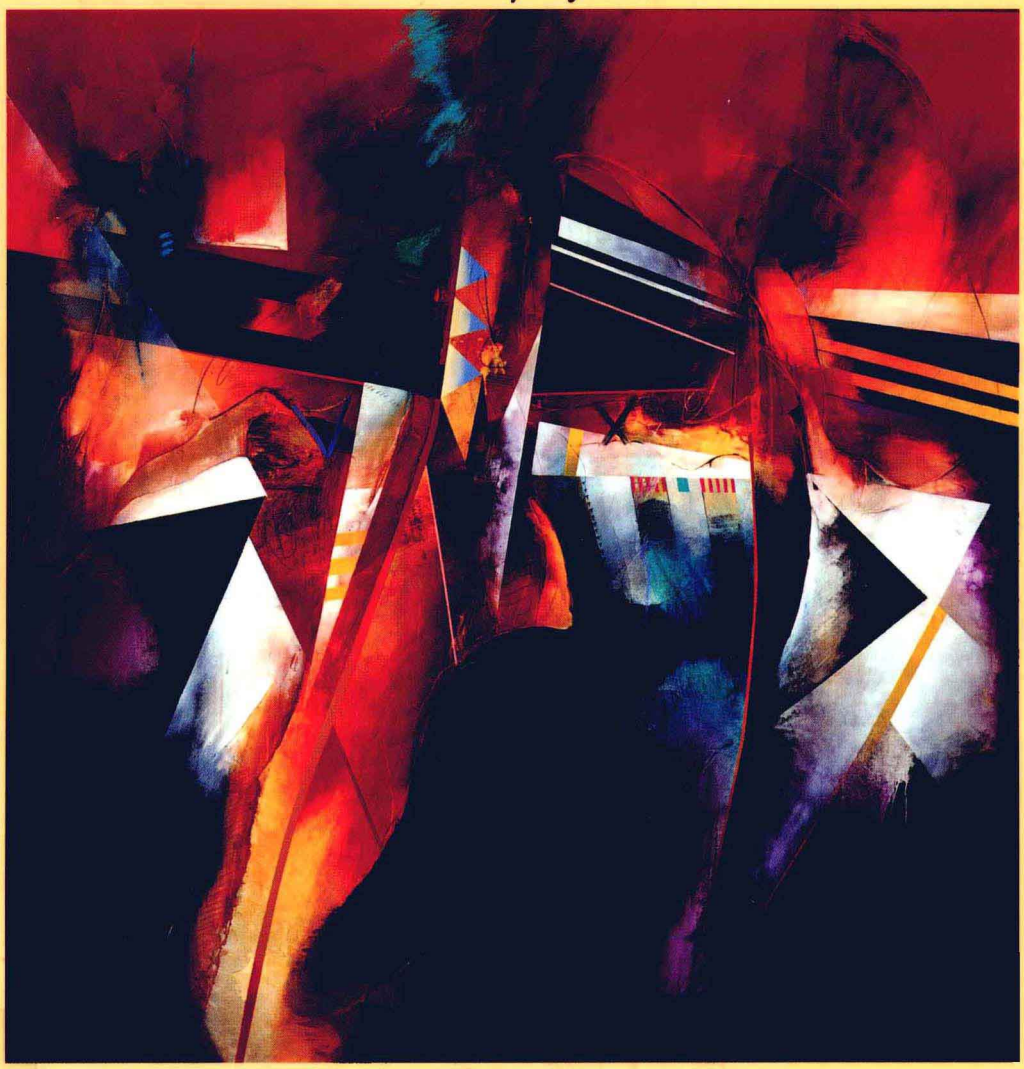
THIRD EDITION

Thinking Through COMMUNICATION

An Introduction to the Study of Human Communication



SARAH TRENHOLM

THIRD EDITION

Thinking through Communication

An Introduction to the Study of Human Communication

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Preface

To the Instructor

Goals of the Text

This text is designed to introduce your students to basic concepts in speech communication. In writing the text and the instructional materials that accompany it, I've tried to provide you with as much flexibility as possible. The text itself contains core material for the student to read and study. The instructional supplements contain additional materials that allow you to tailor the course to your own interests and to your students' particular needs.

Whether you take a theory or a skills approach to teaching, the material in the text should give your students a better understanding of communication as a field of study and should help them think about communication in systematic ways. It should provide a conceptual foundation for discussing communication and its effects.

Whereas the text itself provides a general overview, the material in the supplements allows you to fill in details in your own way. Included are standard teaching aids such as chapter outlines, overheads, and test questions. In addition, I have added suggestions for supplementary lectures, handouts, discussion questions, observation guides, exercises, and assignments. I hope that these materials will allow you to take the course in the direction you want.

Additions to This Edition

Those of you familiar with previous editions will find only a few changes in this edition. The major change is the additon of a chapter on organizational communication. In addition, there is no longer a separate chapter on emerging technologies. This does not mean that this edition lacks a discussion of computer-mediated communication. Rather, in response to suggestions by several reviewers, material on technology has been incorporated into existing chapters. Thus, near the end of Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 you will find sections on the impact of electronically mediated communication. As in previous editions, each context chapter ends with a discussion of ethical issues.

To the Student

This book asks you to think about a process that you can do without thinking. It asks you to take a look at behaviors that most of us overlook. In short, it asks you to rediscover communication.

When we get too close to things, we often take them for granted. People, places, and everyday processes become invisible so that we no longer see their complexity or appreciate their uniqueness. We simply accept them without giving them much thought. Although there are some advantages to taking things as they come, there are also disadvantages. If we were to see the world fresh every day, we would pay a price in time and mental effort. We are often much more efficient when we don't think too much. Yet, we give up something in exchange for efficiency: when we act without thinking, we lose control of our behavior.

This book was written to make you more aware of the invisible process called communication. It was written in the belief that the first step in mastering communication lies in becoming more conscious of it—in taking the time to think it through. It is important that we think communication through because we think through communication. How we see the world and how we act in it are determined by communication practices. When we communicate, we do more than reflect beliefs about the world: we create them.

This book is an introduction to the study of human communication. It is designed to give you the basic concepts you need in order to understand how communication works and to introduce you to some of the most important contexts in which communication occurs. It is also designed to make you more critical of your own communication behavior as both a message sender and a message receiver.

Plan of the Text

The formal study of communication stretches back thousands of years. Like students of today, students in ancient Greece signed up for courses in communication. The first chapter of this book examines the history of communication study. The second chapter provides basic definitions and models of communication. It offers a number of answers to the question "What is communication?" and demonstrates that the way we approach communication determines what we see in it.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 look at basic encoding and decoding processes. They discuss how we construct and interpret messages. Because understanding how people respond to messages is key to constructing messages effectively, we start by

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considering message reception. In Chapter 3, we look at how receivers process and understand messages. In Chapter 4, we turn our attention to the basic material out of which most messages are constructed: spoken language. Chapter 4 examines the structure and function of language and uncovers some of the pragmatic rules that affect the use of language. It also considers how people who ostensibly speak the same language (for example, men and women) may use it in such different ways that misunderstandings occur. Of course, meaning is not conveyed only through words. Time and space, movement, and appearance also convey meaning. In Chapter 5, we look at the hidden nonverbal messages that sometimes enhance, but often undermine, our spoken messages.

Beginning with Chapter 6, we look at the contexts in which communication occurs. Although communication is a unitary process, it is extremely sensitive to environmental constraints. The ways we create meaning and exchange messages are affected by the audience with whom we are communicating and the location in which the communication takes place. In each of the six chapters on context, we look at the unique properties of a given context, at common problems that communicators experience in that context, and at ways to improve communication effectiveness.

In Chapter 6, we look at interpersonal communication, the informal, face-to-face interaction that is the most common form of communication. In Chapter 7, we move on to group communication, considering the constraints that speaking in groups places on interaction. Chapter 8 focuses on communication in complex organizations, while Chapter 9 looks at face-to-face public address. Chapter 10 considers the impact of mediated messages on our everyday lives, and Chapter 11 addresses communication between cultures, a topic of increasing importance in today's global village.

Finally, Chapter 12 gives you a glimpse into the way communication scholars make discoveries about communication. Because communication is such an essential part of our lives, the study of communication does not stop when a book ends or a course concludes. Chapter 12 discusses ways we can continue to think through communication throughout our lives.

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Contents

Preface xiii

Part I Introduction to Communication

1 The Communication Tradition 1

In the Time of Aristotle: A Brief History of Communication Study 2

Studying Rhetoric in Ancient Greece 2

The Classical Period: Enchanting the Mind by Arguments 5

Medieval and Renaissance Communication: Truth Armed Against Falsehood 8

The Modern Period: A Rational Science of Rhetoric 9

Communication Today: Contemporary Departments of Rhetoric and Communication Theory 11

Communication: Humanity or Social Science? 12

What Do Rhetoricians and Communication Scientists Do? 13

Summary 14

2 Definitions, Models, and Perspectives 17

Defining Communication 18

Definitions: Discovery or Construction? 18

Deciding What Communication Is 19

How Broad Is Communication? 20 ■ *Is Communication Intentional?* 20 ■ *Is Communication Sender- or Receiver-Based?* 21 ■ *Is All Communication Symbolic?* 21

Multiple Definitions: Communication as a Family of Concepts 21

How Models Help Us Understand Communication 22
The Forms and Functions of Models 23
The Drawbacks of Models 24
It All Depends on Your Point of View: Three Perspectives 24
Communication as Message Transmission 25
Elements of a Psychological Model 25 ■ *Improving Faulty Communication* 27 ■ *Criticizing the Psychological Perspective* 27 ■ *Asking Questions from the Psychological Perspective* 28
Communication as World Building 28
Elements of a Social Constructionist Model 28 ■ *Improving Our Social Constructions* 30 ■ *Criticizing the Social Constructionist Perspective* 31 ■ *Asking Questions from the Social Constructionist Perspective* 31
Communication as Patterned Interaction 32
Elements of a Pragmatic Model 32 ■ *Improving Unhealthy Patterns* 34 ■ *Criticizing the Pragmatic Perspective* 35 ■ *Asking Questions from the Pragmatic Perspective* 35
Summary and Additional Perspectives 36
What to Look for When You Look at Communication 36
Summary 39

Part II Listening and Language

3 Decoding Messages: Perception, Information Processing, and Listening 43

What Is Perception? 44
Imposing Order and Meaning on the World 45
Using Cognitive Schemata 45
Person Prototypes 46 ■ *Personal Constructs* 47 ■ *Scripts* 48
Overcoming Mindlessness 49
Information Processing: Communicating for Clarity 50
Steps in Information Processing 50
Capturing Attention 51

Controlling Interpretation 53
Increasing Comprehension 53 ■ *Ensuring Acceptance* 54
Enhancing Retention and Retrieval 55

Listening: How Receivers Can Improve Decoding 56
What Is Listening? 57
Listening and Hearing 57 ■ *Ability and Performance* 57
Ways to Listen 57
Improving General Listening Performance 58
Improving Attention 59 ■ *Improving Interpretation* 60 ■ *Improving Retention and Retrieval* 62
Active Listening 63
Styles of Listening 63 ■ *Helpful Listening* 63

Summary 64

4 Encoding Messages: Spoken Language 69

What Is Language? 70
Language Is Symbolic 71
Language Is a Kind of Knowledge 72
Language Is Rule Governed and Productive 72
Language Affects the Way We See the World 73
Language Takes Many Forms 76

The Subsystems of Language 76
The Sounds of Language 76
The Words of Language 79
The Sentences of Language 79
The Social Context of Language 80
Speech Acts 80 ■ *Communication and Context* 81

Pragmatic Styles and Structures 82
Forms of Discourse: Classifying Kinds of Talk 83
Understanding Conversation 83 ■ *Describing Classroom Interaction* 84 ■ *Dimensions of Discourse* 85
Interactive Discourse: Coherence and Structure 85
Coordinating Conversational Moves 85 ■ *Conversational Closings* 86
Guidelines for Understanding Discourse 87

Language and Social Identity 88
Genderlects: When Men's and Women's Talk Differs 88
The Development of Gender Differences 89 ■ *Adapting to Gender Differences* 90
Language and Cultural Difference 92
Context Dependence 92 ■ *Verbal Directness* 93 ■ *Expressiveness* 94 ■ *Formality* 94
Language Choices and Pragmatic Effects 94
Ambiguity: When Not Making Sense Makes Sense 94
Immediacy: Up Close and Personal 96
Abstraction: Creating General Categories 97
Metaphors We Live By 98
Improving Language Choices 99
Summary 100

5 Encoding Messages: Nonverbal Communication 105

What Is Nonverbal Communication? 106
How Can We Know What Nonverbals Mean? 107
Characteristics of Nonverbal Communication 108
Nonverbal Communication May Be Unintentional 108 ■ *Nonverbal Communication Consists of Multiple Codes* 108 ■ *Nonverbal Communication Is Immediate, Continuous, and Natural* 109 ■ *Nonverbal Communication Is Both Universal and Cultural* 109
What Meanings Are Best Conveyed Nonverbally? 110
Making Initial Judgments 110 ■ *Relational Information* 110 ■ *Emotional Expression* 111 ■ *Nonverbal Codes and Verbal Messages* 111
The Nonverbal Codes 113
The Kinesic Code I: Body Movement and Gesture 113
Emblems 114 ■ *Illustrators* 115 ■ *Regulators* 115 ■ *Affect Displays* 116 ■ *Adaptors* 116
The Kinesic Code II: Facial Expression and Eye Behavior 117
Facial Displays 117 ■ *Eye Behavior* 118
Paralinguistics: Vocal Behavior 120
Chronemics and Proxemics: Time, Territory, and Space 121
Time Orientations 121 ■ *Territory and the Use of Space* 124 ■ *Spatial Arrangement* 125 ■ *Personal Space* 126 ■ *Touch* 128

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertongbook.com

Physical Appearance and Object Language 129
Body Type 130 ■ *Dress* 130 ■ *Object Language* 132
Increasing Nonverbal Skills 134
Summary 135

Part III Communication Contexts

6 Interpersonal Communication 141

What Is Interpersonal Communication? 142
Characteristics of Dyadic Communication 142
Are All Dyads Interpersonal? 143
Why Do We Build Dyads? 144
Managing Interpersonal Communication 146
Balancing Interpersonal Tensions 146
Avoiding Dysfunctional Patterns 149
Rigid Role Relations 149 ■ *Disconfirmations* 150 ■ *Paradoxes* 151 ■ *Spirals* 152
Relational Development: Stages in Intimate Dyads 153
Paths To and From Intimacy 153
The Journey Toward Intimacy 153 ■ *The Retreat From Intimacy* 156 ■ *Variations in Relational Development* 158 ■ *Duck's Relational Dissolution Model* 159
Interpersonal Attraction: Filtering Theory 160
Increasing Relational Skills 162
Toward More Effective Self-Disclosure 163
Rules for Disclosing 163 ■ *Responding to Disclosures* 164
Managing Interpersonal Conflict 166
Expressing Conflict 166 ■ *Giving Effective Feedback* 169
Understanding Mediated Relationships 170
The Case of Joan and Alex 170 ■ *Characteristics of Electronic Relationships* 171
Becoming a More Responsible Communicator 172
Summary 173

7 Group Communication 179

What Is a Group? 180

Characteristics of Groups 180

Group Size: How Big Is a Small Group? 181

Why Communicate in Groups? 183

When Are Groups More Effective Than Individuals? 184

Managing Group Communication 185

Balancing Group and Individual Needs 186

Group Socialization Processes 186 ■ *Adapting to Group Pressures* 188

Taking on Task and Maintenance Roles 189

Combating Groupthink 192

Group Development: Phases in Problem-Solving Groups 194

Phase Models: Mapping the Life of a Group 194

Tuckman's Five-Stage Model 195 ■ *Fisher's Four-Phase Model* 196 ■ *Poole's Alternative: A Multiple-Sequence Model* 198

Leadership: How Groups Choose Leaders 198

What It Takes to Be a Good Leader 199 ■ *How Not to Be Chosen Leader* 200

Strengthening Group Discussion Skills 201

Creating a Positive Climate 201

Enhancing Problem Solving 202

The Standard Agenda 203 ■ *Brainstorming: Increasing Creativity* 205 ■ *Nominal Group Technique* 206

Using Special Formats for Public Discussion 207

The Symposium 207 ■ *The Forum* 208 ■ *The Panel Discussion* 208 ■ *The Buzz Group* 209 ■ *The Role-Playing Group* 209

Communicating in Virtual Groups 210

Becoming a More Responsible Communicator 210

Summary 211

8 Organizational Communication 217

What Is an Organization? 218

Characteristics of Organizations 218

Interdependence 218 ■ *Hierarchical Structure* 219 ■ *Linkage to the Environment* 219 ■ *Dependence on Communication* 219

Why Communicate in Organizations? 220
Modes of Discourse in Organizations 221

Managing Organizational Communication 222
Using Formal and Informal Channels 223
Understanding Formal Organizational Structure 223 ■ *Taking Advantage of Informal Structures* 228 ■ *Loose and Tight Coupling* 230
Promoting Professionalism in Workplace Relationships 231
Workplace Relationship 231 ■ *The Office Romance* 232 ■ *Sexual Harassment* 234

Developing Organizational Cultures 235
Fitting In: Entering New Organizational Cultures 235
Organizational Culture: Metaphors, Stories, and Rites 236
Metaphors and Stories 236 ■ *Rites and Ceremonials* 238

Increasing Organizational Skills 238
Interviewing Skills 240
Preparing for the Interview 240 ■ *Answering and Asking Questions and Following Up* 241 ■ *Handling Inappropriate Questions* 243
Using Organizational Technology 243
Telecommuting 245 ■ *Finding the Right Medium for the Right Job* 247 ■ *Etiquette in the Wired Workplace* 247

Becoming a More Responsible Communicator 247

Summary 250

9 Public Communication 257

What Is Public Communication? 258
Characteristics of Public Communication 258
Communicating in the Public Sphere 260
Why Engage in Public Communication? 261

Audience Adaptation and Source Credibility 262
Audience Attitudes and Change 262
Beliefs 262 ■ *Attitudes* 263 ■ *Values* 264 ■ *The Importance of Knowing Your Audience* 265
Adapting Messages to Audiences 265
Audience Adaptation 265 ■ *Audience Analysis* 267

Source Characteristics and Audience Response 268
Credibility 269 ■ *Attractiveness* 269 ■ *Power* 271
Relationships between Source Characteristics 272

Constructing Valid Arguments 272
The Structure of Argument: The Toulmin Model 272
Parts of an Argument 272 ■ *Using the Toulmin Model* 274
Types of Arguments 275
Authoritative and Motivational Arguments 274 ■ *Substantive Arguments* 277
Guarding Against Unsound Warrants 279

Preparing and Presenting the Public Speech 280
Introductions and Conclusions 280
Functions of the Introduction 280 ■ *Functions of the Conclusion* 282
Organizing the Body of the Speech 282
Outlining Main Points and Subpoints 287
Increasing Public Speaking Skills 288
Some Guidelines for Speakers 288
Communicating in the Virtual Sphere 289
Electronic Democracy 289 ■ *Information and Disinformation on the Net* 290

Becoming a More Responsible Communicator 290

Summary 292

10 Communication and the Mass Media 297

What Is Mass Communication? 298
Defining Mass Communication 298
Characteristics of Media Messages 299
Institutional Sources 300 ■ *Invisible Receivers* 300 ■ *Interposed Channels* 301

How Audiences and Media Messages Interact 301
Functions of the Media 302
Media Effects: An Overview 303
What Media Messages Do to Receivers 305
Media Agendas 305 ■ *Hegemonic Messages* 305 ■ *Media Logics* 306
What Receivers Do with Media Messages 307
Selective Processing 308 ■ *Need Gratification* 309 ■ *Reading Media Texts* 309

Media Formats and Logics 310
Newspapers 311
Magazines 312
Radio 314
Television 316
Entertainment Programming 317 ■ *News Programming* 318 ■ *The Pervasiveness of TV Logic* 319
Emerging Communication Technologies 320
Computer-Mediated Communication 320
Life along the Superhighway 321
Becoming a More Responsible Communicator 322
Ethical Issues for Media Practitioners 322
Using Media More Responsibly 324
Ethics in Cyberspace 325
Summary 326

11 Intercultural Communication 331

What Is Culture? 333
Defining Culture 333
Characteristics of Cultures 333
Cultures Are Learned 333 ■ *Cultures Are Shared* 334 ■ *Cultures Are Multifaceted* 336 ■ *Cultures Are Dynamic* 337 ■ *Cultural Identities Are Overlapping* 337
Why Communicate Cross-Culturally? 338
Living in the Global Village 338 ■ *Coming to Terms with Diversity* 339 ■ *Intercultural Communication and Personal Growth* 339
Barriers to Intercultural Communication 340
How Culture Affects Communication 340
Culture and Perception 340 ■ *Culture and Role Identities* 342 ■ *Culture and Goals* 342 ■ *Culture and Images of the Self* 343 ■ *Culture and Language Style* 344
Attitudes That Diminish Understanding 346
Stereotypes and Prejudices 347 ■ *Assumed Similarity* 347 ■ *Anxiety and Withdrawal* 349 ■ *Ethnocentrism* 350

Adapting to New Cultures 350
Nature of the Host Culture 351
Personal Predispositions 352
Communication Bonds 353
Becoming a More Open Communicator 354
Summary 355

12 Methods of Discovery 359

How Is Communication Research Done? 360
Problems with Commonsense Ways of Knowing 361
Systematic Ways of Knowing 362
Common Research Tasks 363
Four Popular Research Methods 365
Rhetorical Criticism 366
Steps in Rhetorical Criticism 368 ■ *The Myth of the American Cowboy: An Example of Social Values Criticism* 369
Ethnographic Research 371
Steps in Ethnographic Research 371 ■ *Talking Like a Man in Teamsterville: An Ethnography of Communication* 372
Survey Research 374
Steps in Conducting a Survey 375 ■ *Making the Love Connection: An Example of Survey Research* 377
Experimental Research 379
Steps in Doing an Experiment 380 ■ *Thanks for Not Smoking: An Example of a Field Experiment* 381
Learning More about Communication 383
Subject Areas in Speech Communication 383
Other Sources of Discovery 385
Summary 385

Author Index 389

Subject Index 393

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