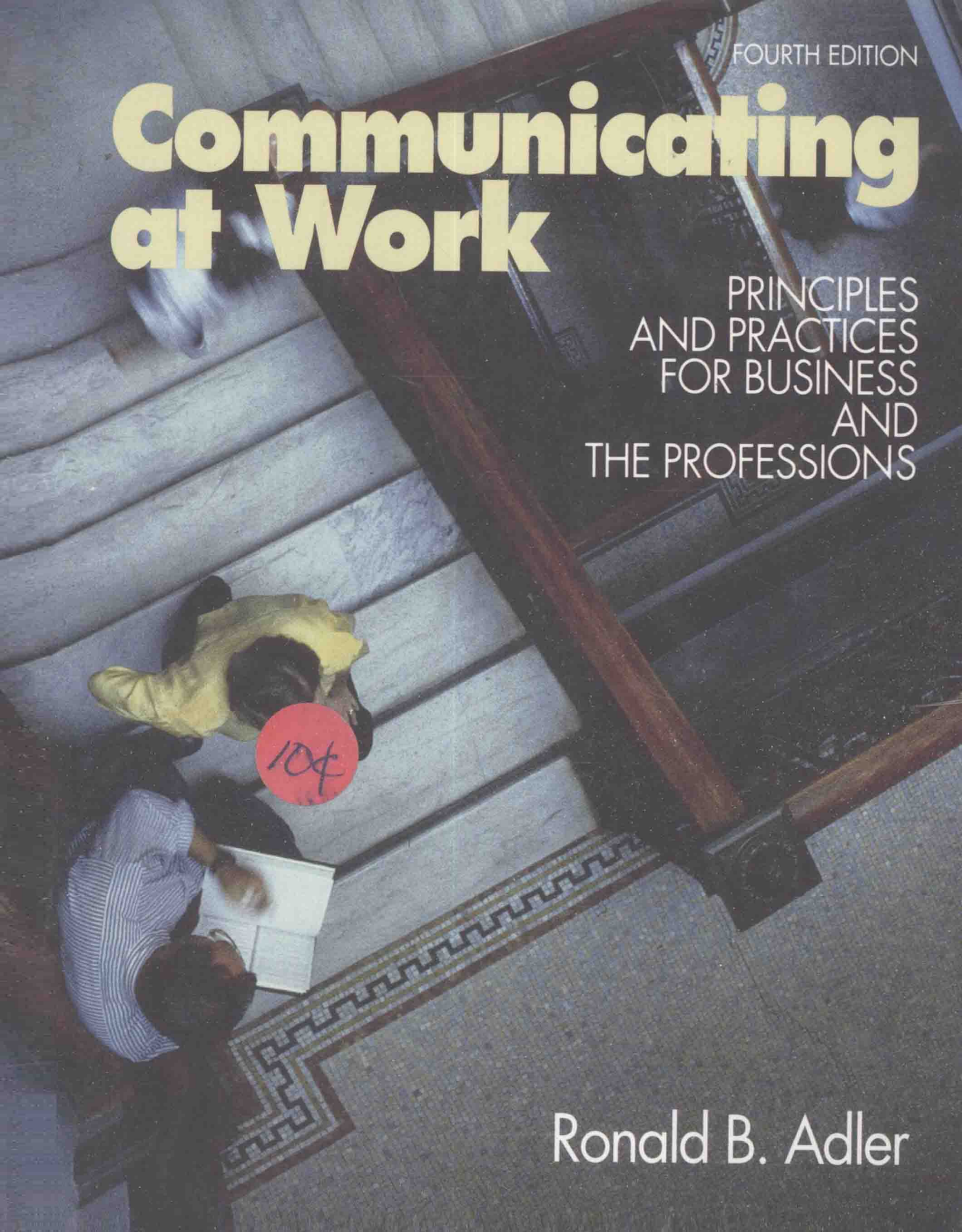




FOURTH EDITION

Communicating at Work

PRINCIPLES
AND PRACTICES
FOR BUSINESS
AND
THE PROFESSIONS

Ronald B. Adler

COMMUNICATING AT WORK

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES FOR BUSINESS AND THE PROFESSIONS

FOURTH EDITION

RONALD B. ADLER

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Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions

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PREFACE

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.” This saying is an apt characterization of this fourth edition of *Communicating at Work*.

On one hand, this book retains the strong link between scholarship and the “real world” of business and the professions that has been so successful in the past. Every chapter reports on the work of researchers in a variety of disciplines, but the constant emphasis is on how scholarship can help readers communicate more effectively. Throughout the book, numerous examples drawn from real business and professional situations show how effective communication can help get any job done in a more productive, satisfying way. A diverse array of quotations and comments from people in business and the professions illustrate the importance of communication and offers suggestions about how to handle specific communication challenges. In addition, each chapter ends with a Communicator Profile: a first-person account from an experienced business or professional person offering insights and suggestions on how the principles in this book apply in day-to-day situations.

As in the past, this edition of *Communicating at Work* should be helpful to virtually every business communicator. Readers who are just beginning their careers will learn the basic communication principles that are necessary for success in any career. Experienced communicators who have already spent time in the world beyond the classroom will find that the book provides information that will help them improve the communication skills they have already developed.

FEATURES OF THE NEW EDITION

Although the successful elements of preceding editions of *Communicating at Work* are retained here, this new edition contains new information that should make it even more helpful for communicators. In addition to an overall updating of research, several key changes are apparent:

- Chapter 2 has been revised to include communicating in the culturally diverse world of the 1990s. Besides surveying the changing nature of the work force, the chapter offers suggestions for how to communicate more effectively with others whose backgrounds may vary widely.
- The information on small-group communication has been consolidated into two chapters in order to make it clearer and more useful. Chapter 8 discusses how communication operates in working teams, and Chapter 9 focuses on the skills necessary to lead and participate in effective meetings.
- The two most important types of presentational speaking have been given separate treatment. Chapter 14 outlines specific suggestions for informative speaking and provides an annotated transcript of a typical informative presentation. Chapter 15 is now devoted exclusively to persuasive presentations. It offers an expanded list of strategies for organizing and presenting messages designed to influence others.
- A new Appendix provides a summary of formats for presenting written communication. Although *Communicating at Work* focuses on face-to-face interaction, students need models for how to present the paper-and-ink materials that accompany their oral messages. This Appendix will provide a useful tool for ensuring that written documents meet the same professional standards as the student's speech.

Besides these prominent changes, every chapter contains new or updated material designed to give readers a current, useful guide to communication on the job. For example:

- Chapter 1 offers an expanded discussion of the differences and merits of oral versus written communication that will help readers decide whether to deliver a message in person, in writing, or both.
- Chapter 4 contains a new section on "Listening to Criticism" that offers advice on how to respond constructively and nondefensively to the inevitable attacks that occur in every job. It also contains a self-test to help readers identify their own listening strengths and weaknesses.
- Chapter 5 offers an expanded discussion of various methods of handling conflicts.
- Chapter 6 discusses the ethics of interviewing and contains an annotated interview plan that will help readers develop an interview strategy that accomplishes their goals.
- Chapter 7 provides both new information on giving feedback in performance appraisal interviews and more detail on strategies for coping with illegal questions in selection interviews.
- Chapter 8 emphasizes the interdependence that is a feature of most working groups. It describes the stages in problem-solving groups, and discusses leadership emergence—an important topic in teams without a designated leader.
- Chapter 12 describes the advantages and potential pitfalls of computer-assisted design in creating visual aids for presentational speaking.

In addition to these improvements in the text itself, several ancillaries that accompany the text will help both students and their professors use *Communicating at Work*:

- A new Instructors' Manual, written by Lawrence W. Hugenberg of Youngstown State University, provides a wealth of teaching and testing strategies.
- A computerized test bank contains over 650 examination questions.
- A videotape developed by Carol Shuherk of the University of Southern California presents a variety of speakers delivering informative and persuasive presentations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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In addition, the thoughts of reviewers from previous editions of the book continue to be useful. Thanks to Bette Brunsting, Central College; David C. Burke, Bob Jones University; Russell T. Church, John Carroll University; Joyce E. Crouch, Morehead State University; H. C. Eichmeier, Clinton Community College; Lois Einhorn, State University of New York at Binghamton; Robert Hirsch, Arizona State University; Robert L. Husband, University of Illinois; Nancy Israel-Perry, University of Michigan—Dearborn; Gary L. Kreps, Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis; Janet K. Larsen, University of South Dakota; Kaylene A. Long, Louisiana State University; Clarice P. Lowe, Texas Southern University; Karin McCallum, The University of Texas at Arlington; Jean Michulka, University of Texas at El Paso; Charles R. Newman, Parkland College; Terry A. Pickett, Iowa State University; David J. Robinson, Youngstown State University; June H. Smith, Austin College; Barbara Strain, San Antonio College; Everett E. Walde, District One Technical Institute—Eau Claire; and G.A. Yeomans, University of Tennessee.

Finally, thanks are due to all the publishing professionals who made this revision possible. The entire team at McGraw-Hill—Hilary Jackson, Jean Akers, Fran Marino, and Roth Wilkofsky—were models of effective, positive communication. Robin Adler's speed and diligence in manuscript preparation kept the project moving. Ann Bennett's interviewing and writing skills produced a diverse and interesting crop of Communicator Profiles. Carol Flechner's copy editing was thorough and accurate. Angie Grandbouche's indexing skills helped make the material accessible to readers. If every team was as competent and personable as this group, communicating at work would be much less of a challenge.

Ronald B. Adler

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PART

I

BASICS
OF BUSINESS
AND
PROFESSIONAL
COMMUNICATION

After reading this chapter, you should understand:

- The prevalence and importance of communication on the job
- Settings in which on-the-job communication occurs
- The four functions of on-the-job communication
- The elements and characteristics of the communication process
- The differences between oral and written communication channels

You should be able to:

- Identify the types of communication and the settings that now play or that will play the greatest role in your career
- Use the communication model in Figure 1-1 to diagnose organizational problems you have experienced
- Apply your understanding of the communication process to increase the chance that you will successfully achieve a communication goal
- Choose the best channel to send a given message

COMMUNICATING AT WORK



THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

There is no denying the importance of job-related knowledge. Whether you are an engineer, accountant, computer programmer, machinist, contractor, medical professional, or any other kind of worker, succeeding on the job requires specialized information and skills.

But specialized knowledge alone isn't enough to guarantee success. Whatever job you choose, communication skills will also be vital. Employers recognize this fact. An impressive collection of research identifies communication as the most important factor in successful job performance. For example, Table 1-1 lists the results of a survey of 1,000 personnel managers in the United States. The respondents identified the top three skills for job performance as involving communication. Other important attributes—including technical competence, work experience, academic background, and recommendations—all lagged behind.¹ In another poll, business and government executives named oral communication as the single most valuable skill an employee could have, followed by written communication and interpersonal skills.² Communication skills are valuable throughout a career. Subscribers to the *Harvard Business Review* rated “the ability to communicate” the most important factor in making an executive “promotable,” more important than ambition, education, and capacity for hard work.³ A twenty-year study that followed the progress of Stanford University M.B.A.s revealed that the most successful graduates (as measured by both career

TABLE 1-1 Factors Most Important in Helping Graduating College Students Obtain Employment

RANK/ORDER	FACTORS/SKILLS EVALUATED
1	Oral (speaking) communication
2	Listening ability
3	Enthusiasm
4	Written communication skills
5	Technical competence
6	Appearance
7	Poise
8	Work experience
9	Résumé
10	Specific degree held
11	Grade point average
12	Part-time or summer employment
13	Accreditation of program
14	Leadership in campus/community activities
15	Participation in campus/community activities
16	Recommendations
17	School attended

From Dan B. Curtis, Jerry L. Winsor, and Ronald D. Stephens, “National Preferences in Business and Communication Education,” *Communication Education* 38 (January 1989): 11.

advancement and salary) shared personality traits that distinguish good communicators: a desire to persuade, an interest in talking and working with other people, and an outgoing, ascendant personality. As students, these achievers developed their communication skills by choosing courses in areas such as persuasion, selling ideas, negotiation, and other forms of speaking.⁴

Although the need for face-to-face skills may seem less important in today's high-tech world, the opposite is true. Without human skills, technology will overwhelm an organization. Cornell University researchers discovered that, in the changing workplace, computers and other kinds of sophisticated equipment are now performing routine jobs, leaving workers to handle the human challenges of improving the organization and responding to customers.⁵ After studying the needs of four Silicon Valley manufacturing firms, educational psychologist Russell Rumberger discovered that what employees needed was "oral literacy—the ability to communicate, to work in teams and to shift rapidly as the work changed."⁶

Most successful people recognize the role communication skills have played in their career. In a survey of college graduates in a wide variety of fields, most respondents said that communication was vital to their job success. Most, in fact, said that communication skills were more important than the major subject they had studied in college.⁷ In one survey of business-school alumni, oral communication skills were judged as "mandatory" or "very important" by 100 percent of the respondents—every person who replied.⁸

The importance of communication is not surprising when you consider the staggering amount of time people spend communicating on the job. Most experts state that the average business executive spends 75 to 80 percent of the time communicating—about 45 minutes out of every hour.⁹ One survey of almost a hundred companies revealed that 80 percent of the businesspeople responding conducted interviews, 78 percent gave instructions to subordinates, 76 percent gave oral reports, and 75 percent spoke with clients.¹⁰ Communication is just as important in other fields. Lawyers, teachers, and salespeople (the most common entry-level job in many industries) obviously need to be able to communicate effectively. Health-care professionals work with colleagues and patients. Computer programmers interview clients to learn their needs and to explain how programs work. Even research scientists must frame grant proposals that communicate the need for a project and must be able to report the results clearly to others.

The importance of communicating effectively on the job is obvious. But the discussion so far hasn't even addressed the fact that communication skills often make the difference between being hired and being rejected in the first place. In a study of the help-wanted sections of 160 Sunday newspapers, nearly 6,300 classified ads specifically asked for applicants with communication skills. Oral communication and selling were most frequently mentioned, followed by writing, counseling, recruiting, interviewing, and supervisory skills.¹¹ A survey of 154 employers who recruit on college campuses showed that one of the three most preferred areas of study was oral and written business communication. (The other two were accounting—personnel management and human behavior in organiza-