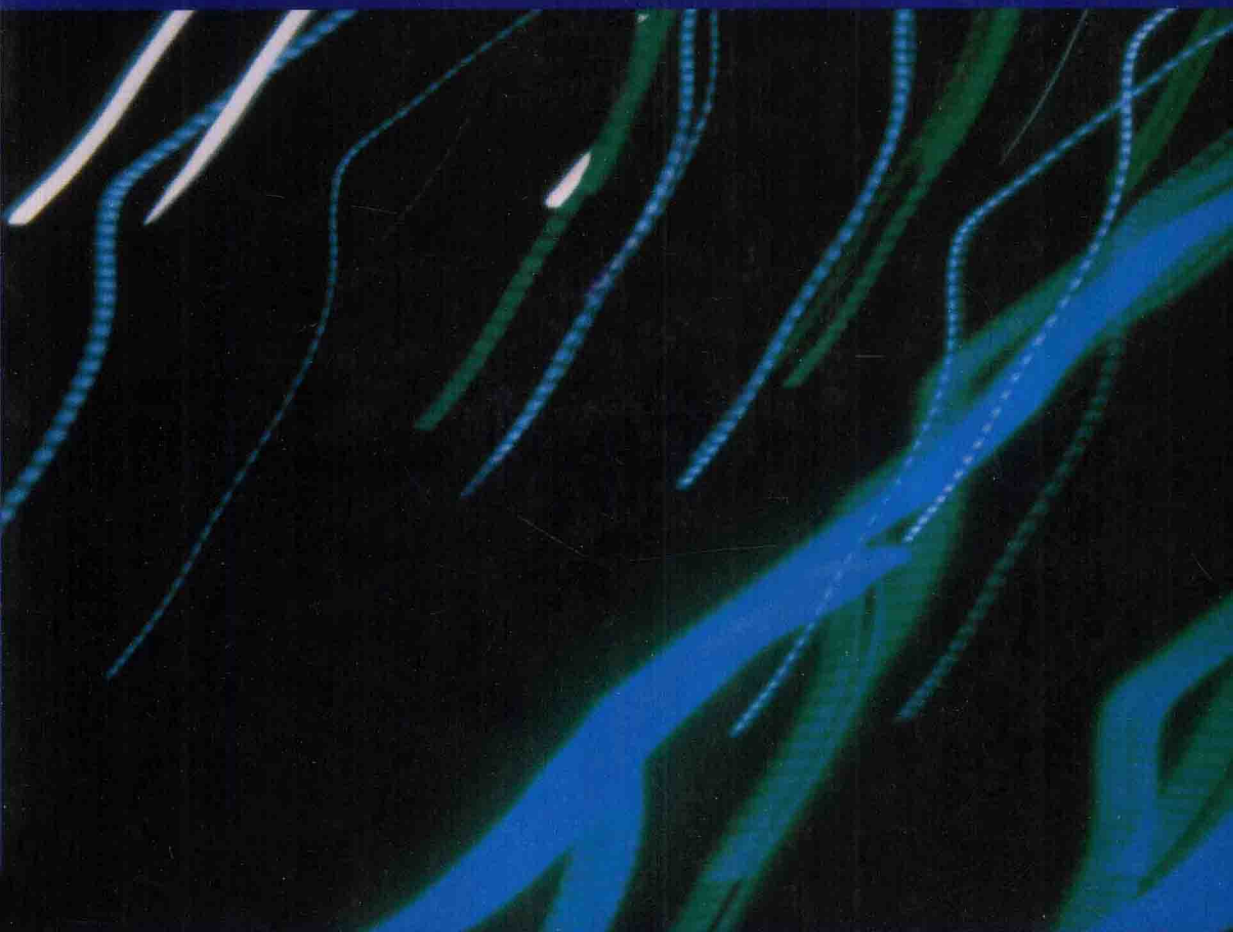


SECOND EDITION

# AS

## Communication Studies: The Essential Introduction



Andrew Beck, Peter Bennett, Peter Wall

# **AS COMMUNICATION STUDIES**

THE ESSENTIAL INTRODUCTION

Second edition

Andrew Beck, Peter Bennett,  
Peter Wall

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## ▼ INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

*'He promised a new start.  
I made no comment.  
What should I resent?'*

T. S. Eliot: *The Waste Land*

Research has suggested that 'new' is the word used most frequently in advertising. What you are reading, then, is almost certainly an advertisement of sorts, an extended version of the book's new blurb which talks about how this version of what was once considered 'essential' is newer and presumably better. It is also then a series of 'plays', of strategies for convincing you at least that what you have is a cut above what went before (and which you probably don't have).

In fact, in essence, nothing very much has changed. Communication is still 'at the heart of our everyday lives' as the first edition claimed and this is still an all-purpose introduction to the study of communication. If you find it more tightly focused (from its title onwards) on the new AQA AS specification, it is simply because this is now the 'introductory' Communication Studies qualification, the lowest level at which Communication Studies is formally examined. Moreover we were all involved, with others, in the creation of that specification as a means to deliver the key strands of Communication Studies as a discipline. As the specification has bedded in, so our work here has become more focused and streamlined.

What we have attempted to do, encouraged by the often gratifyingly positive and thoughtful feedback we have received from readers, is to try to listen and learn lessons. We have tried to make the good stuff more useful and tried to iron out the inconsistencies of structure which for some were interfering with a clear sight of what is essential. The proof of the pudding will, as always, be in the eating.

### HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANISED

This book aims to give you a start in your study of communication. It opens up a path into an often complex discipline. It looks at the principal theories that have been developed about, while at the same time exploring the character of, communication in a modern technological age. It is designed to help you explore and understand

communication from both theoretical and practical perspectives. We offer you advice on how to enhance your own communication skills. We look at key perspectives in communication by considering approaches to textual analysis. We explore key aspects of the communication process between individuals and within groups.

You might be working with the book by yourself or with a group of fellow students led by a teacher. Whichever way you're using the book, here are a few hints on how to make best use of it.

You can work with the book in any order you wish. If you start at the beginning and proceed right the way through to the end, then you should appreciate that there's a structure here. Part 1 sets the scene for your studying Communication. Part 2 looks at ways and means by which you can become more effective communicators, and examines the forms and functions of communication in a number of contexts – including working through a coursework portfolio. Parts 3 and 4 will be of special interest to students preparing for AQA's AS Communication Studies, as they reflect the three units of study. Part 3 introduces you to the tools you can use to analyse communication texts; it also introduces you to a wide range of (sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting) theories about communication. Part 4 looks at themes in personal communication; it introduces you to key concepts relating to verbal and non-verbal communication, intrapersonal communication and group communication. Finally, Part 5 offers advice on and assistance in preparing for and sitting public examinations in Communication Studies.

On the other hand, you might want simply to dip into the book without working through it in sequence. If you do this, then look to the titles of each part, and to the titles of the sections into which the parts are divided. And, in all parts, look to the headings that break up the text and which tell you what's coming.

Whenever a key term is introduced you will find that we offer a definition of that term. Whenever we want you to explore a concept, theory or perspective we offer activities (in shaded boxes). It's often the case that we want you to engage in that activity before you go any further – because what you'll discover doing that activity will inform how you read the next part of the text. It's sometimes the case that we will explain something to you, then ask you to undertake an activity to reinforce your learning, or to test the truth or reliability of what we've said. Shorter definitions of key terms in the text are offered in the Glossary at the end of the book.

We hope this book offers you a readable introduction to Communication Studies. We hope it helps you in your explorations of Communication Studies and that it stimulates you to take your studies further. If that's what you want, then the Further Reading sections and Bibliography will help you to find out more about the world of Communication Studies.

Andrew Beck, Peter Bennett and Pete Wall  
Leamington Spa, Stourbridge, Wakefield  
Autumn 2003

# PART 1: STUDYING COMMUNICATION

## ▼ 1 WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'COMMUNICATION'?

In the first part of this book we will be looking to briefly map out the Communication Studies 'territory'.

- We will ask 'What is "communication"?' and looking at a wide range of answers.
- We will start to explore some of the issues of Communication Studies and present a couple of broadly theoretical approaches to these issues.

Communication is at the heart of our everyday lives. From the moment we wake in the morning, thinking about the challenges of the day ahead, to the moment we drift off to sleep last thing at night, we are constantly in the process of communicating. We do so either as senders of messages or receivers of messages. In some cases, such as our early morning thoughts, the communication is within and to our self.

Just think how important the process of communication is in so many everyday situations.

- We speak to, listen to and interact with other people. We do this face to face or on the telephone. We communicate in formal situations (such as sitting in class listening to a teacher) as well as in informal situations (chatting with friends or family).
- We use written language to communicate. We read and write letters, notes, reports, essays, instructions and shopping lists. Many of us use electronic technology to send and receive e-mails or to surf the Net.
- Wherever we go we are the receivers of messages. Newspaper headlines, billboards, street signs, shop windows, public announcements and traffic lights all send us messages. In a media-saturated society they compete for and demand our attention to the point where it is impossible to ignore them.
- We use the mass media as a source of messages that offers us both information and entertainment. We listen to the radio, to CDs or minidisks; we watch television and DVDs, and we read newspapers and magazines.

- We communicate with ourselves when we think, consider, plan or have a sudden moment of anxiety.
- Even when we think we are not communicating, we usually are. Facial expressions, bodily posture, even the way in which we occupy the space about us, are all methods of communicating our attitudes, ideas and feelings to the world at large. Indeed, it has been argued that it is impossible *not* to communicate.

As communication is such an important part of our everyday lives, it is hardly surprising that people have chosen to study it. By doing so, it is possible to understand more fully how communication works. Some people believe that such study can help to make us more efficient and effective communicators.

Some commentators have tried to represent Communication Studies as a new arrival on the scene. This is easy to disprove. Key theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce, whose work forms a foundation for Communication Studies, were born and worked in the nineteenth century. Fundamental models of the communication process (such as Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver's) were devised and published in the late 1940s. Since the 1970s, Communication Studies has been an established discipline in British secondary, further and higher education. What sometimes confuses people about Communication Studies is that it draws on, and its work is informed by, work in other related disciplines. Thus, as a student of Communication Studies, you will encounter elements of Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy and Linguistics, as well as Cultural Studies. But you'll still be studying communication, and you'll be studying the world from the perspective of Communication Studies.

'Studying the world' is an expansive phrase but hardly an exaggeration since it is much more difficult to say what is excluded from our study than what is included. Paul Watzlawick's much-quoted formulation sums up the problem and potential of the discipline: 'One cannot not communicate,' he claimed (1967). Put simply, this particular game is always 'on'. Communication is what we do, when the 'we' concerned is 'humans', that species the philosopher Aristotle dubbed 'social animals'. As if to confirm this, Communication theorist Colin Cherry has suggested that 'communication makes social life possible' and the triangle is complete, for the moment.

Communication is in a pure and poignant way the proof of our existence ('a souvenir just to prove that we were here' as the song has it) and, at the same time, a place where we have that debate. It is about identity and culture and context because it is about us and in us and through us. We are its theme; we are its channels. Communication represents or constitutes our desire to have meaning, to replace silence with sound and inaction with action.

What we are essentially doing in Communication Studies is considering the significance of everyday life: the importance of appearance and performance and context. Context recurs because it is, as Margaret Atwood has suggested, 'all'. We more often ask 'where?' than 'what?', and 'where?' usually brings us both quicker and closer to the hardest question, 'why?' Of course the particular will always override the general, what is *there* will always overtake 'what is there?' Take this crisp ten pound note and consider its status, its existence, its meaning. Why is it, for example, that one of the conditions of getting permission to reproduce this 'text' in colour was a guarantee that it would be impossible to create forged banknotes from its reproduction.



**Figure 1.1** A ten pound note

## ACTIVITY...

- What is this (precisely)?
- Who is it for?
- What does it mean?
- Why is it valuable?

When Raymond Williams made his formal definition of Communication as an area of study in 1962, he began with the question 'What do we mean by communication?' This part addresses this question but it will do it practically rather than theoretically, examining where communication is to be found rather than redefining what it is. Williams provided some significant clues in his initial survey arguing for a new 'emphasis': 'that society is a form of communication, through which experience is described, shared, modified and preserved' (Williams 1962: 10).

Williams' book *Communications* makes powerful appeals for a new set of ways of looking at reality which are still relevant today. Here is his invitation to students of communication:

We need to say what many of us know in experience: that the struggle to learn, to describe, to understand, to educate is a central and necessary part of our humanity. This struggle is not begun, at second hand, after reality has occurred. It is in itself a major way in which reality is formed and changed . . . Communication begins in the struggle to learn and describe.

(Williams 1962: 11)

## THE WHOLE WORLD AS OUR TEXT



**Figure 1.2** *Crowds leaving Old Trafford. Courtesy of Dale Smith*

### ACTIVITY

Look at the image of Old Trafford. Try to identify those elements that communicate to you. Where are we? What is the event likely to be? Who are these people (age, gender, class)? How do we know all of this?

Stepping into the above photograph is an act of engagement with the world of communication and of communication texts. What is principally represented here is a piece of the built environment in the south of Manchester entitled 'Old Trafford'. What this structure represents – that is, what is communicated by it – is a matter for debate, possibly heated debate. If, as a reader of this communication you are a member of what zoologist Desmond Morris called 'the football tribe', you are likely to have a strongly positive or negative attitude towards it. On the other hand, if you are ignorant of or uninterested in 'ball-based Saturday afternoon rituals', your response is likely to be neutral or even aggressive. In fact it might be said that instead of communicating, the image is in fact operating as a barrier to communication, causing communication to deteriorate.

**COMMUNICATION TEXT** Discrete unit of communication, that is anything that can be identified as communicating in its own right; a signifying structure composed of signs.

**COMMUNICATION BARRIER** Anything that impedes the communication process or causes it to deteriorate. There are four types of identifiable barrier to communication:

- 1 **Mechanical:** physical impediments.
- 2 **Psychological:** internal pressures on sender/receiver.
- 3 **Semantic:** lack of or partial understanding.
- 4 **Organisational:** structural dysfunctions in groups.

For merchandising purposes, 'Old Trafford' has been labelled 'the theatre of dreams'; in other words this meaning has been assigned to it. You can buy miniature representations of the football ground with this legend engraved on the base, where the significance of the word 'theatre' can easily be seen as a reference to the concentrated atmosphere of 'the cauldron'. This is an interesting representation in the sense that when you stand outside Old Trafford, or in fact inside it, you are struck by the awesome size of it and are tempted by its resemblance to a Gothic cathedral rather than to a theatre. We use the word 'tempted' because clearly making connections between places like a football stadium and a cathedral is making links between the activities that take place in them. This is to confuse form (that is, shape and structure) with function (that is, use and purpose).

## ACTIVITY...

Look at some specific buildings in your area where you either live or study. Look for buildings under the following categories:

- cathedral, church, mosque, temple
- civic building (e.g. town hall)
- house
- hospital
- library.

Then consider the degree to which your description of them, or your thoughts about them, or the vocabulary you use about them derives from either their form (that is, what you see) and/or their function (that is, what you know about them).

What you are doing in the above activity is clarifying your perception of the world around you and recognising the extent to which even that perception is shaped by your experiences of language, culture and society. You are being asked to consider the extent to which even seeing is an 'interested' activity – that is it isn't 'objective'. When we see 'Old Trafford', we are looking at a coded message which we must and will decode according to our experiences and experience. The essence of Communication Studies is in the recognition that our experience of the world as human beings is essentially the experience of communication texts – which must be understood.

**KEY TERM**

**ENCODE/DECODE** In process explanations these twin verbs describe the process through which thought is converted from its abstract state and is given a concrete form by the sender (encoding) and then returned to its abstract state by the receiver (decoding).

## COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA TEXTS

Clearly, no understanding of our perception of 'Old Trafford' would be complete without a consideration of the role of the mass media in our perception and interpretation of human activities. It was Bill Shankly who claimed, for example, that 'Football's not a matter of life and death; it's more important than that', but it was newspapers and television that broadcast his words and repeated them until they stuck.

### ACTIVITY

A Communication Studies A Level question (from AEB in 1999) asked candidates to 'consider the media coverage of a sport of your choice'. Looking at a sport other than football, consider what meanings the press and television give to sport – that is:

- What words do they use?
- How do they treat the participants?
- What values do they attach to the sport concerned? Compare these to the reasons why you play sport or why you believe sport should be played.

Whatever your findings, it is very difficult not to conclude that much of sport's social meaning is constructed by mass media for a range of purposes: from ensuring that there are eight pages or three minutes of sport on any day to reopening old wounds and restating matters of national identity. When, in advance of a European football championship semi-final between England and Germany, the *Daily Star* used the headline 'HERR WE GO: Bring On The Krauts' there was widespread criticism. The *Star*

described Germany as 'the old enemy' and ended its front page with the slogan 'LET BATTLE COMMENCE'. Interestingly the coverage was very like that reserved for explicit campaigns of war such as the Falklands and the Gulf conflicts, with a call to fans to support 'the England boys' and including a pastiche of the Kitchener 'Your Country Needs You' First World War propaganda poster.

It is not our job here to analyse this text in depth but rather to reflect the degree to which our society is represented by and in such texts. If we as individuals are sometimes betrayed or revealed by what we consciously and unconsciously say, this may be equally true of the deliberate and accidental pronouncements of our society in its forms of mass communication.

## ACTIVITY...

Take a single copy of a national newspaper.

- Analyse its values solely from its headlines.
- Try to describe the newspaper's 'personality'.
- List its preoccupations (themes), its 'heroes' and its 'villains'.

## THE ILLUSTRATED MAN: THE HUMAN FIGURE AS TEXT

In the stadium illustration that appears on page 6, some people are represented moving in front of the camera. These people would probably have opinions as to the meanings of 'Old Trafford' and sport. They themselves are communicating at a number of levels. In other words, they constitute 'text' in a number of ways: as a crowd/group held together by a common context and purpose; as a group sharing certain demographic variables like gender, ethnicity and age, uniformed to some extent; as a series of individuals expressing their own identities through subtle modifications of clothing, of hairstyle, of attitude. This photograph is merely a still frame from a real movie which is their lives and in which the theme is communication.

## ACTIVITY...

How specifically do you express your own individual personality? List the most significant TEN ways (e.g. 1. My hairstyle, plus comment – 'it's been this long since ...'). PROMPT: your clothes, appearance, props, locations, roles.

In exploring what makes up your expressed identity, you are in fact rehearsing the content of much of your communication course. This will include a consideration of such matters as domestic architecture, interior design, industrial and commercial