



QUESTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION TO THEORY

Rob Anderson

Veronica Ross

QUESTIONS OF COMMUNICATION

*A Practical Introduction
to Theory*

Rob Anderson

Saint Louis University

Veronica Ross

Greenville College

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

New York

Managing editor: Patricia Mansfield-Phelan
Project editor: Amy Horowitz
Production associate: Elizabeth Mosimann
Art director: Sheree L. Goodman
Cover and Text design: LCI Design
Photo research: Inge King

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 92-62788
Copyright © 1994 by St. Martin's Press, Inc.
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any form or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or
otherwise, except as may be expressly permitted by the applicable
copyright statutes or in writing by the Publisher.
Manufactured in the United States of America.
8 7 6 5 4
f e d c b a

For information, write:
St. Martin's Press, Inc.
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10010
ISBN: 0-312-06776-3

PREFACE

Questions of Communication: A Practical Introduction to Theory was written for students and teachers who are curious about how communication works. Not everyone is. Many people are content to go about their daily business without giving a second thought to why some people understand them better than others or why they are more effective in some relationships than in others. Many people aren't particularly interested in whether modern electronic media might be changing the ground rules of human perception or how some people can justify behaviors that others consider morally indefensible.

However, we assume that students majoring in communication are curious about these and other issues. Students in theory courses are often willing to exercise their intellectual curiosity if sincerely invited. Knowing the skills of communication (public speaking, interpersonal sensitivity, small group decision making, interviewing) is important but not enough for a specialist in the field. Yet, at an introductory level, college sophomores and juniors can lose enthusiasm for the field and drown in theoretical abstraction and detail if too much material is assigned all at once.

A number of excellent, comprehensive books are available to introduce communication theory to students who have taken the first course in communication. In our opinion, however, none of them quite fit the need of our own students to study theory in an involving, personalized, and

practical way—while still recognizing that *ideas* themselves can be exciting. Our book, therefore, was conceived as your book—a *student's and teacher's* book, not primarily as a researcher's book. Undergraduates new to a communication major have plenty of time to probe the intricacies of specific theories in upper-level courses. We hope *Questions of Communication* will be an accessible introduction to mainstream communication theory that is based on answering the real questions of students. Somewhat more streamlined in scope and more integrative than other theory books, it is most appropriate for lower-level nonskills classes such as Communication Theory or Introduction to Communication Studies, courses that often are among the first a major takes in the discipline.

Throughout the text, terms that appear in the Glossary are boldfaced at their first mention. In addition, we've tried to make our approach to theory distinctive by incorporating a number of unique features:

- We emphasize the role of questioning more than answering. Knowledge is not built by receiving little packets of answers from experts but by a person's ability to ask, and then seek to answer, real, intelligent, and practical questions.
- We emphasize that *theory* and *practice* are not opposites, but simply two perspectives on the same process—learning.
- We emphasize the role of students as learners in a context of higher education. The discussion of theories contains many examples and research findings specifically relevant to the college context.
- We emphasize that communication theory is not a disciplinary possession but an enterprise that unites a variety of scholars in the humanities as well as in the social sciences. Therefore, *Questions of Communication* supports a broadly based general education or liberal arts philosophy. The most practical education has a solid base or core, yet is liberalizing and expansive; through it, we improve the dialogue among the disciplines.
- We emphasize clarifying and integrating theoretical concepts rather than enumerating many of the diverse categories, names, and abstractions that more advanced courses might justifiably stress. Introductory students should be excited by the possibilities of their subject, not intimidated by elaborate lists of concepts and subconcepts.
- We emphasize a narrative tone, talking readers through basic ideas and, we hope, encouraging them to ask individualized questions. At times, the examples we choose are essentially stories interwoven throughout a chapter; in this way, readers can relate their learning as it evolves to the progression of the narratives.
- We emphasize ethics as a frame for all communication problems and choices, devoting an entire chapter to ethical theory and philosophy.

Beyond these features, we offer two other somewhat unusual features to help students and teachers interact with the book as a stimulus:

- **Testing the Concepts.** Instead of traditional summaries, each chapter will conclude with a question-and-answer session, including focused questions that are similar or in some cases identical to those we've been asked in our own classes. These questions and answers should test the implications and practicality of chapter content from a student perspective and generate further questions and class dialogue from readers.
- **You, the Researcher.** Each chapter from 2 through 10 has a section of projects designed to stimulate out-of-class investigations and explorations students might conduct in their everyday lives. These projects range from the informal and nearly spontaneous (that might generate class discussion topics) to carefully coordinated interviews, mini-experiments, and observations (that could turn into term papers in this course or others). No one reader will want to do all the projects, but the suggestions illustrate the range of communication research that reinforces theory building described in the chapters. We hope students will realize that theorists don't just engage in armchair noodling but are active investigators, too. Please read the introduction to "You, the Researcher" in Chapter 2 for a discussion of reservations you need to keep in mind before attempting to study the communication of human subjects.

Finally, we offer an *Instructor's Manual*, written by Deborah Stieneker of Kirkwood Community College, as a pedagogical resource to be used with this text. This manual provides course syllabi, test items, and assignments as well as teaching strategies, examples of theory in practice, and proficiency goals for students.

Although communication itself is our focus, it is not the exclusive topic of either of the first two chapters in the book. This, too, must seem unusual. In Chapter 1, learning is stressed along with the communication climate for both men and women in college life. We discuss learning in its ethical dimensions and use two major research programs to exemplify how learning about communication also has an ethical dimension. Chapter 2 expands this learning-based approach to consider how all theorizing is based on curiosity and questioning, and how theory and research and theory and practice are interdependent. Chapter 3 defines communication as a fundamentally transactional, mutualistic, and relational process, and it challenges readers to address definitional issues of their own. Chapters 4 through 9 consider problems of communication ranging from intrapersonal experience to personal relationships to public communication issues of persuasion and media theory. Finally, in Chapter 10 we

return to the ethical themes of Chapter 1 by surveying the general philosophical positions underpinning ethical decision making and several specialized perspectives on communication ethics.

Although any extended writing project demands a great deal of time alone and cooperation between coauthors, we would like to acknowledge the support given by many people who might not even know how much they've helped. Our families, Dona, Eric, and Neil Anderson, and Steve, Chris, and Corey Ross, have been patient enough, thoughtful enough, and sensitive enough to deserve sainthood (if those were the only criteria!). The original idea for this book emerged from a series of conversations held many years ago with a mutual friend, Dr. Kevin E. McClearey of the Department of Speech Communication at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Several of our colleagues and friends graciously read early chapter drafts and gave informal advice on how to recast ideas while keeping student needs in mind: Dr. George M. Killenberg, professor of mass communication at the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg; Dr. Noreen Carrocci, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Saint Louis University; and Dr. Cecelia Keener, head of the Communication Department at Greenville College. Of course, the real early reviewers of these ideas have been our questioning, thoughtful, and excitable students at Saint Louis University, Greenville College, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, and the University of South Florida. These four very different institutions all seemed to draw many learners who became teachers, too. They went beyond the books to involve themselves in lasting learning. You'll meet them indirectly in these pages. They continue to ask the right questions of communication and to confront the faculty, as they should, when they think we might be bluffing.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Deborah Stieneker for her work on the *Instructor's Manual*. We greatly appreciate the quality and depth of her contribution.

Editors and reviewers at St. Martin's Press have encouraged the concept of a book like this at every stage of development. We are indebted to the early interest of Cathy Pusateri and to the ongoing support, guidance, and understanding of Jane Lambert. Amy Horowitz, Project Editor, was particularly helpful in coordinating changes and polishing the manuscript. Reviewers engaged by St. Martin's to provide their expert feedback also deserve our thanks. Their suggestions improved the book immeasurably, we think, though they should in no way be held responsible for any short-sighted goofs or gaffes that may remain in the manuscript: William A. Ausmus, University of Northern Iowa; Philip M. Backlund, Central Washington University; Brant Burleson, Purdue University; Randall Bytwerk, Calvin College; Larry Caillouet, Western Kentucky University; Kenneth N. Cissna, University of South Florida; Kenneth D. Frandsen, University of New Mexico; Lois Leubitz, Cedar Valley College;

Gail Mason, Eastern Illinois University; David Procter, Kansas State University; Donna Spaulding, St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley; Robert A. Stewart, Texas Tech University; Anita Taylor, George Mason University; and Mary Wiemann, Santa Barbara City College.

Rob Anderson
Veronica Ross

CONTENTS

Preface **iii**

1

**COLLEGE STUDENTS, ETHICAL ASSUMPTIONS,
AND CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE**

"Do We Have to Memorize All This Stuff?" **1**

 "At the Edge of This Attention": Some Direct Talk about How
 Textbooks Are Written 3

 The Doubting Game and the Believing Game 8

 Stages and Types of Learning 10

The Perry Scheme 11

The Women's Ways of Knowing Scheme 15

 Knowledge in an Ethical Framework 19

 Summary: Testing the Concepts 22

2

**ASKING, OBSERVING, THEORIZING,
CHECKING, ASKING . . .**

"How Do We Learn about Communication?" **25**

 Theorizing as an Everyday Occurrence 28

The Attitude of Availability	30
The Theory-Building Cycle in Communication	34
<i>The Cycle</i>	36
<i>Functions of Theorizing</i>	40
<i>Evaluating the Quality of Theories</i>	41
What Do Communication Theorists Hope to Accomplish (Other Than to Build Theories)?	44
<i>Covering Laws or Rules?</i>	44
<i>Systems Assumptions in Communication</i>	46
Summary: Testing the Concepts	49
You, the Researcher	52

3

THE FLOW OF COMMUNICATION

"When Have We Communicated?"	57
Communication: A Cure?	58
Defining Communication Realistically	61
Communication: Continually Changing?	64
<i>Process</i>	64
<i>Who Can Stop the World? Difficulties of a Process Orientation</i>	65
Mutuality and Transaction	68
<i>Individualistic Approaches: One to Another?</i>	68
<i>Mutualistic Approaches: Both Sides Now?</i>	70
Meaning (Meanings)	73
<i>Meaning Is Processual</i>	74
<i>Meaning Is Personalized</i>	74
<i>Meaning Is Co-constructed</i>	74
<i>Meaning Is Multidimensional</i>	75
Intention and the Definition of Communication: A Controversy	77
Models to Simplify and Define Communication	79
Summary: Testing the Concepts	83
You, the Researcher	85

4

THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATION

"Is There an Ecology to Physical and Social Settings?"	89
Context	91
Physical and Psychological Context: Nonverbal Life and the Theory of Immediacy	92
<i>The Nonverbal Message System: How Is It Theoretically Important?</i>	93
<i>Immediacy</i>	95

<i>People and Environment</i>	96
<i>People and Space</i>	100
Social Context: Communicators and Technologies in Situations	101
<i>Social Levels of Communication</i>	102
<i>A Communication Systems Model of Social Context</i>	104
Summary: Testing the Concepts	107
You, the Researcher	109

5

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

"What's Inside My Head When We Communicate, and Why Do I Need to Know?"	113
---	------------

The Assumptions of Experience	114
<i>Surprise</i>	115
<i>Sensing Self from Who You Aren't</i>	116
Perception: Not Reception	117
<i>Perception and Activity</i>	117
<i>Selectivity: Wired-in, Fragmentary, Consistent</i>	119
Language In-Forms Personal Experience	123
<i>Generative Theory</i>	125
<i>Inner Speech Theory</i>	126
<i>Linguistic Relativity Theory</i>	129
<i>Symbolic Interactionism</i>	131
<i>Changing the Boundaries: A Feminist Linguistic Critique</i>	134
Cognitive Organization and Planning	135
<i>Difference(s): Possibilities for Cognitive Organization in the Study of Communication</i>	136
<i>Social Judgment Theory</i>	138
<i>Constructivism</i>	140
<i>Action Assembly Theory</i>	142
Summary: Testing the Concepts	144
You, the Researcher	146

6

RULES AND THE COOPERATION OF SELVES

"How Do I Know How to Act and What to Say?"	151
---	------------

The Source of Rules	152
Definition	153
<i>Rules in Action: Shimanoff</i>	155
<i>Rules in Action: Ganz</i>	157
<i>Rules Theory as an Alternative to Laws in Explaining Behavior</i>	158
Coordinated Management of Meaning	160

Uncovering Everyday Rules: Being an Ethnomethodologist	163
Summary: Testing the Concepts	164
You, the Researcher	166

7

COMMUNICATIVE INTERDEPENDENCE

<i>"Is Autonomy Overrated?"</i>	169
---------------------------------	------------

"Ensnared" in Narcissism?	171
What Do People Need as Communicators?	172
<i>American Pragmatism: Humans Need Social Contact</i>	173
<i>FIRO Theory: Inclusion, Control, Affection</i>	174
Relational/Interactional Theory: The Palo Alto Group	175
Axiom 1: <i>"The Impossibility of Not Communicating"</i>	176
Axiom 2: <i>"The Content and Relationship Levels of Communication"</i>	177
Axiom 3: <i>"The Punctuation of the Sequence of Events"</i>	178
Axiom 4: <i>"Digital and Analogic Communication"</i>	178
Axiom 5: <i>"Symmetrical and Complementary Interaction"</i>	179
Interpersonal Perception Theory: Laing	181
Dramaturgical Theory: Burke, Goffman, and Bormann	183
<i>The Theatrical Metaphor</i>	183
<i>Burke: The New Rhetoric of Identification</i>	184
<i>Goffman: Impression Management</i>	186
<i>Bormann: Symbolic Convergence</i>	189
Dialogic Theory: Buber, Rogers, and Gadamer	191
<i>Buber: Dialogic Meeting</i>	192
<i>Rogers: The Person-Centered Approach</i>	193
<i>Gadamer: Hermeneutics and Productive Communication</i>	196
Summary: Testing the Concepts	199
You, the Researcher	200

8

CHANGING MINDS

<i>"How Are People Persuaded through Rhetoric?"</i>	203
---	------------

Changing Minds and Minding Persuasion	206
<i>Mind</i>	206
<i>Persuasion</i>	207
Concepts from the Rhetorical Tradition of Persuasion	208
<i>Rhetoric</i>	208
<i>Occasions for Rhetoric</i>	210
<i>Inartistic and Artistic Approaches to Persuasion</i>	210
<i>Types of Artistic Proofs</i>	211

Rhetorical Theory and Everyday Problems: Two Medical Examples of Persuasion as a Helping Relationship	215
<i>The Health Context: Persuasion and a Hero's New Role</i>	216
<i>The Doctor-Patient Relationship as Mutual Persuasion</i>	217
<i>AIDS and Changing Minds</i>	219
Summary: Testing the Concepts	221
You, the Researcher	222

9

THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA WORLD

"Do We Get What We Deserve?" 225

Theories: Have Media Changed How We Make Psychological Sense?	229
<i>McLuhan's Message: Media Extend and Change Our Senses</i>	229
<i>Ong's Sensorium</i>	232
Theories: Have Media Controlled Our Cultural and Social Behaviors?	234
<i>Shot with a Magic Bullet?</i>	235
<i>The Two-Step (and Multi-Step) Flow of Influence</i>	236
<i>Uses and Gratifications Theorizing</i>	241
<i>Cultivation Theorizing</i>	244
<i>Cultural Studies, Critical Theory, and Critical Theorizing</i>	245
<i>Who's Controlling (and Who's Dependent on) Whom? A Recap with Dependency Theory</i>	247
Are Mass Communication and Interpersonal Communication Different Processes?	249
<i>Para-social Interaction</i>	250
<i>Play Theory</i>	250
<i>The Spiral of Silence Theory</i>	252
<i>The Theory of Mediated Place</i>	252
Summary: Testing the Concepts	254
You, the Researcher	255

10

THEORIES AND COMMUNICATION ETHICS

"When Is the Effective Choice the Ethical Choice?" 259

The "Whether Question"	260
Theoretical and Philosophical Foundations for Ethical Communication Decisions	263
<i>Deontological Approaches to Ethical Communication</i>	263
<i>Teleological Approaches to Ethical Communication</i>	264
<i>Egalitarian Approaches to Ethical Communication</i>	266
Beyond What Works: Specific Ethical Theories for Communication Studies	267
<i>Aristotle's Ethic of Virtues</i>	268

<i>A Taoist Ethic</i>	269
<i>A Dialogic Ethic</i>	271
<i>A Marketplace of Ideas Ethic</i>	278
<i>A Narrative Ethic</i>	282

Summary: Testing the Concepts	284
-------------------------------	-----

You, the Researcher	285
---------------------	-----

GLOSSARY	289
-----------------	------------

REFERENCES	295
-------------------	------------

INDEX	310
--------------	------------

C H A P T E R 1

COLLEGE STUDENTS, ETHICAL ASSUMPTIONS, AND CONSTRUCTED KNOWLEDGE

*“Do We Have to Memorize
All This Stuff?”*

“At the Edge of This Attention”: Some Direct
Talk about How Textbooks Are Written

The Doubting Game and the Believing Game

Stages and Types of Learning

The Perry Scheme

The Women’s Ways of Knowing Scheme

Knowledge in an Ethical Framework

Summary: Testing the Concepts

THE WAY TO TEACH

(It isn't so much having a question to ask, rather the ability to create one)

*and so
he let them have their games
until the tide was fully out
and when it was
he came upon the rocky beach
a may-pole of a man
among the shouting children
and bending down beside a magic pool
peering in
he waited
till a ring of faces gathered
at the edge of this attention
then slowly reaching through the mirror
gave a sea anemone
a punch
who did what sea anemones will do
quickly folding in
on what should have been a lunch*

WOW!

*he said—eyes popping
then abruptly rising
but keeping in mind the length of his legs
moved on up the beach
the children scrambling behind
with questions*

Ric Masten (1979, p. 32)

“AT THE EDGE OF THIS ATTENTION”: SOME DIRECT TALK ABOUT HOW TEXTBOOKS ARE WRITTEN

“At the edge of this attention.” Aside from Ric Masten’s interest in children, his attention to attention suggests what communication can accomplish in higher education. Anyone who wants to learn can profit by being in the presence of another curious learner, preferably one who can be a model for the process of attentive inquiry.

After decades of teaching and learning about communication, we’ve noticed that sometimes people don’t understand our excitement about the behind-the-scenes reasons that make the process interesting and involving. In classes or workshops, communication students typically enjoy meeting people and look forward to learning how they might speak and listen more effectively in their day-to-day lives with families, on the job, and elsewhere. Learning communication is a stimulating opportunity to learn about people; meeting people is an indispensable part of an education in communication.

However, consider another side to communication education. People who will become communication specialists of some sort—managers, trainers, teachers, personnel directors, public relations practitioners—should accept a further responsibility. Their coworkers, clients, and students will expect them to be effective resources and occasionally troubleshooters. Thus, in addition to being able to communicate effectively, these men and women should increase their awareness about communication as a broad field of study. Speaking and listening skills are not enough; communication specialists must be able to suggest alternatives, direct people to helpful readings, and explain interpersonal and public communication simply enough to be understood while avoiding simplistic and superficial platitudes.

The premise of this book is that communication study is a complex, intellectually exciting, and pragmatic *calling*. Let’s examine this statement claim by claim. First, studying communication is complex because everything that we call human society is ultimately founded on **communication**, which we will define for now (although we will refine and complicate the definition later) as “the development of shared meaning through **messages**.” What human activity, then, is unrelated? Almost everything from solitary contemplation through the most carefully coordinated advertising campaign can be seen as having an impact on communication. Specific individual tasks such as complimenting your mother or choosing a class to take have communication implications, as do general cultural patterns such as preferences for certain types of art or literature.

Second, communication study is intellectually exciting because it is in a sense a *paradox*, a condition of self-contradiction studied by logicians in