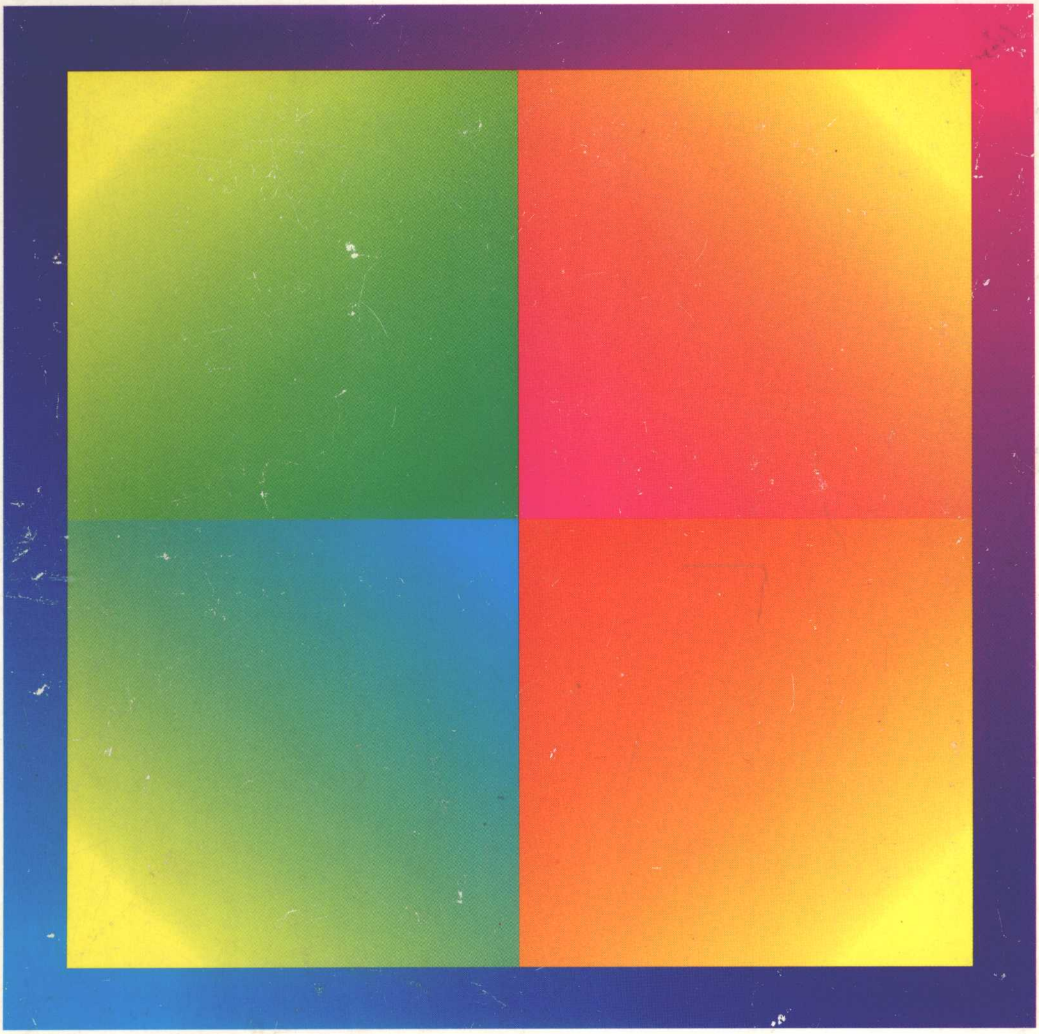
COMMUNICATING AT WORK

Principles and Practices for Business and the Professions

FIFTH EDITION



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FIFTH EDITION

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Preface

In an age of downsizing, change, and career insecurity, good communication skills are more important than ever. The fifth edition of *Communicating at Work* aims at retaining the features that have served career-oriented students well in the past while also reflecting changes in the world of work.

Longtime users will recognize the approach that has helped *Communicating at Work* retain its popularity with students and their professors over the past fourteen years:

- A practical approach that presents academic findings in a form that readers can use to launch and advance in their careers
- Examples from a broad range of settings that illustrate how communication principles operate in the "real world"
- A direct, readable style

Features of the New Edition

Along with these familiar characteristics, this new edition contains many changes that should help students become more successful in their studies and careers.

Improved Pedagogy. Each chapter opens with an outline that makes its content and structure clear. Chapter openers also list key terms, which are highlighted when first introduced in the text and are defined in the *Glossary* at the end of the book. Activities are now integrated throughout each chapter and identified by their goals. *Skill Builders* give readers practice in applying newly learned skills. *Invitations to Insight* help readers understand how concepts from the text apply in the everyday world of work. *Ethical Challenges* invite readers to explore the ethical implications of on-the-job communication.

Expanded Consideration of Culture and Gender. The important topics of culture and gender are treated throughout the text, rather than isolated in a single section. For example, Chapter 2 introduces the many dimensions of culture and discusses its importance in an increasingly diverse, interconnected world. Chapter 3 contains discussions of how gender and culture influence language use and nonverbal communication, as well as descriptions of the challenges of communicating with people for whom English is a second language. It also contains a new section on identifying, avoiding, and responding to sexual harassment. Chapter 4 explores gender variables that affect listening and cultural differences in listening style. Chapter 9 explains that meetings can be conducted in a manner that reflects the cultural norms of the people who attend them. Chapters 11 and 15 offer tips on adapting presentations to the cultural backgrounds of the audience.

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Focus on New Communication Technologies. Chapter 1 discusses when and how to use new technologies, including e-mail, voice mail, and teleconferencing, as well as traditional channels such as writing, telephone, and face-to-face contact. Chapter 12 offers new advice on using computer-generated graphics in presentations. Chapter 13 provides tips for speaking "on camera" for video presentations.

Clearer Organization. Longtime users will find the overall organization of this edition familiar. The first two chapters have been reorganized for the sake of clarity and space management. Material on using formal and informal communication networks has been tightened up and moved to Chapter 1. Discussion of organizational cultures in Chapter 2 has been retained and updated. The end-of-book Glossary pulls together definitions of key terms in one convenient location.

Other New Material. Throughout the book, new sections offer information requested by users on a variety of topics. For example:

- The discussion of listening in Chapter 4 includes new material distinguishing sincere and "counterfeit" questioning styles and an expanded discussion on types of paraphrasing responses.
- Chapter 5 has new sections on offering both praise and constructive criticism.
- Chapter 7 contains expanded samples of written correspondence accompanying employment and career research interviews.
- Chapter 8 now contains an expanded discussion of self-directed work teams, reflecting the trend toward this style of participative communication.
- Major new sections of Chapter 14 offer advice on two common types of business and professional communication: special-occasion speaking (introductions, tributes, acceptances, etc.) and group presentations.
- Chapter 15 helps readers take advantage of theoretical advances to make their presentations more persuasive.
- The Appendix offers improved examples of business correspondence.

Improvements like these don't happen in a vacuum. We owe a great deal to colleagues around the country whose suggestions have helped shape this edition: Carolyn Clark, Shirley Jones, Loretta Walker, and Roselyn Kirk at Salt Lake Community College; Ellen Bonaguro, Northern Illinois University; Thomas J. Costello, University of Illinois–Urbana; Anne Cunningham, Bergen Community College; Mary Hale, University of Colorado–Boulder; Jeffrey Kellogg, University of Mississippi; Leonard A. McCormick, Tarrant County Junior College; James Quisenberry, Morehead State University; Ted Spencer, Eastern Washington University; Francine Sulinski, University of Maine–Orono; and Edgar B. Wycoff, University of Central Florida.

Ronald B. Adler

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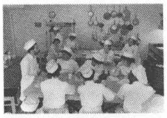

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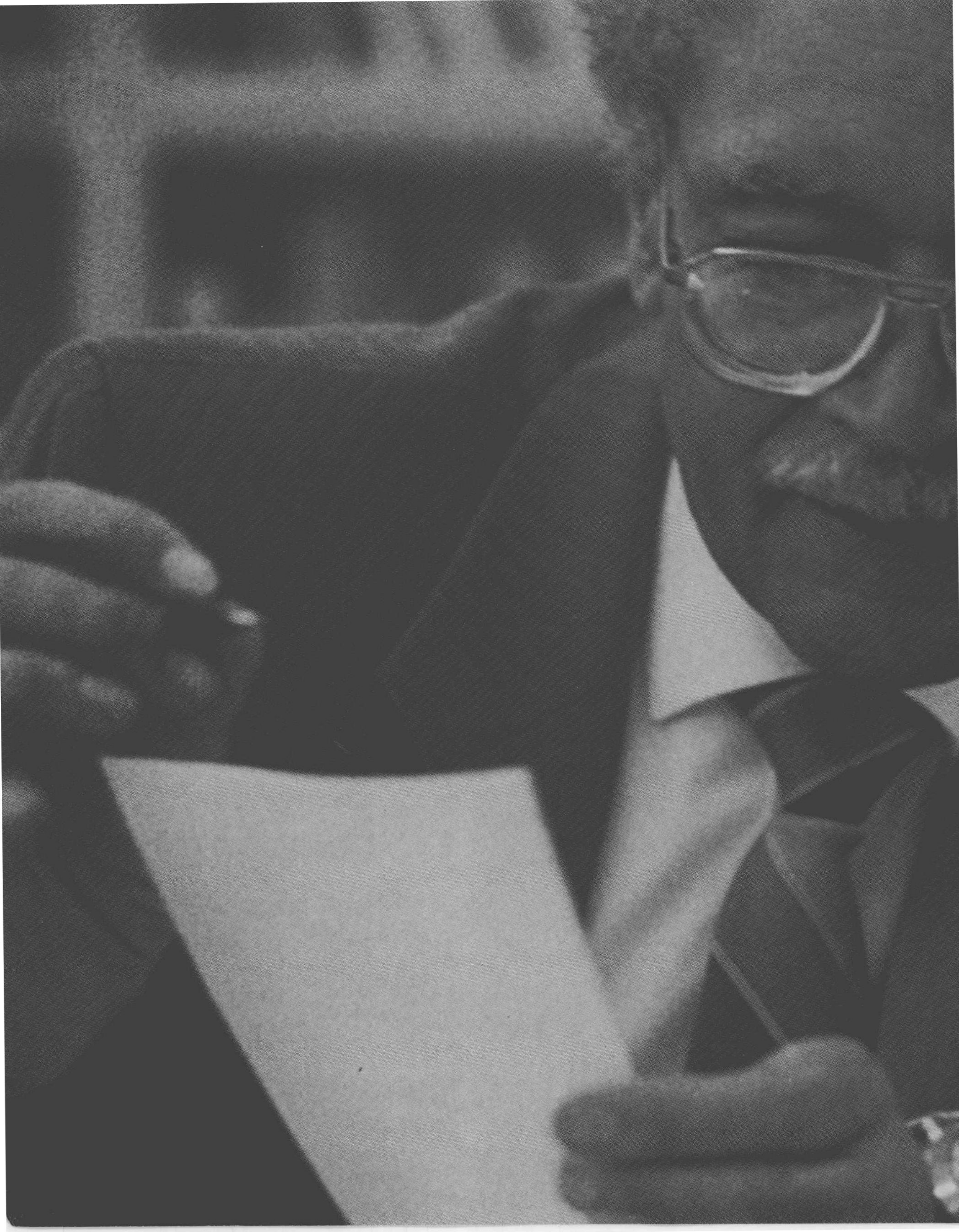
PART I

Basics of Business and Professional Communication



CHAPTER 1

Communicating at Work

- The Importance of Communication
- The Nature of Communication
  - The Process of Communication
  - Communication Principles
- Using Communication Networks
  - Formal Communication Networks
  - Informal Communication Networks
- Choosing the Optimal Communication Channel
  - Face-to-Face Communication
  - Teleconferencing
  - Telephone and Voice Mail
  - Written Communication
  - Which Channel to Use
- Summary / Resources

KEY TERMS

Audioconferencing / Channel / Chronological context / Communication networks / Content messages / Context / Cultural context / Decoding / Document (computer) conferencing / Downward communication / Electronic mail (e-mail) / Encoding / Feedback / Formal communication networks / Horizontal (lateral) communication / Informal communication networks / Message / Noise / Organizational chart / Physical context / Physical noise / Physiological noise / Psychological noise / Receiver / Relational messages / Sender / Social context / Upward communication / Videoconferencing / Voice mail

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

Virtually everyone communicates at work. No matter what the field, and no matter how much you know about your job, specialized knowledge alone isn't enough to guarantee success: communication skills are also vital. 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] Other surveys support the importance of communication-related skills including working on teams, teaching others, serving customers, leading, negotiating, working with cultural diversity, interviewing, listening, conducting meetings, and resolving conflicts.[2]

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] Research spanning several decades has consistently ranked communication skills as crucial for managers.[4] One 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 advancement and salary) shared personality traits

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

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

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.[5]

Although the need for face-to-face skills may seem less important in today's high-tech world, the opposite is true. Business consultant Susan Peterson explains how communication can help workers make sense of the avalanche of information that threatens to overwhelm them.

> We have more information, faster than we ever dreamed, but what is happening to our quality of communication? As managers, and business leaders, perhaps our responsibility is to manage this information. To make sure we communicate.[6]

Without human skills, technology will overwhelm an organization. Columbia 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.[7] 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."[8]

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.[9] 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.[10]

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 forty-five minutes out of every hour.[11] Businesspeople aren't the only ones whose jobs depend on effective communication. The Los Angeles Police Department cited "bad communication" among the most common reasons for errors in shooting by its officers.[12] After two studies indicated that physicians with poor communication skills are more likely to be sued, an editorial in the *Journal*

> The 1990s are proving to be the decade when the soft stuff—like how you listen to employees and customers—finally gets some respect. The new model replaces the top-down military command with a stress on teamwork. In the 1920s IBM chief Tom Watson hung signs saying THINK in every office. . . . Today's signs should read COMMUNICATE.
>
> Jolie Solomon, "The Fall of the Dinosaurs," *Newsweek*

of the American Medical Associaton called for more communication classes for doctors.[13]

The importance of communicating effectively on the job is clear. But this 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. 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 and personnel management/human behavior in organizations.) When 170 well-known business and industrial firms were asked to list the most common reasons for *not* offering jobs to applicants, the most frequent replies were "inability to communicate" and "poor communication skills."[14]

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

It is easier to recognize the importance of communication than it is to define the term. A close look at what happens when people try to communicate can offer clues about why some attempts succeed and others fail.

The Process of Communication

No matter what the setting or the number of people involved, all communication consists of a few elements. Although the process of communication is more than the total of these elements, understanding them can help explain what happens when one person tries to express an idea to others.

Sender. The communication process begins with a ***sender,*** the person who transmits a message—a sales manager making a presentation to a client, a computer programmer explaining a new program to a co-worker, or an after-dinner speaker introducing a guest.

Message. A ***message*** is any signal that triggers the response of a receiver. Some messages are deliberate, while others (such as sighs and yawns) are unintentional. Messages are not synonymous with meanings. For example, you might remind a co-worker about a deadline with the intention of being helpful, but your colleague could interpret the message as an indication that you were annoyed or mistrustful.

Encoding. The sender must choose certain words or nonverbal methods to send an intentional message. This activity is called ***encoding.*** The words and channels that a communicator chooses to deliver a message can make a tremendous difference in how that message is received. Consider the simple act of a manager's offering feedback to an employee: Whether the words are respectful or abrupt and whether the message is deliv-

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