committee will have different rules or norms regarding the level of detail within and availability of the minutes.

Maintenance Roles and Behaviors

Maintenance roles and their corresponding behaviors function to create and maintain social cohesion and fulfill the interpersonal needs of group members. All these role behaviors require strong and sensitive interpersonal skills. The maintenance roles we will discuss in this section include social-emotional leader, supporter, tension releaser, harmonizer, and interpreter.

Social-Emotional Leader

Figure 13.1: Social-emotional leaders are reflective thinkers who use their perception skills to analyze group dynamics and maintain a positive climate.

The social-emotional leader within a group may perform a variety of maintenance roles and is generally someone who is well liked by the other group members and whose role behaviors complement but do not compete with the task leader. The social-emotional leader may also reassure and support the task leader when he or she is stressed (Koch, 2013). In general, the social-emotional leader is a reflective thinker who has good perception skills that he or she uses to analyze the group dynamics and climate and then initiate the appropriate role behaviors to maintain a positive climate. This is not a role that shifts from person to person. While all members of the group perform some maintenance role behaviors at various times, the socioemotional leader reliably functions to support group members and maintain a positive relational climate. Social-emotional leadership functions can actually become detrimental to the group and lead to less satisfaction among members when they view maintenance behaviors as redundant or as too distracting from the task (Pavitt, 1999).

Supporter

The role of **supporter** is characterized by communication behaviors that encourage other group members and provide emotional support as needed (Koch, 2013). The supporter's work primarily occurs in one-on-one exchanges that are more intimate and in-depth than the exchanges that take place during full group meetings. While many group members may make supporting comments publicly at group meetings, these comments are typically superficial and/or brief. A supporter uses active empathetic listening skills to connect with group members who may seem down or frustrated by saying something like "Tayesha, you seemed kind of down today. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?" Supporters also follow up on previous conversations with group members to maintain the connections they have already established by saying things like "Alan, I remember you said your mom is having surgery this weekend. I hope it goes well. Let me know if you need anything."

Tension Releaser

The **tension releaser** is someone who is naturally funny and sensitive to the personalities of the group and the dynamics of any given situation and who uses these qualities to manage the frustration level of the group (Koch, 2013). Being funny is not enough to fulfill this role, as jokes or comments could indeed be humorous to other group members but are delivered at an inopportune time, which ultimately creates rather than releases tension. The healthy use of humor by the tension releaser performs the same maintenance function as the empathy employed by the harmonizer or the social-emotional leader, but it is less intimate and is typically directed toward the whole group instead of just one person.

Harmonizer

Group members who help manage the various types of group conflict that emerge during group communication plays the **harmonizer** role (Koch, 2013). They keep their eyes and ears open for signs of conflict among group members and ideally intervene before it escalates. For example, the harmonizer may sense that one group member's critique of another member's idea was not received positively, and he or she may be able to rephrase the critique in a more constructive way, which can help diminish the other group member's defensiveness. Harmonizers also deescalate conflict once it has already started—for example, by suggesting that the group take a break and then mediating between group members in a side conversation.

These actions can help prevent conflict from spilling over into other group interactions. In cases where the whole group experiences conflict, the harmonizer may help lead the group in perception-checking discussions that help members see an issue from multiple perspectives. For a harmonizer to be effective, he or she must be viewed as impartial and committed to the group as a whole rather than to one side, person, or faction within the larger group. A special kind of harmonizer that helps manage cultural differences within the group is the interpreter.

Interpreter

An **interpreter** helps manage the diversity within a group by mediating intercultural conflict, articulating common ground between different people, and generally creating a climate where difference is seen as an opportunity rather than as something to be feared (Koch, 2013). Just as an interpreter at the United Nations acts as a bridge between two different languages, the interpreter can bridge identity differences between group members. Interpreters can help perform the other maintenance roles discussed with a special awareness of and sensitivity toward cultural differences. Interpreters, because of their cultural sensitivity, may also take a proactive role to help address conflict before it emerges—for example, by taking a group member aside and explaining why his or her behavior or comments may be perceived as offensive.

Negative Roles and Behaviors

Group communication scholars began exploring the negative side of group member roles more than sixty years ago (Benne & Sheats, 1948). Studying these negative roles can help us analyze group interactions and potentially better understand why some groups are more successful than others are. It is important to acknowledge that we all perform some negative behaviors within groups but that those behaviors do not necessarily constitute a role. A person may temporarily monopolize a discussion to bring attention to his or her idea. If that behavior gets the attention of the group members and makes them realize they were misinformed or headed in a negative direction, then that behavior may have been warranted. Group members may enact negative behaviors with varying degrees of intensity and regularity, and their effects may range from mild annoyance to group failure. In general, the effects grow increasingly negative as they increase in intensity and frequency.

Self-Centered Roles Central Negative

The central negative argues against most of the ideas and proposals discussed in the group and often emerges because of a leadership challenge during group formation. The failed attempt to lead the group can lead to feelings of resentment toward the leader and/or the purpose of the group, which then manifest in negative behaviors that delay, divert, or block the group's progress toward achieving its goal. This scenario is unfortunate because the central negative is typically a motivated and intelligent group member who can benefit the group if properly handled by the group leader or other members. Group communication scholars suggest that the group leader or leaders actively incorporate central negatives into group tasks and responsibilities to make them feel valued and to help diminish any residual anger, disappointment, or hurt feelings from the leadership conflict (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). Otherwise, the central negative will continue to argue against the proposals and decisions of the group, even when they may agree. In some cases, the central negative may unintentionally serve a beneficial function if his or her criticisms prevent groupthink.

Monopolizer

The **monopolizer** is a group member who makes excessive verbal contributions, preventing equal participation by other group members. In short, monopolizers like to hear the sound of their own voice and do not follow typical norms for conversational turn taking. Some people who are well-informed, charismatic, and competent communicators can get away with impromptu lectures and long stories, but monopolizers do not possess the magnetic qualities of such people. A group member's excessive verbal contributions are more likely to be labeled as monopolizing when they are not related to the task or when they provide unnecessary or redundant elaboration. Some monopolizers do not intentionally speak for longer than they should. Instead, they think they are making a genuine contribution to the group. These folks likely lack sensitivity to nonverbal cues, or they would see that other group members are tired of listening or annoyed. Other monopolizers just like to talk and do not care what others think. Some may be trying to make up for a lack of knowledge or experience. This type of monopolizer is best described as a dilettante, or an amateur who tries to pass himself or herself off as an expert.

Several subgroups of behaviors fall under the monopolizer's role. The "stage hog" monopolizes discussion with excessive verbal contributions and engages in one-upping and narcissistic listening. Gaining an advantage over is a spotlight-stealing strategy in which people try to verbally "out-do" others by saying something like "You think that's bad? Listen to what happened to me!" They also listen to others in order to find something they can connect back to themselves, not to understand the message. The stage hog is like the diva that refuses to leave the stage to let the next performer begin. Unlike a monopolizer, who may engage in his or her behaviors unknowingly, stage hogs are usually aware of what they are doing.

The "egghead" monopolizes the discussion with excessive contributions based in actual knowledge. However, those contributions exceed the level of understanding of other group members or the needs of the group (Cragan & Wright, 1999). The egghead is different from the dilettante monopolizer discussed earlier because this person has genuine knowledge and expertise on a subject, which may be useful to the group. Nevertheless, like the monopolizer and stage hog, the egghead's excessive contributions draw attention away from the task, slow the group down, and may contribute to a negative group climate. The egghead may be like an absentminded professor who is smart but lacks the social sensitivity to tell when he or she has said enough and is now starting to annoy other group members. This type of egghead naively believes that other group members care as much about the subject as he or she does.

The second type of egghead is more pompous and monopolizes the discussion to flaunt his or her intellectual superiority. While the group may tolerate the first type of egghead to a point, the group may perceive the second type of egghead more negatively and as one who will hurt the group. In general, the egghead's advanced subject knowledge and excessive contributions can hurt the group's potential for synergy, since other group members may defer to the egghead expert, which can diminish the creativity that comes from outside and non-expert perspectives.

13.2 Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups

Group Problem Solving

The problem-solving process involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal. The problems that groups face are varied, but some common problems include budgeting funds, raising funds, planning events, addressing customer or citizen complaints, creating or adapting products or services to fit needs, supporting members, and raising awareness about issues or causes. Problems of all sorts have three common components (Adams & Galanes, 2009):

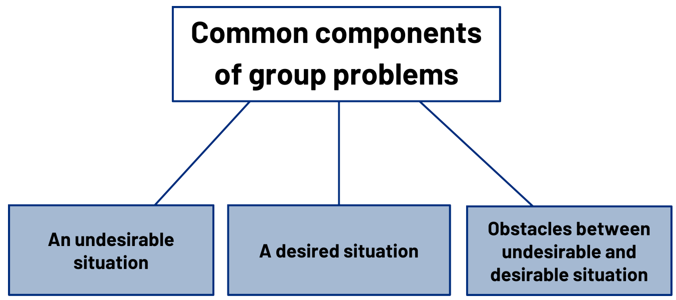

Figure 13.2: Common components of group problems.

1. **An undesirable situation.** When conditions are desirable, there is not a problem.
2. **A desired situation.** Even though it may only be a vague idea, there is a drive to better the undesirable situation. The vague idea may develop into a more precise goal that can be achieved, although solutions are not yet generated.
3. **Obstacles between undesirable and desirable situation.** These things stand in the way between the current situation and the group's goal of addressing it. This component of a problem requires the most work, and it is the part where decision-making occurs. Some examples of obstacles include limited funding, resources, personnel, time, or information. Obstacles can also take the form of people who are working against the group, including people resistant to change or people who disagree.

Discussion of these three elements of a problem helps the group tailor its problem-solving process, as each problem will vary. While these three general elements are present in each problem, the group should also address specific characteristics of the problem. Five common and important characteristics to consider are task difficulty, number of possible solutions, group member interest in problem, group member familiarity with problem, and the need for solution acceptance (Adams & Galanes, 2009).

1. **Task difficulty.** Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing a difficult and complex task in order to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information.
2. **Number of possible solutions.** There are usually multiple ways to solve a problem or complete a task, but some problems have more potential solutions than others do. Figuring out how to prepare a beach house for an approaching hurricane is fairly complex and difficult, but there are still a limited number of things to do—for example, taping and boarding up windows; turning off water, electricity, and gas; trimming trees; and securing loose outside objects. Other problems may require more creativity. For example, designing a new restaurant may entail using some standard solutions but could also entail many different types of innovation with layout and design.
3. **Group member interest in problem.** When group members are interested in the problem, they will be more engaged with the problem-solving process and invested in finding a quality solution. Groups with high interest in and knowledge about the problem may want more freedom to develop and implement solutions, while groups with low interest may prefer a leader who provides structure and direction.
4. **Group familiarity with problem.** Some groups encounter a problem regularly, while other problems are unique or unexpected. A family who has lived in hurricane alley for decades probably has a better idea of how to prepare its house for a hurricane than does a family that just recently moved from the Midwest. Many groups that rely on funding have to revisit a budget every year, and in recent years, groups have had to get more creative with budgets due to funding cuts in nearly every sector. When group members are not familiar with a problem, they will need to do background research on what similar groups have done. They may want to bring in outside experts.
5. **Need for solution acceptance.** In this step, groups must consider how many people the decision will affect and how much "buy-in" from others the group needs in order implement their solution successfully. Some small groups have many stakeholders on whom the success of a solution depends. Other groups are answerable only to themselves. In such cases, groups will want to poll those who will be affected by the solution. They may want to do a pilot implementation to see how people react. Imposing an excellent solution that does not have buy-in from stakeholders can still lead to failure.

Group Problem-Solving Process

There are several variations of similar problem-solving models based on scholar John Dewey's reflective thinking process (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). As you read the steps in the process, think about how you can apply what we learned regarding the general and specific elements of problems.

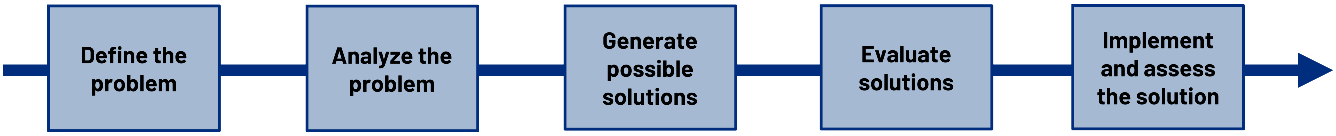

Figure 13.3: The group problem-solving process.

Step 1: Define the Problem

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way (Adams & Galanes, 2009). At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some questions to ask during this stage: What is the current difficulty? How did we come to know that the difficulty exists? Who or what is involved? Why is it meaningful/urgent/important? What have the effects been so far? What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification?

At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a **problem statement**. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of city officials could use the following problem statement: "Our state does not currently have a mechanism for citizens to report suspected ethical violations by city officials."

Step 2: Analyze the Problem

During this step, a group should analyze the problem and the group's relationship to the problem. Whereas the first step involved exploring the "what" related to the problem, this step focuses on the "why." At this stage, group members can discuss the potential causes of the difficulty. Group members may also want to begin setting out an agenda or timeline for the group's problem-solving process, looking forward to the other steps. To analyze the problem, the group can discuss the five common problem variables discussed before. Here are two examples of questions that the group formed to address ethics violations might ask: Why doesn't our city have an ethics reporting mechanism? Do cities of similar size have such a mechanism? Once the problem has been analyzed, the group can pose a **problem question** that will guide the group as it generates possible solutions. "How can citizens report suspected ethical violations of city officials and how will such reports be processed and addressed?" As you can see, the problem question is more complex than the problem statement, since the group has moved on to more in-depth discussion of the problem during step 2.

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

During this step, group members generate possible solutions to the problem. Again, do not evaluate solutions at this point, only propose and clarify. The question should be what *could* we do to address this problem, not what *should* we do to address it? It is perfectly OK for a group member to question another person's idea by asking something like "What do you mean?" or "Could you explain your reasoning more?" Discussions at this stage may reveal a need to return to previous steps to better define or more fully analyze a problem. Since many problems are multifaceted, it is necessary for group members to generate solutions for each part of the problem separately, making sure to have multiple solutions for each part. Stopping the solution-generating process prematurely can lead to groupthink.

Step 4: Evaluate Solutions

During this step, solutions can be critically evaluated based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Once the potential solutions have been narrowed based on differences in relevance and/or merit, the group should analyze each solution based on its potential effects—especially negative effects. Groups that are required to report the rationale for their decision or whose decisions may be subject to public scrutiny would be wise to make a set list of criteria for evaluating each solution.

Additionally, solutions can be evaluated based on how well they fit with the group's charge and the abilities of the group. To do this, group members may ask, "Does this solution live up to the original purpose or mission of the group?" "Can the solution actually be implemented with our current resources and connections?" "How will this solution be supported, funded, enforced, and assessed?" Secondary tensions and substantive conflict, two concepts discussed earlier, emerge during this step of problem solving, and group members will need to employ effective critical thinking and listening skills.

Decision-making is part of the larger process of problem solving and it plays a prominent role in this step. While there are several similar models for problem solving, groups can use many varied decision-making techniques. For example, to narrow the list of proposed solutions, group members may decide by majority vote, by weighing the pros and cons, or by discussing them until they reach a consensus. There are also more complex decision-making models like the "six hats method," which we will discuss later. Once the group reaches a final decision, the group leader or facilitator should confirm that the group agrees. It may be beneficial to let the group break for a while or even to delay the final decision until a later meeting to allow people time to evaluate it outside of the group context.

Step 5: Implement and Assess the Solution

Implementing the solution requires some advanced planning, and it should not be rushed unless the group is operating under strict time restraints or a delay may lead to some kind of harm. Although some solutions can be implemented immediately, others may take days, months, or years. As was noted earlier, it may be beneficial for groups to poll those who will be affected by the solution as to their opinion of it or even to do a pilot test to observe the effectiveness of the solution and how people react to it. Before implementation, groups should also determine how and when they would assess the effectiveness of the solution by asking, "How will we know if the solution is working or not?" Since solution assessment will vary based on whether or not the group is disbanded, groups should also consider the following questions: If the group disbands after implementation, who will be responsible for assessing the solution? If the solution fails, will the same group reconvene? Will a new group be formed?

Certain elements of the solution may need to be delegated to various people inside and outside the group. Group members may also be assigned to implement a particular part of the solution based on their role or because it connects to their area of expertise. Likewise, group members may be tasked with publicizing the solution or "selling" it to a particular group of stakeholders. Last, the group should consider its future. In some cases, the group will get to decide if it will stay together and continue working on other tasks or if it will disband. In other cases, outside forces determine the group's fate.

Decision Making in Groups

We all engage in personal decision making daily, and we all know that some decisions are more difficult than others are. When we make decisions in groups, we face some challenges that we do not face in our personal decision-making, but we also stand to benefit from some advantages of group decision-making (Napier & Gershenfeld, 2004). Group decision making can appear fair and democratic but really only be a gesture that covers up the fact that certain group members or the group leader have already decided. Group decision making also takes more time than individual decisions and can be burdensome if some group members do not do their assigned work, divert the group with self-centered or unproductive role behaviors, or miss meetings.

Conversely, though, group decisions are often more informed, since all group members develop a shared understanding of a problem through discussion and debate. The shared understanding may also be more complex and deep than what an individual would develop, because group members expose themselves to a variety of viewpoints that can broaden their own perspectives. Group decisions also benefit from synergy, one of the key advantages of group communication that we discussed earlier. Most groups do not use a specific method of decision-making, perhaps thinking that they will work things out as they go. This can lead to unequal participation, social loafing, premature decisions, prolonged discussion, and a host of other negative consequences. Therefore, in this section we will learn some practices that will prepare us for good decision-making and some specific techniques we can use to help us reach a final decision.

Brainstorming Before Decision Making

Before groups can make a decision, they need to generate possible solutions to their problem. The most commonly used method is brainstorming, although most people do not follow the recommended steps of brainstorming. As you will recall, brainstorming refers to the quick generation of ideas free of evaluation. The originator of the term *brainstorming* said the following four rules must be followed for the technique to be effective (Osborn, 1959):

1. Evaluation of ideas is forbidden.
2. Wild and crazy ideas are encouraged.
3. Quantity of ideas, not quality, is the goal.
4. New combinations of ideas presented are encouraged.

Figure 13.4: Brainstorming is a good way to generate possible solutions to a problem. Below are some suggestions to make brainstorming more of a decision-making method.

To make brainstorming more of a decision-making method rather than an idea-generating method, group communication scholars have suggested additional steps that precede and follow brainstorming (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

1. **Do a warm-up brainstorming session.** Some people are more apprehensive about publicly communicating their ideas than others are, and a warm-up session can help ease apprehension and prime group members for task-related idea generation. Anyone in the

group can initiate the short warm-up. To get things started, a person could ask, "If our group formed a band, what would we be called?" or "What other purposes could a mailbox serve?" In the previous examples, the first warm up gets the group's creative juices flowing, while the second focuses more on practical and concrete ideas.

2. **Do the actual brainstorming session.** This session should not last more than thirty minutes and should follow the four rules of brainstorming mentioned previously. In order to realize the fourth rule, the facilitator could encourage people to piggyback off each other's ideas.
3. **Eliminate duplicate ideas.** After the brainstorming session is over, group members can eliminate (without evaluating) ideas that are the same or very similar.
4. **Clarify, organize, and evaluate ideas.** Before evaluation, see if any ideas need clarification. Then try to theme or group ideas together in some orderly fashion. Since "wild and crazy" ideas are encouraged, some suggestions may need clarification. If it becomes clear that there is not really a foundation to an idea and that it is too vague or abstract, it may be eliminated. As a caution, though, it may be wise not to throw out off-the-wall ideas that are hard to categorize and instead put them in a miscellaneous or "wild and crazy" category.

Discussion Before Decision Making

The **nominal group technique** guides decision making through a four-step process that includes idea generation and evaluation and seeks to elicit equal contributions from all group members (Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1971). This method is useful because the procedure involves all group members systematically, which fixes the problem of uneven participation during discussions. Since everyone contributes to the discussion, this method can also help reduce instances of social loafing. To use the nominal group technique, do the following:

1. Silently and individually, list ideas.
2. Create a master list of ideas.
3. Clarify ideas as needed.
4. Take a secret vote to rank group members' acceptance of ideas.

During the first step, have group members work quietly, in the same space, to write down every idea they have to address the task or problem they face. This should not take more than twenty minutes. Whoever is facilitating the discussion should remind group members to use brainstorming techniques, which means they should not evaluate ideas as they are generated. Ask group members to remain silent once they have finished their list so they do not distract others.

During the second step, the facilitator goes around the group in a consistent order asking each person to share one idea at a time. As the idea is shared, the facilitator records it on a master list that everyone can see. Keep track of how many times each idea comes up, as that could be an idea that warrants more discussion. Continue this process until all the ideas have been shared. As a note to facilitators, some group members may begin to edit their list or self-censor when asked to provide one of their ideas. To limit a person's apprehension with sharing his or her ideas and to ensure that each idea is shared, I have asked group members to exchange lists with someone else so they can share ideas from the list they receive without fear of being judged.

During step three, the facilitator should note that group members could now ask for clarification on ideas on the master list. Do not let this discussion stray into evaluation of ideas. To help avoid an unnecessarily long discussion, it may be useful to go from one person to the next to ask which ideas need clarifying and then go to the originator(s) of the idea in question for clarification.

During the fourth step, members use a voting ballot to rank the acceptability of the ideas on the master list. If the list is long, you may ask group members to rank only their top five or so choices. The facilitator then takes up the secret ballots and reviews them in a random order, noting the rankings of each idea. Ideally, the highest ranked idea can then be discussed and decided on. The nominal group technique does not carry a group all the way through to the point of decision; rather, it sets the group up for a roundtable discussion or use of some other method to evaluate the merits of the top ideas.

Specific Decision-Making Techniques

Some decision-making techniques involve determining a course of action based on the level of agreement among the group members. These methods include majority, expert, authority, and consensus rule. Table 14.1 "Pros and Cons of Agreement-Based Decision-Making Techniques" reviews the pros and cons of each of these methods.

Majority rule is a commonly used decision-making technique in which a majority (one-half plus one) must agree before making a decision (Schippers & Rus, 2021). A show-of-hands vote, a paper ballot, or an electronic voting system can determine the majority choice. Many decision-making bodies, including the US House of Representatives, Senate, and Supreme Court, use majority rule to make decisions, which shows that it is often associated with democratic decision making, since each person gets one vote and each vote counts equally. Of course, other individuals and mediated messages can influence a person's vote, but since the voting power is spread among all group members, it is not easy for one person or party to take control of the decision-making process. In some cases—for example, to override a presidential veto or to amend the constitution—a super majority of two-thirds may be required to make a decision.

Minority rule is a decision-making technique in which a designated authority or expert has final say over a decision and may or may not consider the input of other group members. When a designated expert makes a decision by minority rule, there may be buy-in from others in the group, especially if the members of the group did not have relevant knowledge or expertise. When a designated authority makes decisions, buy-in will vary based on group members' level of respect for the authority. For example, decisions made by an elected authority may be more accepted by those who elected him or her than by those who did not. As with majority rule, this technique can be time saving. Unlike majority rule, one person or party can have control over the decision-making process.

This type of decision-making is more similar to that used by monarchs and dictators. An obvious negative consequence of this method is that the needs or wants of one person can override the needs and wants of the majority. A minority deciding for the majority has led to negative consequences throughout history. The white Afrikaner minority that ruled South Africa for decades instituted apartheid, which was a system of racial segregation that disenfranchised and oppressed the majority population. The quality of the decision and its fairness really depends on the designated expert or authority.

Consensus rule is a decision-making technique in which all members of the group must agree on the same decision. On rare occasions, a decision may be ideal for all group members, which can lead to unanimous agreement without further debate and discussion. Although this can be positive, be cautious that this is not a sign of groupthink. More typically, groups reach consensus only after lengthy discussion. On the plus side, consensus often leads to high-quality decisions due to the time and effort it takes to get everyone in agreement. Group members are also more likely to be committed to the decision because of their investment in reaching it. On the negative side, the ultimate decision is often one that all group members can live with but not one that is ideal for all members. Additionally, the process of arriving at consensus also includes conflict, as people debate ideas and negotiate the interpersonal tensions that may result.

[table id=10 /]

Influences on Decision Making

Many factors influence the decision-making process. For example, how might a group's independence or access to resources affect the decisions they make? What potential advantages and disadvantages come with decisions made by groups that are more or less similar in terms of personality and cultural identities? In this section, we will explore how situational, personality, and cultural influences affect decision making in groups.

Situational Influences on Decision-Making

A group's situational context affects decision-making (Franken & Muris, 2005). One key situational element is the degree of freedom that the group has to make its own decisions, secure its own resources, and initiate its own actions. Some groups have to go through multiple approval processes before they can do anything, while others are self-directed, self-governing, and self-sustaining. Another situational influence is uncertainty. In general, groups deal with more uncertainty in decision-making than do individuals because of the increased number of variables that comes with adding more people to a situation. Individual group members cannot know what other group members are thinking, whether they are doing their work, and how committed they are to the group. Therefore, the size of a group is a powerful situational influence, as it adds to uncertainty and complicates communication.

Access to information also influences a group. First, the nature of the group's task or problem affects its ability to get information. Group members can more easily make decisions about a problem when other groups have similarly experienced it. Even if the problem is complex and serious, the group can learn from other situations and apply what it learns. Second, the group must have access to flows of information. Access to archives, electronic databases, and individuals with relevant experience is necessary to obtain any relevant information about similar problems or to do research on a new or unique problem. In this regard, group members' formal and information network connections also become important situational influences.

The origin and urgency of a problem are also situational factors that influence decision-making. In terms of origin, problems usually occur in one of four ways:

1. **Something goes wrong.** Group members must decide how to fix or stop something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that half of the building is contaminated with mold and must be closed down.
2. **Expectations change or increase.** Group members must innovate more efficient or effective ways of doing something. Example—a firehouse crew finds out that the district they are responsible for is being expanded.
3. **Something goes wrong and expectations change or increase.** Group members must fix/stop and become more efficient/effective. Example—the firehouse crew has to close half the building and must start responding to more calls due to the expanding district.
4. **The problem existed from the beginning.** Group members must go back to the origins of the situation, walk through and analyze the steps again to decide what can be done differently. Example—a firehouse crew has consistently had to work with minimal resources in terms of building space and firefighting tools.

In each of the cases, the need for a decision may be more or less urgent depending on how badly something is going wrong, how high the expectations have been raised, or the degree to which people are fed up with a broken system. Decisions must be made in situations ranging from crisis level to mundane.

Cultural Context and Decision-Making

Figure 13.5: Culturally heterogeneous groups perform better than more homogenous groups.

Just like neighborhoods, schools, and countries, small groups vary in terms of their degree of similarity and difference. Demographic changes in the United States and increases in technology that can bring different people together make it more likely that we will be interacting in more and more heterogeneous groups (Allen, 2011). Some small groups are more homogenous, meaning the members are more similar, and some are more heterogeneous, meaning the members are more different. Diversity and difference within groups has advantages and disadvantages. In terms of advantages, research finds that, in general, culturally heterogeneous groups perform better than more homogenous groups (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999).

Additionally, when group members have time to get to know each other and competently communicate across their differences, the advantages of diversity include better decision making due to different perspectives (Thomas, 1999). Unfortunately, groups often operate under time constraints and other pressures that make the possibility for intercultural dialogue and understanding difficult. The main disadvantage of heterogeneous groups is the possibility for conflict, but since all groups experience conflict, this is not solely due to the presence of diversity. We will now look more specifically at how some of the cultural value orientations we have learned about already in this text can play out in groups with international diversity and how domestic diversity in terms of demographics can influence group decision making.

International Diversity in Group Interactions

Cultural value orientations such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and high-/low-context communication styles all manifest on a continuum of communication behaviors and can influence group decision making (Yates & de Oliveira, 2016). Group members from individualistic cultures are more likely to value task-oriented, efficient, and direct communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as dividing tasks into individual projects before collaboration begins and then openly debating ideas during discussion and decision-making. Additionally, people from cultures that value individualism are more likely to express dissent from a decision, essentially expressing their disagreement with the group. Group members from collectivistic cultures are more likely to value relationships over the task. Because of this, they also tend to value conformity and face-saving (i.e., indirect) communication. This could manifest in behaviors such as establishing norms that include periods of socializing to build relationships before task-oriented communication (like negotiations) begins or norms that limit public disagreement in favor of more indirect communication that doesn't challenge the face of other group members or the group's leader. In a group composed of people from a collectivistic culture, each member would likely play harmonizing roles, looking for signs of conflict and resolving them before they become public.

Power distance can also affect group interactions. Some cultures rank higher on power-distance scales, meaning they value hierarchy, make decisions based on status, and believe that people have a set place in society that is unchangeable. Group members from high-power-distance cultures would likely appreciate a strong designated leader who exhibits a more directive leadership style and prefer groups in which members have clear and assigned roles. In a group that is homogenous in terms of having a high-power-distance orientation, members with higher status would be able to openly provide information, and those with lower status may not provide information unless a higher status member explicitly seeks it from them. Low-power-distance cultures do not place as much value and meaning on status and believe that all group members can participate in decision-making. Group members from low-power-distance cultures would likely freely speak their mind during a group meeting and prefer a participative leadership style.

How much meaning is conveyed through the context surrounding verbal communication can also affect group communication. Some cultures have a high-context communication style in which much of the meaning in an interaction is conveyed through context such as nonverbal cues and silence. Group members from high-context cultures may avoid saying something directly, assuming that other group members will understand the intended meaning even if the message is indirect. Therefore, if someone disagrees with a proposed course of action, he or she may say, "Let's discuss this tomorrow," and mean, "I don't think we should do this." Such indirect communication is also a face-saving strategy that is common in collectivistic cultures. Other cultures have a low-context communication style that places more importance on the meaning conveyed through words than through context or nonverbal cues. Group members from low-context cultures often say what they mean and mean what they say. For example, if someone does not like an idea, they might say, "I think we should consider more options. This one doesn't seem like the best we can do."

In any of these cases, an individual from one culture operating in a group with people of a different cultural orientation could adapt to the expectations of the host culture, especially if that person possesses a high degree of intercultural communication competence (ICC). Additionally, people with high ICC can also adapt to a group member with a different cultural orientation than the host culture. Even though these cultural orientations connect to values that affect our communication in consistent ways, individuals may exhibit different communication behaviors depending on their own individual communication style and the situation.

Domestic Diversity and Group Communication

While it is becoming more likely that we will interact in small groups with international diversity, we are guaranteed to interact in groups that are diverse in terms of the cultural identities found within a single country or the subcultures found within a larger cultural group.

Gender stereotypes sometimes influence the roles that people play within a group. For example, the stereotype that women are more nurturing than men may lead group members (both male and female) to expect that women will play the role of supporters or harmonizers within the group (Hentschel, Heilman, & Peus, 2019). Since women have primarily performed secretarial work since the 1900s, it may also be expected that women will play the role of recorder. In both of these cases, stereotypical notions of gender place women in roles that are typically not as valued in group communication. The opposite is true for men. In terms of leadership, despite notable exceptions, research shows that men fill an overwhelmingly disproportionate amount of leadership positions. We are socialized to see certain behaviors by men as indicative of leadership abilities, even though they may not be. For example, men are often perceived to contribute more to a group because they tend to speak first when asked a question or to fill a silence and are perceived to talk more about task-related matters than relationally oriented matters.

Both of these tendencies create a perception that men are more engaged with the task. Men are also socialized to be more competitive and self-congratulatory, meaning that their communication may be seen as dedicated and their behaviors seen as powerful, and that when their work isn't noticed they will be more likely to make it known to the group rather than take silent credit. Even though we know that the relational elements of a group are crucial for success, even in high-performance teams, that work is not as valued in our society as the task-related work.

Despite the fact that some communication patterns and behaviors related to our typical (and stereotypical) gender socialization affect how we interact in and form perceptions of others in groups, the differences in group communication that used to be attributed to gender in early group communication research seem to be diminishing. This is likely due to the changing organizational cultures from which much group work emerges, which have now had more than sixty years to adjust to women in the workplace. It is also due to a more nuanced understanding of gender-based research, which does not take a stereotypical view from the beginning as many of the early male researchers did.

Now, instead of assuming biological sex is a factor that creates inherent communication differences, group communication scholars see that men and women both exhibit a range of behaviors that are more or less feminine or masculine. It is these gendered behaviors, and not a person's gender, that seem to have more of an influence on perceptions of group communication. Interestingly, group interactions are still masculinist in that male and female group members prefer a more masculine communication style for task leaders and that both males and females in this role are more likely to adapt to a more masculine communication style. Conversely, men who take on social-emotional leadership behaviors adopt a more feminine communication style. In short, it seems that although masculine communication traits are more often associated with high status positions in groups, both men and women adapt to this expectation and are evaluated similarly (Haslett & Ruebush, 1999).

In terms of age, for the first time since industrialization began, it is common to have three generations of people (and sometimes four) working side by side in an organizational setting. Although four generations often worked together in early factories, they were segregated based on their age group, and a hierarchy existed with older workers at the top and younger workers at the bottom. Today, however, generations interact regularly, and it is common for an older person to have a leader or supervisor who is younger than him or her (Allen, 2011). The current generations in the US workplace and consequently in work-based groups include the following:

Figure 13.6: It is common to have different generations working together in an organizational setting.

- **The Silent Generation.** Born between 1925 and 1942, currently in their mid-60s to mid-80s, this is the smallest generation in the workforce right now, as many have retired or left for other reasons. This generation includes people who were born during the Great Depression or the early part of World War II, many of whom later fought in the Korean War (Clarke, 1970).
- **The Baby Boomers.** Born between 1946 and 1964, currently in their late forties to mid-60s, this is the largest generation in the workforce right now. Baby boomers are the most populous generation born in US history, and they are working longer than previous generations, which means they will remain the predominant force in organizations for ten to twenty more years.
- **Generation X.** Born between 1965 and 1981, currently in their early thirties to mid-40s, this generation was the first to see technology like cell phones and the Internet make its way into classrooms and our daily lives. Compared to previous generations, "Gen-Xers" are more diverse in terms of race, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation and have a greater appreciation for and understanding of diversity.

- **Generation Y.** Born between 1982 and 2000, "Millennials" as they are also called are currently in their late teens up to about thirty years old. This generation is not as likely to remember a time without technology such as computers and cell phones. They are just entering into the workforce and have been greatly affected by recent economic crises. They are experiencing significantly high unemployment rates.

The benefits and challenges that come with diversity of group members are important to consider. Since we will all work in diverse groups, we should be prepared to address potential challenges in order to reap the benefits. Diverse groups may be wise to coordinate social interactions outside of group time in order to find common ground that can help facilitate interaction and increase group cohesion. We should be sensitive but not let sensitivity create fear of "doing something wrong" that then prevents us from having meaningful interactions.

References

Figures

Figure 13.1: Social-emotional leaders are reflective thinkers who use their perception skills to analyze group dynamics and maintain a positive climate. Dim Hou. 2019. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/2P6Q7_uiDr0

Figure 13.2: Common components of group problems. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 13.3: The group problem-solving process. Kindred Grey. 2022. CC BY 4.0.

Figure 13.4: Brainstorming is a good way to generate possible solutions to a problem. Below are some suggestions to make brainstorming more of a decision-making method. Monstera. 2021. Pexels license. https://www.pexels.com/photo/excited-black-woman-using-laptop-9429552/

Figure 13.5: Culturally heterogeneous groups perform better than more homogenous groups. fauxels. 2019. Pexels license. https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-people-near-wooden-table-3184418/

Figure 13.6: It is common to have different generations working together in an organizational setting. Rendy Novantino. 2021. Unsplash license. https://unsplash.com/photos/wJoRe38I8fc

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GLOSSARY

Abstract

The author-supplied summary of the source

Active listening

Refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices

Adaptors

Touching behaviors and movements that indicate internal states typically related to arousal or anxiety

Adjourning

During the adjourning stage, the group dissolves because they finished their task at hand and completed their goal

Analogies

A comparison of ideas, items, or circumstances

Articulation

Refers to the clarity of sounds and words you pronounce

Artifacts

The objects and possessions that surround us

Brainstorming

Generating many potential topic ideas in a fast-paced and a non-judgmental manner

Captive audience

People who are required to attend your presentations

Causal reasoning

Argues to establish a relationship between a cause and effect

Cause-effect pattern

Forming a relationship between ideas that shows a progression from origin to result

Channel

A sensory route on which a message travels, to the receiver for decoding. Part of model of communication

Chronemics

The study of how time affects communication

Chronological pattern

Speech structure based on time or sequence

Claim

The statement that will be supported by evidence

Code switching

Involves changing from one way of speaking to another between or within interactions

Codes

Culturally agreed on and ever-changing systems of symbols that help us organize, understand and generate meaning

Cognitive dissonance

Refers to the mental discomfort that results when new information clashes with or contradicts currently held beliefs, attitudes, or values

Communication

The process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts

Communication apprehension (CA)

Fear or anxiety experience by a person due to real or perceived communication with another person or persons. This is a fear or anxiety that involves several types of communication not limited to public speaking.

Communication competence

Refers to the knowledge of effective and appropriate communication patterns and the ability to use and adapt that knowledge in various contexts

Communication ethics

Deals with the process of negotiating and reflecting on our actions and communication regarding what we believe to be right and wrong

Communication-orientation modification therapy (COM therapy)

A type of cognitive restructuring that encourages people to think of public speaking as conversation rather than a performance

Competence

Refers to the perception of a speaker's expertise in relation to the topic being discussed

Connotation

Refers to the definitions that are based on emotion- or experience-based associations people have with a word

Consensus rule

A decision-making technique in which all members of the group must agree on the same decision

Credibility

When an audience sees you as competent, trustworthy, and engaging

Critical listening

Listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information we can infer from context

Cultural context

Part of the Transaction Model of Communication. Includes various aspects of identities such as race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and ability

Cultural identities

Based on socially constructed categories that teach us a way of being and include expectations for social behavior or ways of acting

Culture

An ongoing negotiation of learned and patterned beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors

Decoding

The process of turning communication into thoughts. Part of model of communication.

Deductive reasoning

Derives specifics from what is already known

Demographics

Broad socio-cultural categories, such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, education level, religion, ethnicity, and nationality used to segment a larger population

Denotation

Refers to definitions that are accepted by the language group as a whole, or the dictionary definition of a word

Digital media

Refers to video, audio, software, and other content created, edited, stored, or accessed in digital form, through numeric encoding and decoding of data

Displacement

Refers to our ability to talk and events that are removed in space or time from a speaker and situation

Dynamism

Refers to the degree to which audience members perceive a speaker to be outgoing and animated

Emblems

Gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning within a cultural context

Empathetic listening

The most challenging form of listening that occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling

Encoding

The process of turning thoughts into communication. Part of model of communication.

Environmental noise

Any physical noise present in a communication encounter

Ethnocentrism

Our tendency to view our own culture as superior to other cultures

Ethos

Refers to the credibility of the speaker and includes dimensions: competence, trustworthiness, and dynamism

Evidence

Also called grounds, it supports the claim

Example

Cited case that is representative of a larger whole

Expediter

A task-related role that functions to keep the group on track toward completing its task by managing the agenda and setting and assessing goals in order to monitor the group's progress

Explanations

Clarify ideas by providing information about what something is, why something is the way it is, or how something works or came to be

Extemporaneous delivery

Memorizing the overall structure and main points of a speech and then speaking from keyword/key-phrase notes

Eye contact

The act of looking directly into one another's eyes

Facial expressions

The feelings expressed on a person's face

Facts

Conclusions based on direct observation or group consensus

Feedback

Includes messages sent in response to other messages. Part of model of communication

Fluency

Refers to the flow of your speaking

Fluency hiccups

Unintended pauses in a speech that usually result from forgetting what you were saying, being distracted, or losing your place in speaking

Formal outline

A full-sentence outline that helps you prepare for your speech. It includes the introduction and conclusion, the main content of the body, key supporting materials, citation information written into the sentences in the outline, and a references page for your speech.

Forming

The stage when group members begin to reduce uncertainty associated with new relationships and/or new tasks through initial interactions that lay the foundation for later group dynamics

Gatekeeper

This person manages the flow of conversation in a group in order to achieve an appropriate balance so that all group members get to participate in a meaningful way

Gender

An identity based on internalized cultural notions of masculinity and femininity that is constructed through communication and interaction

General purpose

To inform, to persuade, or to entertain

Gestures

A movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning

Grammar

Refers to the rules that govern how words are used to make phrases and sentences

Group climate

The relatively enduring tone and quality of the group interactions, it determines how cohesive the group is

Group cohesion

Refers to the commitment of members to the purpose of the group and the degree of the attraction among individuals in the group

Group communication

Communication among three or more people interacting to achieve a shared goal

Group socialization

Refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors

Groupthink

A negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that result from high levels cohesion and/or high conformity pressures

Haptics

Refers to the study of communication by touch

Harmonizer

Group members who help manage the various types of group conflict that emerge during group communication, they keep their eyes and ears open for signs of conflict among group members and ideally intervene before it escalates

High-context communication

Communication where much of the meaning is generated from nonverbal and contextual cues

Immediacy behaviors

Verbal and nonverbal behaviors that lessen real or perceived physical and psychological distance between communicators and include things like smiling, nodding, making eye-contact, and occasionally engaging in social, polite, or professional touch

Impromptu delivery

When a speaker has little or no time to prepare a speech

Inductive reasoning

Reaches conclusions through citation of examples and is the most frequently used form of logical reasoning

Inferences

Conclusions based on thoughts or speculation, but not direct observation

Information overload

A barrier to effective listening that occurs when a speech contains more information than an audience can process

Information provider

This role includes behaviors that are more evenly shared compared to other roles, as ideally, all group members present new ideas, initiate discussions of new topics, and contribute their own relevant knowledge and experiences

Information seeker

The person who has this task-related role asks for more information, elaboration, or clarification on items relevant to the group's task

Informational listening

Listening with the intent of comprehending and retaining information

Informative speaking

A method of speaking that utilizes objective, factual information in order to teach an audience

Interaction model of communication

Describes communication as a process in which participants alternate positions as sender and receiver and generate meaning by sending messages and receiving feedback within physical and psychological contexts

Intercultural communication

Communication between people with differing cultural identities

Intercultural communication competence (ICC)

The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. Some key components include motivation, self-and-other knowledge, and tolerance for uncertainty.

Interdependence

Small groups share a common purpose and a common fate. If the actions of one or two group members lead to a group deviating from or not achieving their purpose, then all members of the group are affected.

Internet and digital media age

Refers to the time-period in which personal computers and other technologies were introduced to provide users the ability to easily and rapidly transfer information

Interpersonal communication

Communication between people whose lives mutually influence one another

Interpersonal conflict

Emerges from conflict between individual members of the group

Interpretation

The third part of the perception process in which we assign meaning to our experiences using mental structures called schemata

Interpreter

This person helps manage the diversity within a group by mediating intercultural conflict, articulating common ground between different people, and generally creating a climate where difference is seen as an opportunity rather than as something to be feared

Intrapersonal communication

Communication with oneself using internal vocalization or reflective thinking

Jargon

Refers to specialized words used by certain group or profession

Listening

The learned process of receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages

Logos

The reasoning or logic of an argument

Low-context communication

Communication where much of the meaning generated within an interaction comes from the verbal communication used rather than nonverbal or contextual cues

Main point

A “miniature speech” within your larger speech. Each will have a central idea, meet some part of your specific purpose, and include supporting material from your research that relates to your thesis

Majority rule

A commonly used decision-making technique in which a majority (one-half plus one) must agree before making the decision

Manuscript delivery

Speaking from a well written or printed document that contains the entirety of a speech

Mass communication

Public communication which is transmitted to many people through print or electronic media

Media literacy

The ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms

Memorized delivery

Completely memorizing a speech and delivering it without notes

Message

The verbal or nonverbal content being conveyed from sender to receiver. Part of model of communication.

Metaphor

An implicit comparison of two things that are not alike and/or are not typically associated

Mindfulness

A state of self- and other-monitoring that informs later reflection on communication interactions

Minority rule

A decision making technique in which a designated authority or expert has final say over a decision and may or may not consider the input of other group members

Monopolizer

A group member who makes excessive verbal contributions preventing equal participation by other group members. Can include the "egghead" and the "stage hog."

Monroe's Motivated Sequence

A five step organizational pattern to help persuade an audience. 1. Attention Step: Grab the audience's attention in the introduction. 2. Need Step: Establish the reason that your topic needs to be addressed. Satisfaction Step: Present a solution to the problem that you are addressing. 4. Visualization Step: Incorporate a positive/negative motivation to support the relationship you have set up between the need and your proposal. 5. Action Step: Include a call to action that tells people what they can do about the situation.

Noise

Anything that interferes with a message being sent between participants in a communication encounter. Can be environmental or semantic. Part of model of communication.

Nominal group technique

This technique guides decision making through a four-step process that includes idea generation and evaluation and seeks to elicit equal contributions from all group members

Nonverbal adaptors

Extra movements caused by anxiety (i.e., tapping your foot, wringing your hands, playing with a paperclip, twirling hair, or scratching)

Nonverbal communication

A process of generating meaning using behavior other than words

Nonverbal signposts

Pauses and changes in rate, pitch, or volume that help to emphasize a transition in a speech

Norming

During this stage of group development, the expectations and norms of the group are clear and understood, allowing for a stable, productive, and cohesive environment

Oculesics

Study of eye behaviors and movements in nonverbal communication

Organizing

The second part of the perception process, in which we sort and categorize information that we perceive based on innate and learned cognitive patterns. Three ways we sort things into patterns are by using proximity, similarity, and difference

Paralanguage

Vocalized but not verbal part of a spoken message, such as speaking rate, volume, and pitch

Parallel wording

Similar wording among key organizing signposts and main points that helps structure a speech

Paraphrase

To rephrase a message into your own words

Pathos

The emotional appeal

Peer-review process

The most rigorous form of review, which takes several months to years and ensures that the information that is published has been vetted and approved by numerous experts on the subject

Perception

The process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information. The process of perception includes the perception of select stimuli that pass through our perceptual filter

Perception checking

A strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication

Performing

During this stage of group development, members are working towards the final product or goal previously established. They are working towards the completion of the task at hand.

Periodicals

Magazines and journals that are published periodically

Physiological noise

Noise stemming from physical injury, illness, or bodily stress

Pitch

Refers to how high or low a speaker's voice is

Posture

The position in which someone holds their body when standing or sitting

Prejudice

Negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities

Primacy effect

Presenting your best information first in order to make a positive impression and engage your audience early in your speech

Primary sources

Sources written by people with firsthand experiences or by researchers/scholars who conducted original research

Problem-solution pattern

Presenting a problem and offering one or multiple solutions

Pronunciation

Whether you say the words correctly

Proxemics

The study of how space and distance influence communication

Pseudo-listening

Behaving as if you are paying attention to a speaker when you are actually not

Psychological audience analysis

Consider the audience's psychological dispositions towards the topic, the speaker and the occasion as well as how their attitudes, beliefs, and values inform those dispositions

Psychological noise

Noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal

Public communication

A sender-focused form of communication in which one person is typically responsible for conveying information to an audience

Public speaking anxiety

Type of communication apprehension that produces physiological, cognitive, and behavioral reactions in people when faced with a real or imagined presentation

Race

A socially constructed category based on differences in appearance that has been used to create hierarchies that privilege some and disadvantage others

Rate

Refers to how fast or slow you speak

Recency effect

Based on the idea that an audience will best remember the information they heard most recently

Recorder

The person who takes notes on the discussion and activities that occur during a group meeting. This role is the only role that is limited to one person at a time

Reference librarians

Information-retrieval experts

Relational context

Part of the Transaction Model of Communication. Includes the previous interpersonal history and type of relationship we have with a person

Relational needs

Include needs that help us maintain social bonds and interpersonal relationships

Rhetoric

Refers to speaking well and persuasively

Rhetorical question

A question which will elicit a mental response from the audience, not a verbal or nonverbal one

Schemata

Databases of stored, related information that we use to interpret new experiences

Secondary groups

Which are characterized by less frequent face to face interactions, less emotional and relational communication, and more task related communication than primary groups

Secondary sources

Compiled research by others in a condensed format

Selecting

The first part of the perception process, in which we focus our attention on certain incoming sensory information

Self-concept

The overall idea of who a person thinks they are

Self-esteem

The judgments and evaluations we make about our self-concept

Self-fulfilling prophecies

Thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true

Self-serving bias

This is the perceptual error through which we attribute the causes of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control

Semantic noise

Noise that occurs in the encoding and decoding process when participants do not understand a symbol

Sex

Based on biological characteristics, including external genitalia, internal sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones

Signposts

Statements that help audience members navigate the changes in a speech

Simile

A direct comparison of two things using the words like or as

Slang

Refers to new or adapted words that are specific to one group, context, or time period

Small group communication

Refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence and a shared identity

Social cohesion

Refers to the attraction and liking among group members; relational-oriented groups have higher social-cohesion

Social comparison theory

We describe and evaluate ourselves in terms of how we compare to other people

Social constructionism

A view that argues the self is formed through our interactions with others and in relationship to social, cultural, and political contexts

Social learning theory

Proposed by Albert Bandura, this theory emphasizes the importance of observing, modelling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others

Social loafing

When a group member contributes less to the group than the other members do or than they would if working along

Social networking sites (SNSs)

An online platform that allows users to create a public profile and interact with other users

Spatial pattern

Arranges main points based on their layout or proximity to each other

Speaking outline

A keyword and phrase outline that helps you deliver your speech. The speaking outline helps you get that information out to the audience.

Specific purpose

One-sentence statement that includes the objective you want to accomplish in your speech

Statistics

Numerical representations of information

Stereotypes

Sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group

Storming

The stage of group development, when conflict begins to emerge as people begin to perform their various roles, have their ideals heard, and negotiate where they fit in the group's structure

Supporter

A maintenance role that is characterized by communication behaviors that encourage other group members and provide emotional support as needed

Symbol

Something that stands in for or represents something else

Synergy

Refers to the potential for gains in performance or heightened quality of interactions when complementary members or member characteristics are added to existing ones

Teams

Are task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members

Testimonies

Quoted information from people with direct knowledge about a subject or situation

Thesis statement

One-Sentence Summary of the central idea of your speech

Topical pattern

Breaking a large idea or category into smaller ideas or subcategories

Transaction model of communication

Describes communication as a process in which communicators generate social realities within social, relational, and cultural contexts

Transmission model of communication

Describes communication as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver

Triangle of meaning

A model of communication that indicates the relationship among a thought, symbol, and referent and highlights indirect relationship between the symbol and referent

Trustworthiness

The second component of ethos and is the degree that audience members perceive a speaker to be presenting accurate, credible information in a non-manipulative way

Verbal citation

Citing the sources you have obtained information from in your speech to prove your credibility to the audience

Verbal expressions

Language is expressive. Helps us communicate our observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs

Verbal fillers

The umms, uhhs, and other linguistic pauses of conversation

Virtual groups

Take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal

Visual aids

Help a speaker reinforce speech content visually, which helps amplify the speaker's message

Vocal variety

Changes in your rate, volume, and pitch that make you sound more prepared and credible

Vocalics

The study of paralanguage

Volume

Refers to how loud or soft you speak

Voluntary audience

People who have decided to come hear your speech

Warrant

The underlying justification that connects the claim and the evidence