

# COMMUNICATION AT WORK:

LISTENING  
SPEAKING  
WRITING  
AND READING

# COMMUNICATION AT WORK

*Listening, Speaking, Writing,  
and Reading*

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# PREFACE TO STUDENTS

Emperor Frederick, a thirteenth-century Roman ruler, set up an experiment to find out what language had been spoken in the Garden of Eden. He designed a garden which as closely as possible recreated his image of that first garden, and there he placed a group of newborn infants. Planning to let the babies' speech develop naturally, he ordered that no one be allowed to talk to the infants. Wet nurses took care of the babies' physical needs, but they did not speak to the infants or to each other while they were in the garden. The result of Emperor Frederick's experiment? All the infants died.<sup>1</sup>

Although this test did not satisfy the emperor's curiosity about the first language spoken, it does point out the importance of communication. Lack of communication can evidently be fatal.

Our need to communicate is substantiated by modern experiences. A 1977 British court case described a two-year old girl and her one-year-old brother whose mother thought they should grow up without adult intervention. Although she took care of the children's physical needs, she did not talk to them or respond to their attempts to communicate. This lack of communication between mother and children slowed the children's development. The one-year-old could not sit up alone and the two-year-old's language consisted of unintelligible noises.<sup>2</sup>

Communication is obviously a vital part of our daily lives. From the time we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep at night, we communicate. Reading the paper, watching the morning news, discussing problems with our co-workers, and making plans with our families all involve communication. We com-

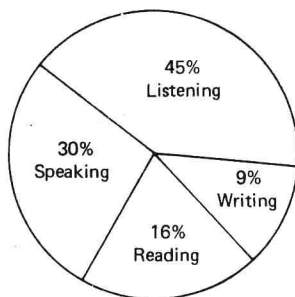
<sup>1</sup>Joseph Dahmus, *Seven Medieval Kings*, Doubleday, 1967, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup>David Lewis, *How to Be a Gifted Parent* (New York: Berkley Books, 1979), p. 156.

municate by talking, listening, reading, and writing. The way we dress, stand, sit, walk, and look at each other relays messages. Some people say we even communicate while we sleep. Someone watching a person sleep can tell whether that person feels peaceful or restless.

Although for most of us a lack of communication may not result in anything as drastic as mental retardation or death, it can contribute to failures at work and unhappiness at home. According to John C. Crystal, career development expert, one of the most common reasons for the firing of an employee is "that the employee just doesn't see eye to eye with the boss. Something has gone wrong with their relationship."<sup>3</sup> Lack of communication has also been mentioned as a major factor in divorce. Herbert A. Gliberman, domestic relation lawyer, says the "inability to talk to each other" is the main reason couples split up.<sup>4</sup> Evidently, losing a job or a spouse may be the serious result of ineffective communication.

When we think of communicating, we often think of talking or writing, in other words, telling people what we think. Communication, however, is an ongoing process involving both a sender of a message and a receiver. It includes four activities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The amount of communicating time the average person spends daily in each activity is illustrated by the following graph:<sup>5</sup>



You can see that each area of communication plays an important part in our lives. Although we spend a large amount (45%) of our time listening, we also spend 55% of our communication time in the other three areas. Even writing, which typically takes up the least time, accounts for 9%. Therefore, if you want to be an effective communicator, you must develop skills in all four areas of communication.

These four communication activities are interrelated. You will notice from looking at the graph that the amount of time we spend listening is closely related to the time we spend speaking, and the time we spend reading relates closely to the time we spend writing. You can imagine that many of the factors of speaking and writing such as word choice and audience analysis are similar, and awareness of the presenter's style is important whether you are reading or listening.

<sup>3</sup>"If the Boss Says: 'You're Fired,'" *U.S. News & World Report*, Inc., March 12, 1979, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>"Why So Many Marriages Fail," *U.S. News & World Report*, Inc., July 20, 1981, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup>Theodore H. Wright, *Tuning In* (Stamford, Conn.: Xerox Corporation, 1973-74), p. 4.



Although we sometimes tend to underestimate the importance of the connection—we might talk when no one is listening or might hide the poetry we write in a drawer—we have long been aware that communicating means sharing. In fact, the Japanese character for “listen” is their symbol for ear placed within their symbol for gate, indicating that we must put ourselves in the speaker’s place in order to listen effectively. The listener has as much responsibility for absorbing the message as the speaker has for presenting it.

Because communication is an ongoing process involving both sender and receiver, this book emphasizes all four areas of communication. As you study the text, you will notice how these activities interrelate. For example, the listening section discusses techniques for interpreting a speaker’s body language, and the speech section tells you how to use gestures and facial expression to help listeners understand your meaning. The writing chapters stress the importance of keeping your audience in mind, and the reading section helps you learn how to adapt your reading skills to the different styles writers use.

How well we actually read, write, speak, or listen is related to our understanding of skills. For that reason each section of the text includes three areas: information about the communication process, a discussion of the skills involved in carrying out that process, and suggestions for using the information and skills you have learned in actual situations.

Some skills, such as word choice, logical thinking, and information gathering, are necessary for all types of communication. For that reason, these areas are discussed first and make up the opening section of the text.

Most important, you are preparing for employment. You will want to use this text to help you acquire the skills necessary to achieve success on the job. Successful workers use their communication skills in three ways: (1) to do a job, (2) to understand their co-workers, and (3) to maintain an enjoyable and relatively stress-free personal life. Because on-the-job success is usually a combination of these three areas, the activities and examples in this book are planned to help you understand how communication skills relate to each of these situations. As closely as possible, the activities in this text represent real-life experiences.

Much emphasis is placed today on job seeking and other work-related skills, and current textbooks tend to approach the discussion of communication from that viewpoint. Although the importance of skillful on-the-job communication is also emphasized here, this text presents a more diversified approach to the study of communication. Effective communication skills can help you to establish a satisfying personal life and to become a contributing member of your community. These skills are necessary for a well-rounded life.

The concluding chapter of the book brings all these communication skills together by applying them to an important activity: job seeking. We will discuss how to apply reading and writing skills in the job search, resume, and application letter process and how to apply speaking and listening skills in the interview process. The information in this text will help you use the communication skills you have learned here to take the first step in finding a satisfying job.

As advanced technology plays an ever-increasing role in the workplace and at home, the need to refine our interpersonal communication skills also increases. A successful business deal may hinge on how accurately you can listen to a telephone conversation or how well you understand word connotations when you write a letter. One source estimates that communication has changed more rapidly in the 40 years since World War II than it did in the 1,800 years before that. Our need to keep pace with the changing demands of communication is obvious when we consider the types of jobs available today. In 1950 people without high school diplomas could do approximately one-third of all the industrial jobs in the United States. By 1980 that figure had dropped to 5%. Today fewer than 5% of all the industrial jobs in the United States can be done successfully by people without high school diplomas.<sup>6</sup>

The message is clear. Jobs in our advanced technological society require highly trained people. An important part of that training is the development of communication skills. This text will help you understand the basics of the communication process in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Use it to learn how to communicate effectively in many different work-related and personal situations.

<sup>6</sup>Lloyd Dobyns, "The Decline of American Productivity: If Japan Can, Why Can't We," *Training and Development Journal*, August 1982, p. 56.

# PREFACE TO THE INSTRUCTOR

A successful communicator knows how to listen as well as speak, read as well as write. Communication is an integrated process involving both sender and receiver. For that reason, *Communication at Work* presents all four areas of communication skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. The purpose of the text is to help students develop skills while showing them how these skills interact throughout the entire communication process. A speaker's effectiveness, for example, is enhanced by interpretation of the listener's body language; familiarity with the writing process helps the reader understand written messages better.

Keeping that purpose in mind, the author begins the text with an overview of the communication process as it applies to both spoken and written messages and concludes the text with a chapter on job-seeking skills which shows how the four areas of communication can be integrated in practical application.

The main part of the text is divided into the four areas of communication. The sections have been arranged as you might teach them, beginning with listening to start the semester, then speaking, writing, and reading. Each section, however, is a full discussion of the skill and may be used individually at any time during the semester. Nevertheless, listening and speaking have been placed together, as have writing and reading, to emphasize their interrelatedness, and it is probably best to teach them in this pattern.

The book also includes a section on preparing. Because certain skills such as research, logical thinking, and effective word choice are basic to all areas of communication, a section on these three skills follows the overview of the four areas of communication. Students who understand the necessity for and the techniques of research will send more interesting, compelling messages. Students who know how to think logically to solve problems will send more organized, persuasive



messages. Students who adapt their word choice to their receivers will send more readily understandable messages. These qualities of interest, organization, and intelligibility are essential to all communication; therefore the skills that will help your students incorporate these qualities into their messages are discussed first. However, each chapter within the preparing section is a complete unit and you may decide to disperse these chapters throughout the text.

The main emphasis of the text is on using the skills presented to improve on-the-job performance. Many of the examples used to illustrate concepts are taken directly from business and industry. Report writing, for example, is illustrated with an annual report from Sentry Insurance. Examples in the reading chapters are taken from manuals and trade journals typical of on-the-job reading. The application activities that conclude each chapter are intended to simulate work experiences.

The author also believes that an efficient employee sustains a happy personal life; therefore, some of the activities also relate to interaction with spouses, friends, and neighbors. They are intended to help students apply communication skills to their lives at home and in their communities.

The belief that a successful communicator understands all areas of communication as they relate to both personal and on-the-job experiences comes from the author's fifteen years as a communication instructor in schools and for business and industry. She is experienced in teaching specialized courses for business and industry as well as in meeting the needs of the traditional student. The text is a practical guide for instructors who want to relate traditional concepts of communication skills to their students' primary focus of interest: the world of work.

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I also thank the many librarians and other resource people who helped with cross references, obscure sources and appropriate examples. They were important in the successful completion of this book.

No author writes a book alone. The encouragement of my husband and son, the interest of my friends and the cooperation of fellow professionals were invaluable as I worked to complete this formidable task.

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# 1

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## THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

You cannot speak of oceans to a well-frog—the creature of a narrow sphere. You cannot speak of ice to a summer insect—the creature of a season.

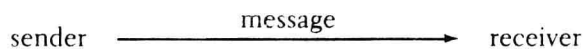
Chuang Tzu, *Autumn Floods*, 4-3 Century B.C. trans. Herbert Giles

After studying this chapter you should understand:

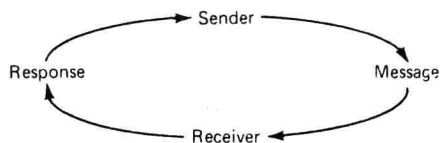
1. The communication process
2. How barriers can prevent us from communicating
3. Similarities between spoken and written communication
4. Differences between spoken and written communication

### THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Nathan Miller, American author and journalist, has said, “Conversation in the United States is a competitive exercise in which the first person to draw a breath is declared the listener.” Although you may chuckle at Miller’s statement, you probably also see the truth in his observation. People often seem more interested in hearing themselves talk than in maintaining a constant flow of ideas with other people. Whether we are speaking or writing, we tend to think of communication as a linear process starting with the sender’s comments and ending when someone receives the message.

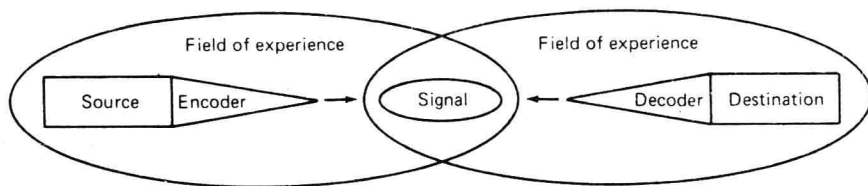


However, communication is actually an ongoing process involving both the speaker and the listener. This process is best described by a circular diagram.



“To communicate” comes from the Latin “to make common.” When people communicate, they relate to each others’ experiences; in other words, they share something “in common.”

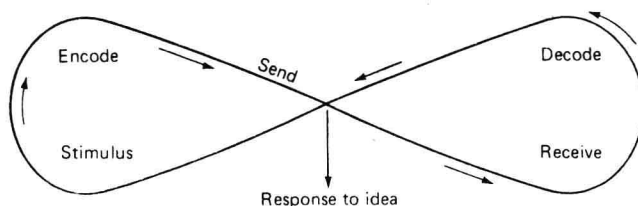
This sharing process can best be illustrated with a diagram developed by Wilbur Schramm in the 1950s. Schramm showed communication occurring when the “fields of experience” (knowledge, attitude, values, etc.) of the sender (encoder) and receiver (decoder) overlap.<sup>1</sup>



This model, or symbolic drawing, illustrates several important aspects of the communication process. All communication begins with a source or a stimulus. This stimulus gives us a reason to communicate. We interpret (encode) that stimulus within the context of our own experience. Then we send the message (our interpretation of the stimulus). The receivers of our message decode (translate) it within the context of their own experiences. We hope they will decode the message in the way we expect. When the encoding of a stimulus and the decoding of the message are similar, the sharing process is complete.

Let’s say you and a friend are canoeing down a river. From your vantage point in front, you notice that the canoe is headed for a large rock. This observation is a stimulus. You interpret (encode) the rock as danger so you yell to your canoeing partner, “Rock ahead.” If your partner receives the message and also decodes it as danger, the two of you will work together to avoid the rock. In this case an accurate sharing of ideas has been achieved because you and your friend have had similar experiences with rocks. The pattern of your communication looks like Diagram A.

Diagram A



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