

An aerial photograph of the New York City skyline, featuring numerous skyscrapers and a bridge in the foreground. The Empire State Building is prominent on the right side. The sky is clear and blue.

# Business Communication

BONNIE D. PHILLIPS

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# PREFACE

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In recent years there has been a tremendous increase in business communications courses taught in public schools. *Business Communication* has been developed to meet the need for a textbook which stresses the fundamentals of business communications.

Unlike many business communications texts which concentrate on writing skills alone, this text also covers verbal and nonverbal communications, listening and reading skills, and telephone techniques. Units are organized in a logical sequence with each unit based on the preceding unit. Students proceed in a step-by-step manner from the simpler forms of business communications to more sophisticated and lengthy forms.

A cassette tape is available to accompany the chapter on effective listening. The tape contains numerous exercises to measure the student's listening ability.

Each chapter is preceded by performance objectives which state what students are to accomplish before proceeding to the next chapter. Exercises are interspersed throughout the text. These exercises allow students to gauge their own performance and assure that each principle is fully mastered before students proceed to more advanced material.

The unique format of *Business Communication* allows the text to be used in an open-ended program of self-instruction as well as in a one-semester course. The appendix includes rules for word usage, letter style, and other reference material which is needed in any business office. A glossary at the end of the text contains commonly used terms with which the business communications student should be familiar.

A student activities workbook which coincides with the text is also available. This workbook includes additional activities and exercises to help the student master the principles presented in the text.

An instructor's guide accompanying the text includes suggested teaching procedures, additional exercises, answers to exercises and review material, and original copies to make masters of certain items which the instructor may want to distribute to all class members. The guide also contains pretests and a final test which may be used to gauge the understanding of the individual student at different points in the learning process.

The author wishes to thank the New York State Education Department and the many teachers who used this text as a pilot in twenty-eight New York State schools. Many of the ideas for the revised edition of the text came from them. The author also wishes to acknowledge and express appreciation to the following for providing the photographs which appear in the text:

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## **Section 1**

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# **BACKGROUND FOR COMMUNICATING**

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# CHAPTER 1

## COMMUNICATION THEORY

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### PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to

- define the communication process.
- list the elements of the communication process.
- identify the five senses through which people receive signals.
- identify noise or interference that distorts information.
- list several ways the sender and receiver can improve communication.

As living beings we all must communicate with others. Yet few of us communicate really well at all times. *Communication* is broadly defined as an act or instance of transmitting. Merely transmitting, or sending, information does not always mean that communication has taken place. If, for example, you stand alone in your office and say that you do not know how to write a report, is there communication? Or, if you talk to your boss who is deeply involved in reading a report, is there communication? In the first case, no one else is present to receive the information. In the second case, the fact that a person is present does not mean that a person is listening. Communication is not taking place.

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### THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

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The *communication process* is defined as the transmittal of intended meaning to others. This implies that the speakers have a clear idea of the meaning they wish to convey and that the listeners interpret the message in such a way as to receive the intended meaning.

The *communication process* is made up of four elements, Figure 1-1. The *sender* is the person who is trying to transmit the message. The *message* is the

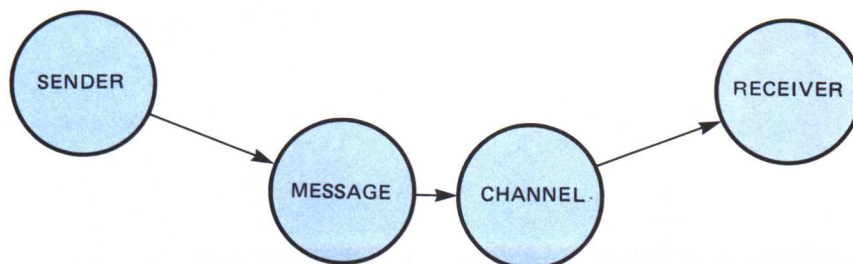


Fig. 1-1 The communication process consists of a sender, a message, a channel used for conveying the message, and a receiver.

verbal or nonverbal information which is being transmitted. The *channel* is the means by which the information is being sent. The *receiver* is the person who is receiving and interpreting the message.

## PERCEPTION AND INTERPRETATION

All communication is based on how each of us perceives, or sees and interprets, or explains, information. The ability to communicate increases when it is understood that observations are selective. Because you cannot pick up all of the signals in your environment, you select certain items. What you see is modified by many factors including your interests, biases, and background, Figure 1-2.

People tend to believe that what they see is a carbon copy of the “real world.” We may think that others who do not see an object as we see it are mistaken or see in a distorted way. People construct their own reality from what they observe. Many persons may observe the same thing, but may interpret it in different ways. The process of *interpreting* means making sense out of one’s own experiences.

Signals are received from the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. From these signals, information is translated into a form that can be recognized, into a concept that can be understood, or into a sound that is meaningful in a given situation.

**Exercise 1.** Write a sentence about how each of the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) affects communication. (For example, you can reach out and *touch* the soft petals of a rose.)

**Exercise 2.** Identify and discuss individual factors that affect the communication process in the classroom.



Fig. 1-2 What you see may depend on your background.

**Exercise 3.** How do your experiences compare with those of your parents, your best friend, and your teacher? How would these differences affect your interpretation of messages?

**Exercise 4.** “Mr. Joffee is really a great teacher,” says Christine to her friend Jim. “He’s so brilliant as a teacher and he’s really interested in students.” Jim responds with these words: “That creep? I had him last semester. He’s terrible.” Explain, from a communications viewpoint, why you think the students’ opinions differ.

**Exercise 5.** From your own experience, select an example of poor communication. Explain how the poor communication occurred.

**Exercise 6.** “Sure, I know Joe Anderson,” a manager reported to a person considering Joe for employment. “He and I were in high school together. He’s shiftless and lazy.” Discuss the manager’s perception of Joe.

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## INTERFERENCE

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Senders almost always assume that their messages are received. They are puzzled or annoyed if the messages are misinterpreted or get no response. They want to know what went wrong between the sending and the receiving of their messages. What went wrong is called interference. *Interference* is anything that distorts the information sent to the receivers or distracts them from receiving it, Figure 1-3.

There are many kinds of interference. Sounds; a smoke-filled, stuffy room; the odor of strong pipe tobacco; or a person dressed in strange clothing can all cause interference. A rock group can create a lot of interference without singing a note because of their appearance and body movements.

What is interference to one person may not be interference to another. For example, what may be a small, crowded room to one may be a comfortable, intimate setting to another. The strong odor of pipe tobacco to one person may be a light, sweet fragrance to another. The problem is that you cannot always know what is interference, to those with whom you are communicating, or when it occurs. Other forms of interference include the environment, lack of clarity, and lack of empathy.



Fig. 1-3 Anything that distracts the receiver can cause interference.

### Environment

Persons who are involved in the communication process often have the chance to change elements that may become distracting to a situation. Do you need to stop doodling on your scratch pad, close the door, turn off the heat, or talk more loudly? Would it be better to comment on why you are late for an appointment? If, for example, you go to work with a black eye, you may mention to your boss that the wind blew the trash can lid into your face. This verbal message limits the number of ways in which your nonverbal message might be interpreted. Or, if there are only a few students in a large classroom, the teacher may ask them to move closer together. In the smaller area, the students feel more a part of a group and may be more willing to ask questions.

### Lack of Clarity

Being clear means limiting the ways that others can interpret what you say. Sometimes being unclear can be an advantage. Some advertisers deliberately are unclear about their claims. A coffee ad for example claims "It unlocks great flavor other coffees leave behind . . . to save you money." The object of this kind of communication is to be unclear — to lack clarity. Such language is used as a smoke screen. Have you had a teacher who was deliberately unclear?

Student: What do we need to know for the test?

Teacher: Everything.

Student: Everything includes a lot. What do you mean by everything?

Teacher: Just everything. That's it.

Most of the time, however, people want to be clear about what they say. Most of the time we want to be understood, not misunderstood. Being clear is a significant part of day-to-day communication. Being unclear is a source of interference.

Sometimes, far more concern seems to be shown for the transmission of the message than for the message itself. Thinking is often an overlooked aspect of communication. Failing to think through an idea before trying to express it causes interference and results in poor communication. An unclear sentence may result from an unclear thought. You cannot communicate an idea to another person unless you can first communicate it to yourself.

### Lack of Empathy

You show empathy when you phrase a message in terms of the experiences of others, when you appeal to their interests, and when you take into account their feelings. If others sense your concern, they are more likely to make an effort to see your viewpoint. Empathy is a difficult communication skill to develop because we are generally far more interested in ourselves and what we have to say than in others. Probably one of the most frequently used words in the English language is "I."

You must be careful, though, not to confuse empathy with sympathy. *Empathy* is mentally putting yourself in the other person's circumstances which is very different from *sympathy* (feeling sorry for the other person).

**Exercise 7.** Obtain a copy of a recent magazine. Go through the magazine and note the advertisements that are intended to be unclear. Discuss the communication purposes of the ads as you see them.

**Exercise 8.** In groups of four or five, discuss environmental interference (such as room temperature) as it affects the communication process in your class. How can those factors be changed to improve communication?

**Exercise 9.** Write a paragraph, describing someone you know whose physical appearance causes interference (for example, a person who always wears sunglasses). Use specific examples and details.

**Exercise 10.** Relate a conversation you have had with someone in which you wanted to be unclear (for example, not telling the entire truth so you would not hurt a friend's feelings).

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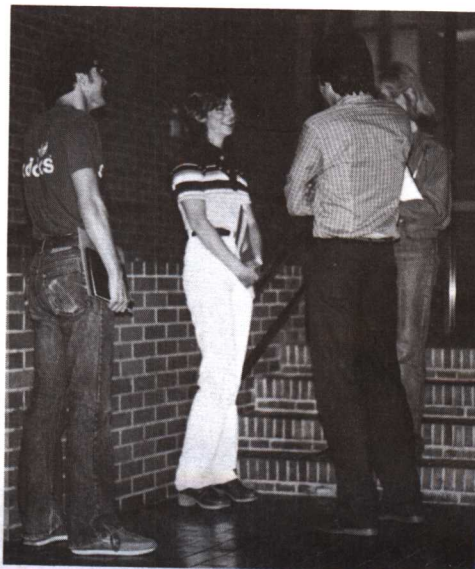
## IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS — SENDER

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Knowledge of basic rules of communication can help you to become a more effective sender of business messages. Following are some practical aids that can be used to help you improve your communications skills.

### Appearance

Dress, grooming, and general physical appearance are often the basis of first and fairly long-lasting impressions. Persons dress to impress others, to be more like them, or to be different. Through clothing, a person can communicate acceptance or rejection of traditional values. You communicate what you are by your choice of dress, make-up, posture, and cleanliness, Figure 1-4. Even what you chose for lunch and the way you eat send signals about you.



**Fig. 1-4** You communicate what you are by your appearance.

An effective communicator is aware of the impact of appearance and adjusts appearance to meet the circumstances. For example, a company president might dress neatly and formally for a talk to a local community group, but wear a pair of jeans when helping the workers take inventory. A person who is going to an interview for a job as a laborer in a mine or as a factory worker should wear clean work clothes, perhaps even new ones. A person having an interview as a bank teller should wear dress clothes. The best way to know what to wear to an interview is to visit the company before your appointment and then dress the way the employees do. By observing the employees while you are there you can determine company policy on such things as hair length and beards.

### Self-Concept

Self-concept can make a difference in the effectiveness of your communications. *Self-concept* is the impression you have of yourself. It develops, in part, from the reactions you receive from those around you. In fact, some persons believe that we evaluate ourselves mainly on the basis of how we think others evaluate us. For example, if your parents and relatives think of you as the "Pollyanna" of the family, you may come to think of yourself in those terms.

Often persons who believe they are viewed negatively become flustered. Speakers who see negative reactions from listeners may become tense or nervous. On the other hand, those who believe they are viewed positively may gain self-confidence. During a job interview, for example, if you believe the interviewer is receiving a positive image of you, you tend to be encouraged. Your communication behavior will reflect this attitude. If you believe the interviewer thinks you are doing a poor job of answering questions, you may become discouraged. Again, your communication behavior will be affected.

Persons who expect to be accepted by others and who see others as friendly are often outgoing and pleasant. Their behavior accounts in good measure for the positive way in which others respond. On the other hand, persons who expect to be rejected, often are, Figure 1-5. These persons see others as hostile or unfriendly



Fig. 1-5 People who expect to be rejected often are.

and thus may act defensive or superior. This behavior may very well bring about the rejection they fear. Often people help to confirm their own expectations. A favorable self-concept may lead to success; an unfavorable self-concept, to failure.

### Empathy

Empathy on the part of the sender is important to good communication. Encouraging the receiver to react to your message is one of the best ways to develop empathy. By listening to the response, you can determine how your message was received. This tells you a great deal about the other person's feelings and knowledge.

Advertisers use empathy when writing their sales messages. They try to see their products from the consumers point of view so they can know how the consumers feel about the products. A good way to empathize is to make frequent use of the word *you*.

Soap ad: Using soap will result in fresher, better looking skin, no matter what type of skin the user has.

Soap ad (better): *You* will have fresher, better looking skin, no matter what type of skin *you* have.

### Communication Style

Different situations require different styles of communications. Formal, important situations call for formal words and means of transmission. For example, even though heads of foreign governments may be relaxed persons, they are not likely to communicate a vital world problem to the president of the United States in an informal manner. In a like way, it is reasonable to assume that a worker feels at least mildly anxious in a performance evaluation with a supervisor. The supervisor will likely be able to suggest ways for work improvement by creating a relaxed, helpful climate. On the other hand, it might be more effective for the supervisor to use a harsher tone if the situation is one in which job performance has become so poor that the worker may lose the job.

### Clarity

A clear message by the sender aids effective communication. You can focus attention on what you mean by your choice of language. Your choice of words must be precise in meaning. The words must be understandable to your listener. Most people use only about 2,000 different English words. The 500 words that they use most often, however, have more than 14,000 different meanings. Note the many meanings for the word *cheap*.

I got the car cheap. (meaning at a bargain)

Those tires are cheap. (meaning inferior in quality or shoddy)

Purchase now so that you can use cheap dollars. (meaning depreciated in value)

That was a cheap victory. (meaning costing little trouble to obtain)

That was a cheap shot. (meaning yielding small satisfaction)

**Exercise 11.** Working in groups of three or four, stage an interview in class. Have each group select a help-wanted advertisement from the local newspaper. One member of the group will role play the interviewer. The other members of the group will role play the persons being interviewed for the job. After the interview, discuss how players could improve their images.

**Exercise 12.** Write a paragraph on the advice you would offer students to help them project a favorable impression to a prospective employer.

**Exercise 13.** Working in pairs, write a paragraph about your self-concept. Then have your partner write a paragraph on his or her impressions of you. Compare your self-concept with what your partner wrote about you.

**Exercise 14.** Using the word *beat*, write as many sentences as you can to illustrate the many meanings and uses of the word.

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## IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS — RECEIVER

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The sender is usually emphasized in the communication process. However, the message receiver is equally important. The actual message received is determined by the receiver's interpretation.

### Beliefs and Attitudes

Receivers are influenced by their beliefs and attitudes. They tend to make general evaluations of people based on these qualities. The general evaluations may be negative or they may be positive. You may have met someone, for example, who says, "People are no good." On the other extreme, there are those who say, "There is good to be found in all people."

A *belief* is something that evolves from what people say or do. If people say they think something is true, they are saying they believe it. It may or may not be true in fact, but their thinking that it is true makes it a belief. For example, you may believe your boss likes you, which may or may not be true. You may act friendly because of your belief. Such beliefs are based on your experiences and influence how you receive messages.

An *attitude* is made up of several beliefs based upon a common subject. You may believe that your job is meaningful. You may believe that your job is exciting. You may believe that no one else can do your job. As a result of these beliefs, you may develop a positive attitude toward working in general. Your attitude toward working is that it is good. As a rule, persons gain their attitudes as a result of their experiences. Your parents, teachers, and friends all help to shape your attitudes. Attitudes usually develop over a long period of time. They are not easy to change. Attitudes influence how you receive messages.

Attitudes help persons understand their environment. They become standards against which persons can apply new information. In other words, persons often make sense of things by labeling and classifying them. For example, you

may have a stereotyped view of shy people that says such people tend to be bashful, intelligent, and modest. Your interpretation of messages from someone that you have labeled as shy may reflect your feelings about this stereotype.

### Listening

Your listening ability as a receiver is an important part of the communication process. There is interference if you do not feel well — when you have a bad headache, a cold, or a stomachache. There is interference when you have a strong opinion that keeps you from listening carefully to any message that contradicts your opinion. These kinds of interference are often so strong that they prevent effective communication. For example, the fear of failing a test makes some students so tense that they do not hear the test instructions. A strong bias against women may keep a man from listening carefully to a woman as she tells him her qualifications for a job. A severe cold can prevent an employee from accurately listening to a customer's order. An environmental condition such as a hot, stuffy room or an uncomfortable chair can also prevent effective listening.

Drawing conclusions that are based on weak evidence and making generalizations are problems that affect the accuracy of listening. Just because something happens a certain way one time, persons tend to assume that it will happen that way on a regular basis. If, for example, some workers often have poor reasons for being late for work, their supervisor may now jump to the conclusion that they are late again for the same poor reasons. The supervisor may not now listen accurately to the explanations. Persons need to restrain themselves. They must learn to suspend judgment until they receive all of the facts. Being able to listen accurately and to suspend judgment are skills that improve the communication process. These skills are important in any relationship.

**Exercise 15.** Make a list of factors that describe someone you think is an effective communicator. List all factors that seem to help the person to communicate effectively. Think of a poor communicator, what factors seem to cause the ineffectiveness. What do you think affects how you see these two people?

**Exercise 16.** What advice would you offer management to help employees project a more favorable public image?

**Exercise 17.** Describe the stereotype these words convey to you.

- Politician
- Stockholder
- Accountant
- Professional football player
- Cabdriver
- Cheerleader
- Self-made millionaire

**Exercise 18.** "I'm sorry," a customer told the salesperson, "I buy only well-known brands. No offense, but I've never heard of your company." Discuss the customer's attitude.

**Exercise 19.** Select an attitude and a belief you have about some sport (for example, you believe the quarterback is the most important person on the team, or your attitude is any person who tries hard enough can play basketball). As well as you can, explain why you hold each of these viewpoints.

**Exercise 20.** Discuss how your attitude and belief (as stated in Exercise 19) influence your communication.

**Exercise 21.** Select three stereotypes that you think are widely held by your classmates. Discuss how correct they are and how they developed.

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## SUMMARY

Communication is the transmittal of intended meaning to others. The four elements of the communication process are sender, message, channel, and receiver. Signals are received from the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. You modify what you receive by your individual biases and interests. You then interpret the signals into something you can understand.

Interference distorts information sent to receivers or distracts them from receiving it. The environment, lack of clarity, and lack of empathy are examples of interference that affect communication. Communicators can often remedy the distractions that affect communication. Communication is more effective when senders are aware of the impact of appearance, self-concept, empathy, and style.

Beliefs and attitudes influence how you receive messages. Improving the accuracy of listening is an aid to effective communication.