Elements of
EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION

Randal S. Chase, Editor

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Contents

Communication and Meaning

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

When you have read and thought about this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions:

1. Why should you study communication?

2. What is communication?

3. How does communication begin with the self?

4. How does communication involve other people?

5. What are the differences among the models of communication?

6. What are the components of communication?

7. What are some ways that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and public communication differ from each other?

TO BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND communication, you need to learn what it is. This chapter defines communication, shows how it begins with you and extends to other people, reveals its components, and shows the differences and similarities among its three contexts. We begin by answering the question, Why should we study communication?

Speech is civilization itself. The word, even the most contradictory word, preserves contact—it is silence which isolates.
Thomas Mann

Americans report that their greatest fear is the fear of speaking in front of a group.
Bruskin Report

Effective loving calls for knowledge of the object.... How can I love a person whom I do not know? How can the other person love me if he [she] does not know me?
Sidney M. Jourard

ow much time do we spend communicating? Experts say we spend more time talking and listening than engaging in any other activity.[1] Even though we spend much of our lives communicating, many of us realize that we need improvement. We need better communication skills in our personal lives and on the job.[2] Some adults are poor at giving directions or listening to instructions. Others have poor relationships with friends and loved ones because they don't talk or don't listen. Thousands of people are afraid to speak to large groups or even to small groups. Let us consider why we should study communication.

WHY STUDY COMMUNICATION?

The following are a few of the reasons you need to know more about communication.

1. By understanding how communication works, you will see more clearly why one communication event is successful and why another is not.
2. By recognizing the communication contexts, you can increase your flexibility as a communicator.
3. By understanding how your own perceptions shape your speaking and listening, you increase your effectiveness.
4. By becoming more aware of yourself, you learn how you influence your own communication.
5. By understanding why and how you listen, you can improve your capacity to learn from and respond to others.
6. By learning how to think critically, you improve your analytical skills as a receiver of ideas.
7. By studying verbal and nonverbal communication, you discover how they combine in the sending and receiving of messages.
8. By learning more about human relationships, you find out how they develop, how they disintegrate, and how problems can be resolved.
9. By studying how language functions between and among cultures, you can improve understanding among diverse people.
10. By understanding small group communication, you can learn more about how people solve problems and make decisions.
11. By exploring leadership, you can discover why some people become leaders and why many do not.
12. By studying public speaking, you can learn skills that help you give effective speeches.

This book, if you think about and practice what it says, can improve your communication and make your life more satisfying. Besides improving life on the personal front and in the workplace, its principles can help mend a fractured nation. Applied internationally, the ideas espoused in this book can be used to keep us from killing each other in endless conflicts. The sooner you learn the important precepts of communication, the sooner you can apply them. Let's move on to discover what communication is.

A DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION

Over the years, scholars have created hundreds of definitions of *communication*. How the term is defined can limit or expand the study of the subject. In this text, the definition is both simple and broad—simple enough to allow understanding and broad enough to include many contexts of communication.

Communication: The Process of Understanding and Sharing Meaning

The word *communication* is used in a variety of ways. Before we use the term any further, we should establish a common understanding of its definition. *Communication* comes from the Latin word *communicare*, which means "to make common." This root definition is consistent with the definition of communication used in this text.

In this text, **communication** is defined as *the process of understanding and sharing meaning*. Communication is considered a **process** because it is *an activity, an exchange, or a set of behaviors*—not an unchanging product. Communication is not an object we can hold in our hands—it is an activity in which we participate. David Berlo, a well-known communication researcher, probably provided the clearest statement about communication as a process. Berlo wrote

> If we accept the concept of process, we view events and relationships as dynamic, ongoing, ever-changing, continuous. When we label something as a process, we also mean that it does not have a beginning, an end, a fixed sequence of events. It is not static, at rest. It is moving. The ingredients within a process interact; each affects all of the others.[3]

What is an example of how a process operates in everyday communication? Picture three students passing on the sidewalk between classes and exchanging a few sentences. Does this tiny communication episode really begin and end with their first and last word? Does the fact that they have stopped to exchange messages tell us that they must have had a prior encounter? If they have a common understanding of what is being said, then they must share some experiences that similarly shape their perceptions. Don't their messages go beyond the words to how they look, whether or not they smile, and how softly they speak? Does the episode end with the last word and look or does it continue? Do they think

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Human communication involves understanding and sharing among people.

about their brief conversation later that day and the next, and does it lead to another meeting that night? Communication is a complicated process. It is variable, active, and dynamic. It starts long before the words begin to flow and can last long after the words stop.

Communication is a process that requires **understanding**—*perceiving, interpreting, and comprehending the meaning of the verbal and nonverbal behavior of others.* Your professor asks, "What is the ontogeny of your misogeny?" You hear the words, but you may not be able to understand them, just as an international student who struggles with English as a second language has trouble with words that most Americans regard as easy to understand. Understanding the meaning of another person's message does not occur unless the two communicators can elicit common meanings for words, phrases, and nonverbal codes. The importance of this kind of understanding was emphasized by humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers in his book *On Becoming a Person.* He wrote, "I have found it of enormous value what I can *permit* myself to understand another person."[4]

In addition to understanding, communication involves **sharing,** *interaction between people in order to exchange meaning.* Consider the popular use of the word *sharing.* We share a meal, we share an event, we share a sunset. Sharing is a gift that people exchange. We can also share with ourselves when we allow ourselves time to relax and daydream— time to consider who we are and what our goals are. We share with others when we talk to them alone or in larger groups. Regardless of the context, communication involves sharing.

What exactly is understood and shared in the communication process? When you use language for expression, **meaning** is *the shared understanding of the message.* When you use language, meaning facilitates an appropriate response that indicates that the message was understood. For example, you ask for a drink, and the other person gives you one. Your mind constructs meaning as you interpret the message sent.

Try This

See if you can think of your own definition for communication.
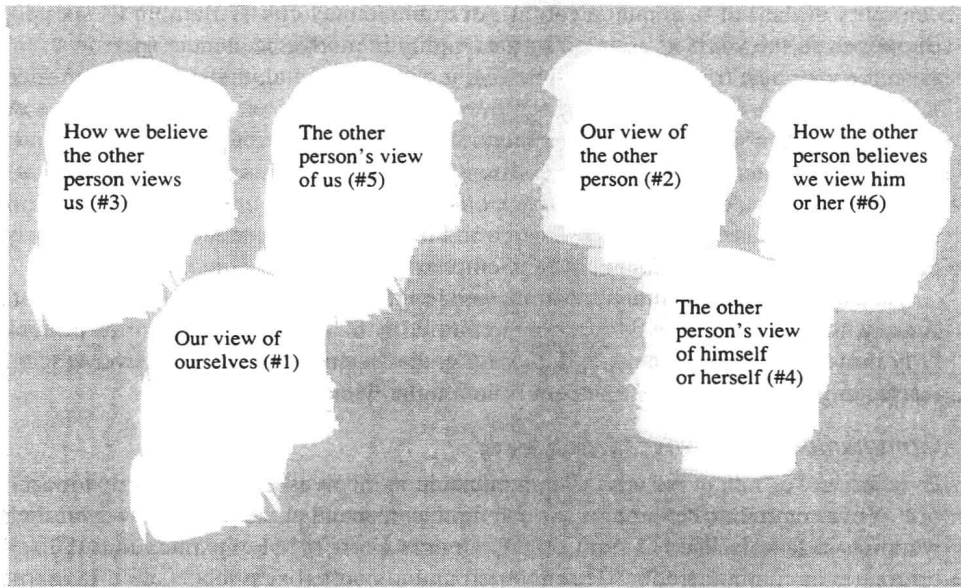
Barnlund's "six people" involved in every two-person communication.

How we believe the other person views us (#3)

The other person's view of us (#5)

Our view of the other person (#2)

How the other person believes we view him or her (#6)

Our view of ourselves (#1)

The other person's view of himself or herself (#4)

Communication Within, Between, and Among People

In this text, we limit our discussion to human communication, the communication that occurs within, between, and among people. As such, we observe that communication begins with the self and involves others.

Communication Begins with the Self

Communication is viewed from the perspective of self. As Carl Rogers wrote, "Every individual exists in a continually changing world of experience of which he [or she] is the center."[5] Consider, for example, the case of Magic Johnson, the professional basketball star who was diagnosed HIV positive. Before he contracted the illness, most Americans did not perceive AIDS as a threat because they thought AIDS was limited to Haitians, homosexuals, and habitual drug users. Magic Johnson clearly did not fit this profile. Newly married, about to have his first child, and one of the most admired people in America, Johnson looked within himself and decided he must serve as an example to save others. Communication was initiated by Magic Johnson's internal assessment of himself as a star, HIV survivor, and crusader.

Dean Barnlund, a communication theorist, introduced the idea that communication is viewed from one's own perspective in his discussion of the "six persons" involved in every two-person communication situation (figure 1.1).[6] These six persons emerge in the following ways:

1. How you view yourself
2. How you view the other person
3. How you believe the other person views you
4. How the other person views himself or herself
5. How the other person views you
6. How the other person believes you view him or her

Barnlund believed that we "construct" ourselves, as well as other persons, through the relationships we have, wish to have, or perceive ourselves as having. He encouraged us to consider the various perspectives involved in communication and to recognize the

centrality of the self in communication. An example may clarify Barnlund's six people. Suppose you see yourself as an enthusiastic, highly motivated student (person #1). You perceive your best friend as a very intelligent, yet judgmental, underclassperson (person #2). She sees you as fun loving and achievement oriented (#5) and views herself as moderately intelligent and a good conversationalist (#4). You, therefore, respect her and ask her opinion on academic matters yet discount her negative messages concerning other areas. She, in turn, offers frequent advice but fails to share her opinions (#6). In addition, she sees you not as "driven" but as energetic and funny. Your tendency, therefore, may be to downplay your accomplishments and emphasize your sense of humor (#3).

As participants in communication, we are limited by our own view of the situation. A student, for instance, may describe a conflict with an instructor as unfair treatment: "My professor doesn't like me and, therefore, grades me more harshly." Conversely, the instructor might remark, "The student is unfamiliar with class policy."

Communication Involves Other People

Even when we "talk to ourselves," communication involves other people. How does this occur? We communicate through our own unique perceptual processes; however, the self we know is largely learned from others. George Herbert Mead explained that the self originates in communication. Through verbal and nonverbal symbols, a child learns to accept roles in response to the expectations of others.[7] We establish our self-image, the sort of person we believe we are, by the ways other people categorize us. The positive, negative, and neutral messages others offer us enable us to determine who we are. Our self-definition, then, arises through our interactions with others.

Communication also involves others in the sense that a competent communicator considers the other person's needs and expectations when selecting messages to share. The competent communicator understands that a large number of messages can be shared at any time, but sensitivity and responsiveness to the other communicator are essential. Thus, we observe that communication begins with the self, as defined largely by others, and involves others, as defined largely by the self.

Communication Models

Barnlund's six persons rendition of communication is a model, a pictorial depiction of how communication looks if we diagram it. A model's relationship to reality is like that of a wiring diagram to the actual wiring of an apartment, or a sewing pattern to the actual construction of a garment. A model is a simplification, but it is also a predictor of how communication might occur.

Three other communication models show communication as action, interaction, and transaction. In the past, people believed that communication could be viewed as **action,** that is, *one person sends a message and another receives it*. This view, depicted in figure 1.2, can be compared to the situation in which one person holds a basketball and throws it to another. The second person does not return the ball but only catches (or fumbles) it. Using this model of communication, the speaker sends the message to the audience as a kind of inoculation in which the message is a shot that may or may not take effect.

In another model, communication is viewed as **interaction.** *One person sends a message to a second person, who receives it and responds with another message.* The communicators take turns sending and receiving messages. This point of view is pictured in figure 1.3. To continue with our basketball analogy, this perspective would be similar to a game of catch. Each person catches (or drops) the ball, and each person throws the ball. However, the ball cannot be thrown back until it is caught. Using this model of communication, the speaker and receiver take turns being speaker and listener in a linear fashion.
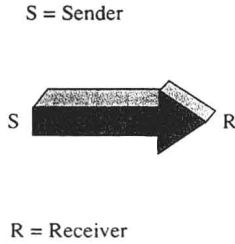
6

Figure 1.2

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Communication as action.

S = Sender

S ➡ R

R = Receiver

Figure 1.3

....

Communication as interaction.

S = Sender

S   R

Figure 1.4

....

Communication as transaction.

S/R ⬌ S/R

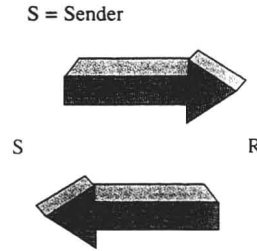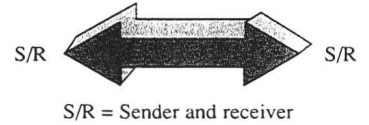S/R = Sender and receiver

In the **transaction** model of communication, *communicators simultaneously send and receive messages* rather than act exclusively as senders or receivers (figure 1.4). Thus, speaking and listening are not separate activities, nor do they occur one at a time. According to the transactional view (accepted in this text), people are continually sending and receiving messages; they cannot avoid communication. Communication is a confusing ball game in which a person catches and throws an unlimited number of balls at any time, in any direction, to any other person. An individual's throwing a ball is not dependent on his or her ability to catch one first. He or she does not always "take turns" in this game. The game has some rules and some predictability but, from time to time, balls fly through the air without preparation. In this model, messages are everywhere. The person talking to you on the sidewalk, nodding to a passerby while stating agreement with you, is in a transactional situation with multiple messages. How you look, what you say, how receptive you are, and what is happening around you all are part of the transactional model.

Within the models of communication, one person may serve as the primary transmitter of messages, whereas another person or persons serve primarily as message receivers. For example, in public speaking, we can identify a speaker and an audience of listeners. In interpersonal communication, such a distinction is more difficult to make. Nonetheless, all communication interactions contain certain components, which we will consider next.

Try This

Draw your own model of communication.

You know that communication is understanding and sharing meaning, and you know four models of communication. Now you will discover the components of communication.

People

People are involved in the human communication process in two roles. They serve as the *sources* and *receivers* of messages. The **source** is *the component that initiates a message*. The **receiver** is *the intended target of the message*. Individuals do not perform these two roles independently. Instead, they are the source and the receiver of messages simultaneously and continually.

People are not like programmed computers or machines. They do not respond uniformly to all messages, nor do they always provide the same messages in exactly the same way. Individual characteristics of people, including their race, gender, age, culture,

THE COMPONENTS OF COMMUNICATION

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values, and attitudes affect both their sending and receiving qualities. Intercultural communication and gender and communication have both become increasingly important topics during the past three decades. Throughout this text you will find examples that illustrate that membership in a culture affects communication behavior.

The Message

The **message** is *the verbal and nonverbal form of the idea, thought, or feeling that one person (the source) wishes to communicate to another person or group of persons (the receivers).* It is the content of the interaction. The message includes the symbols (words and phrases) we use to communicate our ideas, as well as our facial expressions, bodily movements, gestures, touch, tone of voice, and other nonverbal codes. The message may be relatively brief and easy to understand or long and complex. Messages can be intentional or accidental.

The Channel

The **channel** provides *the mode by which a message moves from the source to the receiver of the message.* Both light waves and sound waves are major communication channels; we can see and hear each person with whom we interact. Similarly, television viewing relies on both light waves and sound waves. On the other hand, we rely on sound waves alone when we listen to the radio, and on light waves alone when we read the text on a computer screen.

Feedback

Feedback is *the receiver's verbal and nonverbal response to the source's message.* Let us say you need to find a restroom in an unfamiliar building. You say to a person passing quickly past, "Excuse me, can you . . . ," but the person keeps on going without acknowledging your inquiry. The intended receiver did not acknowledge your message. What if the person turns before you finish your question and asks, "What did you say?" That is feedback indicating the receiver did not fully understand your inquiry. The best feedback would be an answer to your request for information.

Feedback is part of any communication situation. Silence on the telephone is feedback, as are restive behavior and quizzical looks in the lecture hall. High-fidelity communication occurs when the source is sensitive to feedback and responds appropriately to verbal and nonverbal messages sent by the receiver or audience.

Code

People express ideas or thoughts in the form of messages. How do thoughts become messages? We use codes to share our ideas with others. A **code** is *a systematic arrangement or comprehensive collection of symbols, letters, or words that have arbitrary meanings and are used for communication.*

Two major types of codes are used in communication: verbal codes and nonverbal codes. **Verbal codes** consist of *symbols and their grammatical arrangement.* All languages are codes. It is easier for Americans to think of the German or French language as a code than it is to realize that our own language is a code. The English symbols, letters,

and words we use are arbitrary. We have no more reason to call a heavy outer garment by the word *overcoat* than a German does to call it *der Mantel*. Nature does not provide a rationale for any particular language.

Nonverbal codes consist of *all symbols that are not words, including our bodily movements, our use of space and time, our clothing and other adornments, and sounds other than words*. Nonverbal codes should not be confused with non-oral codes. All non-oral codes—such as bodily movement—are nonverbal codes. Nonverbal codes also include oral codes, such as pitch, duration, and rate of speech, as well as sounds like *eh* and *ah*. Nonverbal codes refer to *all* codes that do not consist of words.

Encoding and Decoding

If communication involves the use of codes, the process of communicating can be viewed as one of encoding and decoding. **Encoding** is defined as *the act of putting an idea or a thought into a code*. **Decoding** is *assigning meaning to that idea or thought*. For instance, suppose you are interested in purchasing a new car. You are trying to describe a compact model to your father, who wants to help you with the purchase. You might visualize the car that belongs to your best friend, picturing the black leather interior, red racing stripe, and sporty design. Putting this vision into words, you might say a compact car is small and well designed. You encode your perceptions of a particular car into words that describe the model. Your father, on hearing this, decodes your words and develops his own picture. His love of larger cars affects this process. As a result of your definition, he envisions a sedan. As we can see, misunderstanding often occurs because of the limitations of our language and the inadequacy of our descriptions. Nonetheless, encoding and decoding are essential in sharing our thoughts, ideas, and feelings with other people.

Noise

Noise is *any interference in the encoding and decoding processes that reduces the clarity of a message*. It can be physical noise, such as loud sounds; distracting sights, such as a bit of food on someone's face; or unusual behavior, such as a person standing too close. Noise also can be mental, psychological, or semantic, such as daydreams about a loved one, worry about the bills, pain from a tooth, or uncertainty about what the other person's words are supposed to mean.

Try This

Think of as many examples as you can of noise that interferes with communication.

THE CONTEXTS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication occurs in a **context**, *a set of circumstances or situation*. It occurs between two friends, among five business acquaintances in a small group setting, and between a lecturer and an audience that fills an auditorium. The importance of the context is less obtrusive in some situations and of greater importance in others. The number of people involved in communication affects the kind of communication that occurs. We may communicate with ourselves, with another person, or with many others. The differences among these situations affect our choices of the most appropriate verbal and nonverbal codes.

Intrapersonal communication is the process of understanding and sharing meaning within the self.

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is *the process of understanding and sharing meaning within the self.* Why would we need to communicate with ourselves? Suppose you and your dating partner of two years share the same attitude toward education and a future career. You plan to attend graduate school together next year and later operate your own business. One day, your friend informs you that he or she intends to work after graduation this year—in the family's business. This action, in your opinion, will seriously limit your future together. When you begin to share your feelings with your friend, your friend becomes angry and replies it is just one more example of your narrow-mindedness. You probably feel a certain amount of psychological discomfort. What is likely to occur? (1) You could dismiss your friend's remark and the change of plans as irrelevant and act as though nothing has happened to alter your friendship. (2) You could dismiss your friend from any interactions with you. (3) You could decide you were wrong to prejudge your friend's change of plans and that your friend was correct in pointing it out to you. None of these outcomes is immediately likely, however. Instead, you are more apt to consider these alternatives—and others—as you try to understand what has occurred. You are engaged in communication within yourself.

Intrapersonal communication occurs, as this example suggests, when we evaluate or examine the interaction that occurs between ourselves and others, but intrapersonal communication is not limited to such times. This form of communication occurs prior to, and during, other forms of communication as well. For instance, you argue with yourself during a conversation in which someone asks you to do something you don't really wish to do.

The Case of Sharon Black

Sharon Black, a sophomore at an extension university, worked thirty hours a week at a local department store—a very busy schedule. Sharon wanted to spend more time with her coworkers, but her college work interfered. The other workers usually ate lunch together, but Sharon had a class that started at 12:30 P.M. four days a week. She usually couldn't attend parties because she had homework to do.

Sharon became increasingly quiet at work and felt more alienated as time passed. Her coworkers began to suspect that "the college girl" was avoiding them because she felt superior. They began to plan activities that excluded Sharon.

Sharon's work was exemplary, and she became eligible for promotion to supervisor. Her boss told her that a lot depended on whether the other workers would accept her leadership and cooperate with her. Sharon's coworkers were resentful of the possible promotion of a person who had so little experience at the store. They also felt she was being "pushed ahead" because she was a college student. At lunch that day, they decided that Sharon would not get the promotion if they had anything to say about it. One of the employees offered to tell the boss how they felt.

Sharon was called into the office two days later. Her boss explained that she wasn't going to be promoted because she didn't seem to be getting along well with the others, and it did not look as if they would cooperate with her.

1. What made Sharon's coworkers feel that Sharon thought she was superior to them?
2. Explain the intrapersonal communication that may have occurred for Sharon. What kinds of internal conflicts was she likely to have been experiencing?
3. Why did the misunderstanding between Sharon and the others grow to this level? Why did they not discuss their differences?
4. Is Sharon's situation realistic? Identify a similar experience in which you had a misunderstanding with another person or with other people. How did you resolve it?

Intrapersonal communication is not restricted to "talking to ourselves"; it also includes such activities as internal problem solving, resolving internal conflict, planning for the future, and evaluating ourselves and our relationships with others. Intrapersonal communication involves only the self, and it must be clearly understood by the self because it is the basis for all other communication.

Continually engaged in intrapersonal communication, we might become more easily absorbed in talking to ourselves when we are alone—walking to class, driving to work, taking a shower—but most of us are involved in this form of communication in crowded circumstances as well—during a lecture, at a party, or when visiting friends. Think about the last time you looked at yourself in a mirror. What were your thoughts? Although intrapersonal communication is almost continuous, we seldom focus on our communication with ourselves.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is *the personal process of understanding and sharing meaning between at least two people when relatively mutual opportunities for speaking and listening occur.* Like intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication occurs for a variety of reasons: to solve problems, to resolve conflicts, to share information, to improve our perception of ourselves, or to fulfill such social needs as the need to belong or to be loved. Through our interpersonal communication, we are able to establish relationships with others that include friendships and romantic relationships.

Dyadic communication, a subset of interpersonal communication, simply refers to *two-person communication* and includes interviews with an employer or a teacher; talks with a parent, spouse, or child; and interactions among strangers, acquaintances, and friends. **Small group communication,** another subset of interpersonal communication, refers to *purposeful communication in limited-sized groups in which decision making or problem solving occurs.* Small group communication occurs in social organizations, such as clubs, civic groups, and church groups, and in business settings.

The addition of more people greatly complicates communication. Although each of us holds conflicting perceptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes, the differences between two people are generally far greater than those within an individual. In addition, we all have different ways of expressing what we feel. Consequently, the possibility of successful communication decreases.

Interpersonal communication is generally considered the most influential form of communication and the most satisfying to the individuals involved in it. Interpersonal communication often occurs in an informal setting and generally involves face-to-face verbal and nonverbal exchanges and a sharing of the roles of source (speaker) and receiver (listener).

Try This

What examples of dyadic communication have you experienced in the past week?

Public Communication

Public communication is *the process of understanding and sharing meaning with an audience; one person is generally identified as the source (speaker) and others are recognized as receivers (listeners).* The speaker adapts the message to the audience in an attempt to achieve maximum understanding. Sometimes, virtually everyone in the audience understands the speaker's message; at other times, many people fail to understand the speaker.

Public communication, or public speaking, is recognized by its formality, structure, and planning. We are frequently the listeners of public communication in lecture classes, at convocations, and at religious services. Sometimes, we are speakers: when we speak with a group, when we try to convince other voters of the merits of a particular candidate for office, or when we introduce a guest speaker to a large audience. Public communication most often informs or persuades, but it can also entertain, introduce, announce, welcome, or pay tribute.

The various contexts—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and public—can be described on the basis of the number of people involved, the degree of the setting's formality or intimacy, the opportunities for feedback, the need for prestructuring messages, and the degree of stability of the roles of speaker and listener, as indicated in table 1.1.