INTRODUCTION TO
COMMUNICATION

SECOND EDITION

COMPILED BY CAROL JABLONSKI

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

The Communication Tradition

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the four periods of rhetorical study
- Describe the way scholars viewed communication in the classical period
- Describe the five canons of rhetoric
- Explain the major characteristics of communication study during the medieval period and the Renaissance
- Outline rhetorical study during the modern period
- Distinguish between humanistic and scientific approaches to communication study

Harvey Shands once said that "people, in cultures, speaking to each other in the local tongue and following the rules and regulations of the group, are playing a great game, the central game of the human condition."[1] This book is about that game. It's about how the game is played and how playing it affects us and the world we live in. It's about the rewards that come from playing the game well, and it's also about the costs of losing. It's about a game that affects us deeply, both on a cultural and on an individual level.

It is in the constant interplay between communication and experience that our world is shaped.

No society has existed, or ever could exist, without a well-ordered system of communication, and no individual could survive for long without knowing how that system operates. Without the ability to communicate, we could not form relationships with others, nor could we understand the world around us, for it is in the constant interplay between communication and experience that our world is shaped.

In the following pages, we look at how communication affects us as individuals and how it affects us as a culture. We look at the verbal and nonverbal skills that make communication possible and at the many contexts in which it occurs. In short, we'll examine the knowledge and skills necessary to operate successfully in an age that has often been labeled the "age of communication."

In the Time of Aristotle: A Brief History of Communication Study

Before we begin our study of contemporary communication, it is useful to look at the development of the field—the history of communication study. Communication has been studied seriously for many centuries. In fact, many of the communication principles we believe today were taught in ancient Greece over twenty-five hundred years ago. In the remainder of this chapter,

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we'll see how the formal study of communication began in fifth-century Sicily and developed in ancient Athens; we'll trace it through the medieval period and the Renaissance, discover how it evolved in the modern period, and look at some recent trends (see Table 1.1 for a summary). This brief tour should help you appreciate the importance of the subject you are about to study and should give you a sense of the way it has changed over the years.

Studying Rhetoric in Ancient Greece

If by some mysterious twist of fate you were to wake up tomorrow and find yourself in ancient Greece, you could still pursue your education, although it's unlikely you'd be able to put together the same class schedule you have today. Many of the courses and majors you now take for granted wouldn't exist. If, however, you were interested in studying communication, if you wanted to learn public speaking, oral interpretation, argumentation and debate, or communication theory, you'd have no problem, for in Athens, about three hundred years before the birth of Christ, communication was as popular a subject as it is today. It would be quite easy for you to find a school, for there were many famous teachers willing to take on new students. You'd simply have to keep in mind that in those days the study of communication was called **rhetoric** and teachers of communication were known as **rhetoricians.**

If you were looking for a place to study rhetoric in Athens around 335 B.C., your best bet would be a school called the Lyceum. The Lyceum was founded by **Aristotle,** whose writings on rhetoric are considered by many to be the single greatest source of rhetorical theory. Born in 384 B.C., Aristotle was a student of the other great Greek philosopher, **Plato,** and attended Plato's Academy. Before

starting the Lyceum, Aristotle served as tutor to the young son of Philip of Macedon, the child who grew up to be Alexander the Great.

Those of you who are male would have no difficulty attending the Lyceum, for the school was open to any young man who showed an interest in education. Those of you who are female would, unfortunately, have a problem. Although historical records show that two women managed to attend Plato's school, it was not Athenian custom for women to receive higher education. Indeed, Axiothea, one of the women who attended the Academy, resorted to the strategy of disguising herself as a man.[2]

Table 1.1

A Short History of Rhetoric and Communication Theory

Cave paintings attest to the universal human need to record and communicate experience. Written records in all ancient civilizations (Egypt, Babylon, India, China) show that communication has long been an object of study.

Classical Period (500 B.C.–A.D. 400)

With the rise of Greek democracy, public communication became an important tool for problem solving. Rhetoric, the study of "the available means of persuasion," was a respected discipline taught by the great philosophers. The first known communication model, the canons of rhetoric, divided rhetoric into five parts: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Classical rhetoric emphasized credibility, ways to ground arguments, and audience analysis. Major figures included Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.

Medieval Period and the Renaissance   (400–1600)

In response to the rise of monolithic Christianity, rhetoric became secondary to theology. Major rhetorical acts were letter writing and preaching. Parts of the classical paradigm were kept alive, but the focus was prescriptive, not theoretical. Rhetoricians emphasized methods of embellishing and amplifying rhetorical style. Major figures included Augustine, Cassiodorus, John of Salisbury, Erasmus, and Francis Bacon.

Modern Period (1600–1900)

Once again, public rhetoric was a major force in determining public policy. The written word became an important medium as books and newspapers became more available. Rhetoric followed four paths: Classical rhetoric revived the work of the ancients. Psychological/epistemological rhetoric investigated receivers' psychological responses to persuasive messages. Belletristic rhetoric saw written and spoken communication as art and developed theories of rhetorical criticism. Elocutionists focused on developing elaborate rules for delivery. Major figures were Fénelon, Lord Kames, George Campbell, Joseph Priestley, and Thomas De Quincey.

Contemporary Period (1900–present)

Modern departments of communication were formed. Communication study took two paths: rhetoricians used humanistic methods to analyze rhetorical effects of public discourse. Communication theorists used scientific methods to analyze communication behavior as a social science. Communication study expanded to include interpersonal and group, as well as public, communication. The rise of electronic media signaled additional changes in communication study.
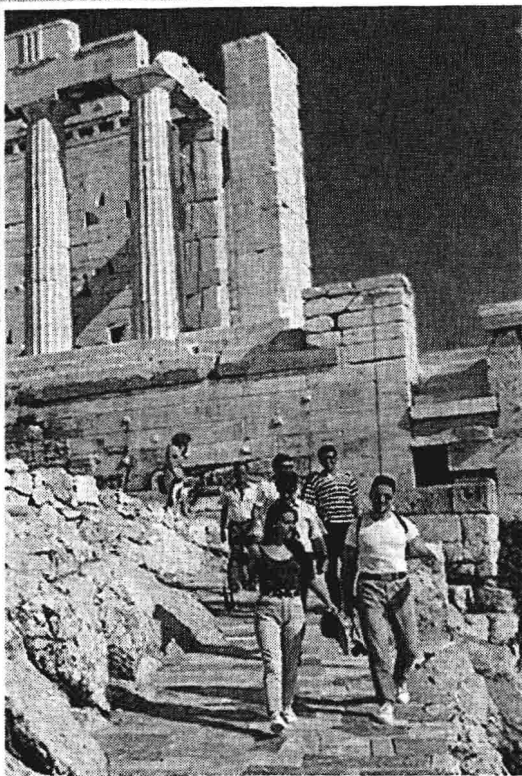
If you were to attend Aristotle's public lectures (whether or not in disguise), you would have to rise early. Accompanied by your *paidagogos*—the attendant hired by your parents to make sure you didn't cut classes—you would make your way through the busy *agora*, or central marketplace, to the great wall surrounding the city. Outside the wall, you would enter the wooded sanctuary of Apollo the Wolf Slayer, site of the Lyceum. As you passed the huge gymnasium, you might see young men practicing the discus or wrestling. If it were during one of the many periods in which Athens was at war, you could observe troops, clad in bronze breastplates and shields, taking part in military drills on the open parade ground. In Athens, as in other Greek city-states, physical activity was important to education, and teachers of philosophy and rhetoric shared space in the public gyms with teachers of physical culture and the military arts. As you neared the school library (one of the first of its kind), you would undoubtedly meet friends, and together you would look for seats in front of the colonnaded portico from which Aristotle customarily spoke.

Aristotle held his public lectures in the mornings, covering philosophy, science, and logic.[3] In the afternoons, he walked along the shaded walkways known as *peripatos*, stopping from time to time to sit in one of the roomy recesses and talk with his students about ethics, politics, and rhetoric. Because much of his private instruction took place as he strolled the peripatos, his school became known as the **Peripatetic School.**

If you were to study with Aristotle, your focus would be on persuasive rhetoric. Aristotle considered the science of rhetoric to be that of "observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."[4] He lectured about the ways in which successful arguments can be built, and he described methods of arriving at truthful conclusions. He also talked a great deal about proof. Aristotle believed that a speaker could sway an audience in three ways: through personal character, or **ethos;** through the ability to arouse emotions, or **pathos;** and through the wording and logic of the message, or **logos.** In discussing ethos, Aristotle became one of the first communication specialists to point out the importance of source credibility. If you were fortunate enough to study with him, you would leave school knowing the most frequently encountered types of speaking situations,

rules for effective reasoning, the part that human emotions play in persuasion, the necessity for audience analysis, ways of improving style and delivery, and the place of rhetoric in maintaining and discovering truth.

The Classical Period: Enchanting the Mind by Arguments

Although he was arguably the greatest of the early Western rhetoricians, Aristotle was not the first. That honor is shared by two Sicilian Greeks, **Corax** and **Tisias**, who lived a century before Aristotle. The story of Corax and Tisias illustrates clearly that the study of communication is always prompted by practical problems.[5]

In 466 B.C., Sicily experienced political upheaval; the populace overthrew the existing tyrant and established a democratic constitution. People who had been exiled under the previous regime came back to Sicily and demanded the return of their land and property. This, of course, led to intricate legal problems (similar in some respects to those now occurring in the formerly socialist countries of Europe). Corax recognized that many of the litigants were ill-equipped to argue their own cases persuasively. This prompted Tisias to study ways in which speakers could effectively order their ideas. From these early attempts to address practical problems, the rhetorical tradition emerged.

In the next one hundred years, the study of rhetoric expanded rapidly as the great orators and philosophers of ancient Greece added insights and theories about the art of public speaking. Indeed, the rhetoric taught by the Greek philosophers is directly linked to the rhetoric taught in modern communication courses. Much of the advice a modern teacher of public communication gives a student (advice on building audience rapport, organizing ideas, arguing to hostile audiences, and delivering a speech) was given by Greek and Roman teachers over two thousand years ago.

The rhetoric taught by the Greek philosophers is directly linked to the rhetoric taught in modern communication courses.

The **classical period** lasted for about nine hundred years, from the fifth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. It flowered under Athenian democracy, lasted through the years of the Roman Empire, and closed with the advent of Christianity. Communication study was important in ancient Greece for at least three reasons. First, Greece was a society that revered the spoken word. Although many Athenians could read and write, the stone, wood, or wax tablets they used were unwieldy. There was no light reading, no books or magazines. Oral expression, in the form of storytelling, poetry reading, dramatic performance, or conversation, was the major source of entertainment, and ornamental speech was greatly admired.

Second, the Greeks put a great deal of emphasis on persuasion and argumentation. Because Athens was a democracy, would-be politicians achieved office through their ability to speak thoughtfully and persuasively. Important political

issues were defined and resolved through public debate, and individual politicians gained public notice as a result of their skills in argumentation.

Finally, for many years there was a ban on professional lawyers. Like their Sicilian counterparts, Greek citizens who wished to bring suit in a court of law had to have the forensic skills to argue their cases successfully.

In response to this practical need, a group of itinerant teachers called **Sophists** began to ply their trade. The Sophists were professional speech teachers who advertised their services by posting notices in public places where they could find an audience. Soon the gymnasia became important locations for learning: the Sophists knew they could find a large and receptive audience in the Athenian version of today's health clubs.

The major concern of the Sophists was teaching the "tricks" of persuasive speaking for use in the law courts or assemblies. Often, the Sophists supplemented their income by acting as professional speechwriters and political consultants. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, who believed that the goal of communication was to discover the truth, not merely to win arguments, held the Sophists in great contempt. The Sophists seemed undaunted, however, and bragged about their skill in defeating strong arguments with weak ones.

The Greek and Roman philosophers Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian were more theoretical (and more ethical) than were the Sophists. **Cicero** (106–43 B.C.), a prominent Roman politician, was considered to be Rome's finest orator. He met his death when he joined the forces opposing Mark Antony after the assassination of Julius Caesar. During his lifetime, he delivered many famous speeches and wrote extensively on communication theory. By the time his works were published, the study of rhetoric had stabilized into five major topic areas, the famous **canons of rhetoric.** Cicero did much to elaborate on this early model of communication.

The canons divided communication into five parts: invention, style, arrangement, memory, and delivery (see Table 1.2). The first, **invention,** was the process of deciding on the subject matter of one's speech and of discovering information and arguments that would lead to sound conclusions. Classical rhetoricians shared Aristotle's belief that through communication one could decide which of several possible "truths" was the most correct. In their writing and teaching they argued that speakers should have a wide knowledge of current affairs as well as the ability to think clearly. Theories of invention emphasized ways to argue in different contexts.

Style was the second canon. It described the process of selecting the proper words to convey a message. Classical rhetoricians emphasized correct use of language and cataloged major figures of speech. Cicero believed there were three styles of speaking that corresponded to ethos, logos, and pathos, Aristotle's three modes of speech. The **plain style** built ethos by convincing the audience of the speaker's good character, good sense, and trustworthiness; it was logical, clear, and restrained. The **middle style** emphasized logos by impressing the audience with the soundness of the speaker's position; it consisted of intricate argumentation

Aristotle

and careful philosophical distinctions. Finally, the **vigorous style** was based on pathos; it "pulled out all the stops" and was eloquent and emotional. Cicero, like other classical rhetoricians, mistrusted emotional appeals and warned speakers not to use the vigorous style without elements of the other two styles.[6]

The next canon, **arrangement**, described ways to order ideas effectively. Speakers were taught that a speech must open with an introduction, follow with a statement of purpose, lead into presentation of arguments, and end with a conclusion. Classical rhetoricians also emphasized the necessity of organizing material according to audience needs and goals.

In an oral society, **memory**, the ability to hold content, style, and arrangement in one's mind, was exceedingly important. The science of mnemonics was developed during this time to help speakers keep track of complex arguments. One of the most popular mnemonic systems called for the speaker to visualize a villa with the main ideas of the speech situated in each room. During the speech, the speaker could then mentally proceed through the rooms, making each argument in the

Table 1.2

The Five Canons of Rhetoric

Invention

The speaker must begin by discovering what can be said about a given topic and by finding arguments that will allow others to understand it. Classical theory emphasized methods for analyzing audience, subject, and occasion of speech to find material that would move people to belief and action. Through logical thinking and clear topical analysis, the speaker could find grounds for effective arguments. Major speech occasions were three: forensic, deliberative, and epideictic (ceremonial). Modes of proof were three: ethos, pathos, and logos.

Style

The speaker must select and arrange the wording of the message carefully. Style was thought to differ in relationship to speech purpose: it could instruct, please, or persuade. Classical writers believed language should be clear, lively, and appropriate for the audience. Using figurative language was thought to be a way of increasing audience response.

Arrangement

The speaker must arrange ideas for maximum impact. Classical theory divided a speech into several parts that correspond roughly with today's introduction, body, and conclusion. Theorists agreed that the audience must be put into the proper frame of mind for receiving the message, the subject must be set forth clearly, a case must be built, and the speech must end with a summary and conclusion. Writers recognized that order of elements depends on the nature of the audience (whether hostile or friendly) and on the seriousness of the occasion.

Memory

The speaker must find a way to keep the message firmly in mind. Classical writers suggested several mnemonic devices to help orators memorize speeches. Theorists also discussed factors that make speech material memorable, including novelty.

Delivery

The speaker must present the speech in a natural, varied, and appropriate way. Voice should convey interest and emotion, and gestures should match the major ideas in the speech.

correct order. The method was developed by a rhetor named Simonides who, after reciting a poem at a banquet, was called away from the banquet hall. This circumstance was fortunate, because no sooner did he leave than the hall collapsed, killing many of the guests. When asked to help identify the dead, Simonides realized that he could remember quite easily where each person had been sitting. The incident brought home to him the power of visual memory and set him to wondering whether visualization might be used to recall other kinds of information.

The final canon was **delivery.** Delivery was considered necessary for success because if the speaker did not use a pleasing voice and graceful gestures, the effect of the speech would be undermined. Although they considered delivery less important than the other canons, the Greeks and Romans understood the importance of nonverbal communication in speech presentation. Cicero, for example, illustrated the need for nonverbal expression when he warned speakers that they would never be able to make an audience feel indignation, terror, or compassion until these emotions were "visibly stamped or rather branded on the advocate himself."[7]

For classical rhetoricians, communication was the "queen of disciplines." Because it was through communication that a society determined policies in its own best interest, rhetoric carried heavy ethical weight. In fact, **Quintilian** (A.D. 35–95), the last of the great classical theorists, defined rhetoric as the study of "the good man speaking well." While the focus of communication study during this time was on legal and political discourse, classical theorists also expressed a concern for all forms of communication. As Plato says in the *Phaedrus,*

For classical rhetoricians, communication was the "queen of disciplines."

Is not rhetoric, taken generally, a universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments; which is practised not only in courts and public assemblies, but in private houses also, having to do with all matters, great as well as small, good and bad alike?[8]

Medieval and Renaissance Communication: Truth Armed Against Falsehood

With the fall of the Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity, rhetorical study declined. During the next two important historical periods, the **medieval period** (which lasted from 400 to 1400) and the **Renaissance** (1400 to 1600), little insight was added to classical thought. Only at the very beginning of the medieval period, when Augustine wrote, and at the very end of the Renaissance, with the work of Francis Bacon, do we find much original work. During the twelve hundred years following the classical period, most rhetorical works were fragmented versions of earlier thought or handbooks on rhetorical style.

The medieval period and the Renaissance were characterized by the rise to power of Christian clergy and the decline of "pagan" theories of rhetoric. With the advent of monolithic Christianity, the goal of communication was no longer to discover possible truth through debate but to instruct the faithful in certain

truth, the revealed "will of God." Classic ideas of rhetoric, therefore, fell into disrepute, and "rhetoric ceased to be a vital, developing discipline."[9]

There was, nevertheless, a practical need for training in communication. The two most important communication activities were letter writing and preaching. The first was of great importance because, in a world of independently held feudal kingdoms, it was necessary to communicate over large distances. In the so-called Dark Ages, most people were illiterate, and even kings, queens, and priests were forced to hire professional "dictators" who composed and wrote the political decrees, legal mandates, and religious dispensations that connected feudal society.

Preaching was also of great importance, because it was the duty of the Christian clergy to teach the word of God. **Augustine** (354–430), a major Christian theorist, argued that it would be foolish for truth "to take its stand unarmed against falsehood." If evil speakers were to sway an audience by their eloquence and false arguments, and the good were to "tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and, in fine, not easy to believe in," then wicked and worthless causes would triumph.[10]

The preacher's goal was to interpret the word of God. He (rarely she) had to study the scriptures and pass their meaning on. As a communication theorist, Augustine tried to understand this process. He believed that people communicate through signs. A sign, he said, is something that "causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself."[11] **Natural signs** (for example, smoke, which causes one to think of fire) are created by God. **Conventional signs** (for example, the spoken or written word) are arbitrarily created by humans, and their interpretation is more difficult. For Augustine, communication was a process of "drawing forth and conveying into another's mind what the giver of the sign has in his own mind."[12] This view of communication as a process whereby a sender transmits symbols to a receiver who interprets and acts on them is close to the view of many modern theorists.[13]

After Augustine, there was little original theorizing about communication. Rhetoric became secondary to theology, its subject matter was dispersed throughout the liberal arts, and what remained was prescriptive rather than theoretical. Most rhetorical works were compilations of form letters or manuals on preaching style. Although the study of rhetoric never died out, it became fragmented: the vigor and originality that had characterized it during the classical period were gone.

Augustine

The Modern Period: A Rational Science of Rhetoric

The three centuries from 1600 to 1900 are known as the **modern period**. During this time, new attitudes toward knowledge revitalized the study of rhetoric. Secular studies were no longer regarded with suspicion. Nationalism and the rise of democratic forms of government led to increased public debate on important issues of the day. Once again, people believed that political and moral problems could be solved through the exercise of free speech.

In his analysis of modern rhetoric, Douglas Ehninger identifies four directions of rhetorical study during the modern period.[14] Those who took the **classical approach** set out to recover the insights of the great classical rhetoricians, adapting them to modern times. Others took a **psychological/epistemological approach.** They investigated the relationship of communication and thought, trying to understand in a "scientific" way how people could influence one another through speech. The **belletristic approach** focused on writing and speaking as art forms, developing critical standards for judging drama, poetry, and oratory. Finally, those who took an **elocutionary approach** designed elaborate systems of instruction to improve speakers' verbal and nonverbal presentation.

Whether their primary interest was understanding the nature of human thought, developing standards of artistic judgment, or understanding delivery, modern rhetoricians built on the insights of the ancients. They added, however, a thoroughly modern belief in the importance of **empiricism** (the process of grounding theory in observation).

Those adopting a psychological approach were particularly eager to find a scientific basis for the study of human communication, although their science emphasized "armchair introspection" over experimentation. They wanted to understand the process by which human action could be influenced by speech and to describe the thought processes of receivers listening to persuasive messages. More than any previous writer, **George Campbell** (1719–1796) stressed that receivers were active participants in the persuasion process and that the effective communicator studied the inner workings, or "faculties," of the human mind. Contemporary theorists still emphasize the importance of understanding the experiences and motivations of individual receivers.

The rhetoricians who took a belletristic view were interested less in the psychology of communication than in problems of style and eloquence. Nevertheless, like the classical and psychological theorists, they believed that speakers should be widely read and well educated; should use clear, lively, and concise language; should follow a motivational or psychologically based order of arguments; and should speak with a natural, extemporaneous style, matching gestures and voice to the feeling expressed in their texts.

The elocutionists focused their study of communication on the canon of delivery. Although their initial task was to describe the gestures and vocal characteristics naturally associated with different emotional states, their zeal for systematizing soon led to sets of artificial rules for delivery. They developed elaborate charts detailing the appropriate ways to show major emotions such as pride, shame, horror, and admiration (see Figure 1.1). By using the "self-help" books they published, speakers could mechanically map out the nonverbal behaviors that would make their delivery most effective. Unfortunately, this approach led to a florid style that was anything but natural and spontaneous and that gave a bad name to the study of oral communication for many years.

Figure 1.1

The Geometric Properties of Easy and Graceful Movement
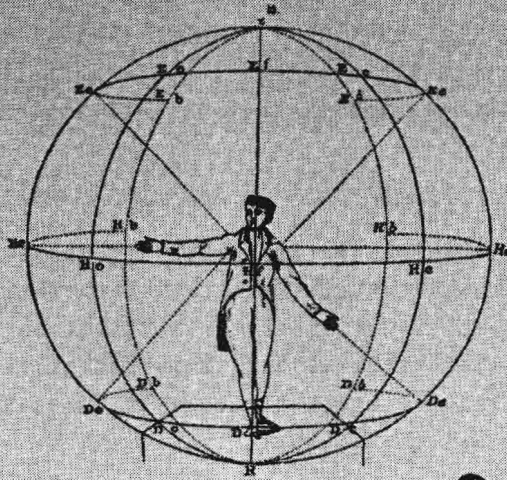
**Diagrams Showing the Speaker
How to Express Appropriate Emotion**

Aversion is expressed by two gestures; first the hand . . . is retracted toward the face . . . then suddenly the eyes are withdrawn, the head is averted, the feet retire, and the arms are projected out extended against the object, the hands vertical.
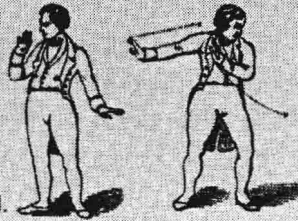
Veneration crosses both hands on the breast, casts down the eyes slowly, and bows the head.

Horror is seldom capable of retreating, but remains petrified, in one attitude, with the eyes riveted on its object, and the arm held forward to guard the person . . .

From *A Manual of Elocution: Embracing Voice and Gesture, Designed for Schools, Academies and Colleges as Well as for Private Learners* by M. Caldwell, 1845, Philadelphia: Sorin and Ball, pp. 248, 310, 808.

Communication Today: Contemporary Departments of Rhetoric and Communication Theory

Throughout the history of communication study, new technologies have continually affected our ideas of what communication is. During the modern period, the new technology was printing. As written communication became increasingly important, rhetoricians turned their attention from the study of the spoken word to the study of literary works. Therefore, when American universities and colleges organized themselves into departments, rhetoric was assigned to English departments.

In the early years of the twentieth century, however, teachers of public speaking and rhetoric formed their own professional organization and developed their own departments of speech communication. Today these departments are among the most popular on campuses everywhere, but in the early days this was not the case. At that time, serious students of communication focused on literary communication, whereas public speaking was associated with the simplistic systems of the elocutionists. Many people considered speech too simple to be studied seriously.[15]

Communication: Humanity or Social Science?

In contemporary departments, two approaches to the study of communication are evident. Many scholars continue in the rhetorical tradition. They use the historical and critical methods of the humanities in their studies of the ways in which symbolic activity shapes public response to political and ethical issues. For these scholars, rhetoric remains a humanistic discipline. Yet although their approach grows out of a long and rich tradition, the problems they address are often very contemporary.

A second school of thought takes a more scientific approach to the study of communication. At the turn of the century, many disciplines were influenced by the **scientific method,** a belief in controlled laboratory experimentation and careful, objective measurement. Scientists believed that one could understand a phenomenon only by reducing it to its most basic elements or variables, manipulating these variables in a controlled situation, and observing the results.

Scholars in the emerging disciplines of psychology, sociology, and anthropology sought ways of applying the methods of the "hard" scientists to the study of human behavior. Because many students of communication were convinced that human communication should join the social sciences, in the 1920s communication researchers began publishing empirical research on oral communication. One of the most popular subjects for study was audience psychology and attitude change: early communication scientists used experimental and statistical methods to study source credibility, speech organization, use of evidence, the effects of rational and emotional appeals, and "audience variables such as sex, dogmatism, ego involvement in the subject of the message, and so forth."[16] Today, communication scholars with a social-scientific approach continue to address these issues as well as to investigate interpersonal and group interaction.

Communication is often viewed as a meeting of minds. To the extent that partners share experiences and try to see things from one another's point of view, communication succeeds.
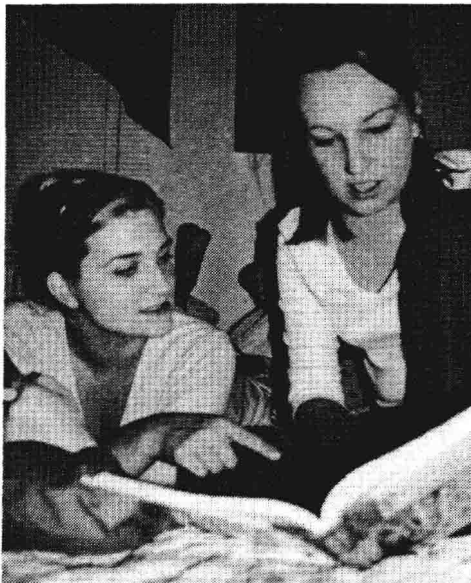
Whether you believe that communication should be studied using humanistic or scientific methods, you will find support in contemporary communication departments where courses both in rhetoric and communication theory are taught. Although their methods may differ, rhetoricians and communication scientists address similar questions. Both want to understand how communicators affect each other as they interact.

Although their methods may differ, rhetoricians and communication scientists address similar questions.

What Do Rhetoricians and Communication Scientists Do?

One of the most attractive aspects of studying communication is that it prepares us for so many different professions. People with degrees in rhetoric and communication theory apply their interests in many communication-related professions. They may become speechwriters, political consultants or politicians, legal consultants or lawyers, advertising executives, public relations experts, counselors, organizational training and development specialists, professional negotiators, personnel managers, specialists in information storage and retrieval, radio or television performers, media consultants, and the like. Communication specialists are needed in corporate settings as spokespersons and company representatives. They are also needed in professions that provide information and counseling to the public, such as health-care professions. In fact, opportunities for individuals trained in communication are plentiful throughout the economy. Whether you plan to major in communication or to take some courses simply to explore, what you learn will be useful to you throughout your working life. Knowing how to communicate clearly and effectively will benefit you no matter what career you choose.

Of course, business and professional contexts are not the only settings where the study of communication is important. Many communication specialists decide to teach or do academic research. Those who do so have large numbers of subjects to investigate and, as we shall see later, a variety of ways to study those subjects. In the past, rhetoricians have studied the rhetoric of films, television, social movements, political speeches, political newscasting, cartoons, popular music, psychotherapy, painting, architecture, and even science.[17] Communication scientists have studied how communication affects the development and maintenance of one's self-image, how message variables affect the way we process and understand information, the factors that lead to attitude change, how interpersonal relationships form and dissolve, how small groups make effective and ineffective decisions, how complex organizations use communication to function effectively, how the media affect audience responses, and the like.[18]

As we've seen, communication has been an important area of study for thousands of years. Now, more than ever, a firm grounding in communication is a personal and professional necessity, for we live in an age in which the ability to process and evaluate communication has become a necessary skill. As you