

# INTERPLA

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THE PROCESS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION



SEVENTH EDITION

RONALD B. ADLER

LAWRENCE B. ROSENFELD

NEIL TOWNE

RUSSELL F. PROCTOR II



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SEVENTH EDITION

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## PREFACE

It would seem that professors of interpersonal communication are lucky people. Few, if any, academic subjects are so obviously important or interesting. Most students recognize that this subject has the potential to provide fascinating and useful information, and they approach an interpersonal class ready to learn. Despite the inherent appeal of the subject, designing an interpersonal communication course (or text) isn't an easy task. On one hand, instructors and authors have to avoid the danger of being too simplistic, denying students an understanding of how a scholarly approach to the topic goes far beyond the nostrums of pop psychology and talk show advice. On the other hand, a good introductory course and its accompanying textbook shouldn't overwhelm readers with an avalanche of details that are more appropriate at the upper division or graduate level.

### BASIC APPROACH OF THE BOOK

Like its predecessors, this edition of *Interplay* strives to strike a balance between simplicity and complexity by providing a thorough, readable survey of the field of interpersonal communication for students taking their first serious look at the subject. The book you are holding retains the same approach as earlier versions. We have worked hard to make the writing style accessible and engaging, based on the conviction that even complicated ideas can be presented in a straightforward way. Beyond clarity, *Interplay* aims to be interesting. Toward this end, the book includes a

variety of photos and cartoons that illustrate the points far better than text could alone. Finally, this edition continues the successful approach of showing readers how principles of interpersonal communication operate in everyday life. Throughout the book, a boxed series of "Reflections" offer first person accounts of how topics in the book are illustrated in the personal experiences of a variety of people. The "Film Clips" take advantage of the popular medium of motion pictures to show how communication principles are illustrated in the lives of a variety of characters. Features like these have helped thousands of students appreciate that the principles of interpersonal communication described in *Interplay* are, indeed, reflected in the "real world" outside the classroom.

### CHANGES IN THE SEVENTH EDITION

Several changes distinguish this edition of *Interplay*. Most noticeably, a striking full-color design represents a change from the more staid approach of previous editions. This new design reflects the enthusiasm most professors and students feel about the topic of interpersonal communication, and we are convinced that it will help make the book more inviting as students spend many hours studying the information it contains.

Beyond this obvious improvement, long-time users will notice that the chapter on Emotions has been reintroduced in this edition. This change—requested by virtually all of our reviewers—will make it easier to address this important

dimension of interpersonal communication in a clear, coherent way.

Also at the request of many reviewers, the order of other chapters has been revised. For example, material on intercultural communication has been moved to Chapter 2, recognizing that culture is perhaps the most powerful force that influences how we perceive and behave toward others. Professors who wish to organize the course in other ways will find that Chapters 2 through 12 may be presented in a variety of sequences without compromising the clarity of the material they contain.

A new series of “Focus on Research” sidebars will help readers learn how scholars have gained insights about the process of interpersonal communication. These self-contained pieces profile a diverse group of scholarly studies on a variety of topics, showing how the academic study of communication has contributed to a better understanding of human interaction. Coupled with the extensive citations of scholarly work throughout the book, these “Focus on Research” boxes help readers understand that the discipline of communication is very much an academic enterprise that goes far beyond “common sense.”

Besides an overall updating of the material, this edition of *Interplay* emphasizes several topics that have gained prominence in recent years. For example, Chapter 9 illustrates how dialectal models provide new insights about how relationships operate. New material throughout the book highlights the impact of mediated communication on interpersonal relationships, showing that communication via computer is far from the sterile, dehumanizing type of act many critics suspected it would be. An increased number of examples and research citations illustrate how interpersonal communication operates in non-romantic relationships. New material focuses on the working world, family communication, and intercultural encounters. Collectively, these illustrations make

it clear that interpersonal communication operates in a variety of contexts.

## ANCILLARY RESOURCES

Along with the text itself, this edition of *Interplay* comes with a variety of tools that can help professors teach and students learn more effectively.

**Instructor’s Manual/Test Bank.** A comprehensive instructor’s manual, developed by Carol Zinner-Dolphin of the University of Wisconsin, Waukesha County, provides a wide array of resources for professors teaching the course. Former users of the text will note a number of new exercises as well as suggested written Portfolio Assignments and Group Study Exercises for each chapter. Most notably, there is a new section which introduces the concept of the Unit Windup. Based on the principle of applying theory to a “real” situation, the Windups can be used to spark group discussion and to assess and solidify students’ understanding of theory at the end of each unit of the text. A final exam based upon this principle is also provided.

**Computerized Test Bank.** ExamMaster, Harcourt Brace’s computerized test question program, is available for users in Windows, DOS, and Macintosh formats.

**Film Resource Guide.** The second edition of Russell F. Proctor’s *Communication in Film* is available to professors adopting *Interplay*. This book contains a wealth of strategies for using feature films as a teaching tool, along with suggestions on using dozens of films to illustrate the principles of interpersonal communication.

**Overhead Transparencies.** More than 30 overhead transparencies provide a tool for discussing key concepts in the classroom or lecture hall.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like most projects of any magnitude, whatever success *Interplay* enjoys is due to the contributions of many people.

Our sincere thanks go to colleagues around the country whose suggestions have helped us keep this edition of *Interplay* useful for professors and students: Nick Backus, Washburn University; Bruce Dorries, Colorado State University; Veronica Duncan, University of Nebraska; Susan Fox, Western Michigan University; Ava Good, San Jacinto College; Pam Johnson, California State University-Chico; Terri Main, Kings River Community College; Sandra Metts, Illinois State University; Joe Munshaw, Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville; Carol Peirce-Jones, University of Kentucky; Todd Thomas, North Carolina State University; Anita Vaccaro, Herkimer County Community College.

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You, of course, are the final judge of *Interplay*. We hope you will find that it increases the quality of teaching and learning. Perhaps more importantly, we hope the insights you gain using the book will improve the quality of your own interpersonal communication.

Ronald B. Adler

Lawrence B. Rosenfeld

Neil O. Towne

Russell F. Proctor II

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# CHAPTER *One*





# INTERPERSONAL PROCESS

## WHY WE COMMUNICATE

*Physical Needs*  
*Identity Needs*  
*Social Needs*  
*Practical Needs*

## THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

*A Linear View*  
*An Interactive View*  
*A Transactional View*

## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION DEFINED

*Quantitative and Qualitative Definitions*  
*Personal and Impersonal*  
*Communication: A Matter of Balance*

## COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

*Communication Can Be Intentional or Unintentional*  
*All Messages Have a Content and a Relational Dimension*  
*Communication Is Irreversible*  
*Communication Is Unrepeatable*

## COMMUNICATION MISCONCEPTIONS

*More Communication Is Not Always Better*  
*Communication Will Not Solve All Problems*  
*Effective Communication Is Not a Natural Ability*

## COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

*Communication Competence Defined*  
*Characteristics of Competent Communication*

## SUMMARY

## ACTIVITIES

## REFERENCES



## *After studying the material in this chapter*

### YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND

1. The needs that effective communication can satisfy.
2. The qualities that make a transactional model of communication more accurate than linear or interactive models.
3. Quantitative and qualitative definitions of interpersonal communication.
4. Five key principles and three misconceptions about communication.
5. The characteristics of competent communication.

### YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

1. Identify examples of the physical, identity, social, and practical needs you attempt to satisfy by communicating.
2. Demonstrate how the transactional communication model applies to your interpersonal communication.
3. Describe the degrees to which your communication is qualitatively impersonal and interpersonal, and describe the consequences of this combination.
4. Identify situations in which you communicate competently, and those in which your competence is less than satisfactory.

### KEY TERMS

Behavior  
Channel  
Cognitive complexity  
Communication  
Communication competence  
Content message  
Decoding  
Dyad  
Encoding  
Environment  
External noise  
Feedback  
Interactive communication model

Linear communication model  
Message  
Noise  
Physiological noise  
Psychological noise  
Qualitative interpersonal communication  
Quantitative interpersonal communication  
Receiver  
Relational message  
Self-monitoring  
Sender  
Transactional communication model





EVERYONE COMMUNICATES. Students and professors, parents and children, employers and employees, friends, strangers, and enemies—all communicate. We begin communicating with others in our first weeks of life and will keep on doing so until we die.

Why study an activity you've done your entire life? There are three reasons. First, studying interpersonal communication will give you a new look at a familiar topic. For instance, in a few pages you will find that some people can go years—even lifetimes—without communicating in a truly interpersonal manner. In this sense, exploring human communication is rather like studying anatomy or botany—everyday objects and processes take on new meaning.

A second reason for studying the subject has to do with the staggering amount of time we spend communicating. In research at the University of Cincinnati, Rudolph Verderber and his associates (1976) measured the amount of time a sample of college students spent on various activities. The researchers found that their subjects spent an average of over 61 percent of their waking time engaged in some form of communication. Whatever the occupation, the results would not be too different.

A third, more compelling reason exists for studying interpersonal communication. To put it bluntly, none of us communicates as effectively as we could. Our friendships, jobs, and studies suffer because we fail to express ourselves well and to understand others accurately. If you pause now and make a mental list of communication problems you have encountered, you'll see that, no matter how successful your relationships, there is plenty of room for improvement in your everyday life. The information that follows will help you improve the way you communicate with some of the people who matter most to you.

## WHY WE COMMUNICATE

Research demonstrating the importance of communication has been around longer than you might think. Frederick II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire from 1220 to 1250, was called *stupor mundi*—"wonder of the world"—by his admiring subjects. Along with his administrative and military talents, Frederick was a leading scientist of his time. A medieval historian described one of his dramatic, if inhumane, experiments:

He bade foster mothers and nurses to suckle the children, to bathe and wash them, but in no way to prattle with them, for he wanted to learn whether they would speak the Hebrew language, which was the oldest, or Greek, or Latin, or Arabic, or perhaps the language of their parents, of whom they had been born. But he labored in vain because all the children died. For they could not live without the petting and joyful faces and loving words of their foster mothers. (Ross and McLaughlin 1949: 366)

Fortunately, contemporary researchers have found less dramatic ways to illustrate the importance of communication. In one study of isolation, five subjects were paid to remain alone in a locked room. One lasted for eight days. Three held out for two days, one commenting "Never again." The fifth subject lasted only two hours (Schachter 1959: 9–10).

The need for contact and companionship is just as strong outside the laboratory, as individuals who have led solitary lives by choice or necessity have discovered. W. Carl Jackson, an adventurer who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean alone in 51 days, summarized in a 1978 interview published in the *Wisconsin State Journal* the feelings common to most loners:

I found the loneliness of the second month almost excruciating. I always thought of myself as self-sufficient, but I found life without people had no meaning. I had a definite need for somebody to talk to, someone real, alive, and breathing.