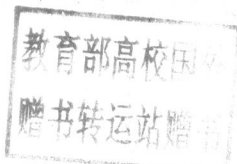
An abstract painting in a cubist style, featuring several figures in a room. The figures are rendered in bold, flat colors like blue, red, yellow, and white, with some areas of purple and orange. The background consists of geometric shapes and planes in shades of blue, red, and white, suggesting an interior space with windows or architectural elements. The overall composition is dynamic and expressive.

Exploring Human Communication

Sue DeWine
Melissa K. Gibson
Matthew J. Smith

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*To my family, colleagues, and former
students who continue to inspire me to
write about our relationships—SD*

*To my parents, Howard and Kathy, and my brother,
Jason, for their empowering love; to my friends and
colleagues for their unceasing support; and to my students
for reminding me every day why I teach—MKG*

*To Sue and Melissa, true mentors
and truer friends—MJS*

Preface

The authors of this text have taught the basic communication course for many years. We tried several different basic textbooks but felt they were all missing three crucial elements: (1) a view of communication from the *student's* perspective; (2) interesting case studies with stories from students facing communication problems; and (3) a strong *applied* focus with strategies that could actually be put to use while students read the book. *Exploring Human Communication* is our effort at providing what we thought was missing from other texts.

Along with emphasizing traditional competencies in areas such as interpersonal, small group, and organizational communication, we have also incorporated coverage of topics not usually found in basic texts, but ones that are increasingly central to human communication: understanding legal communication, communicating with new technologies, and using communication principles on the job.

We have designed this book to be an applications-oriented approach to the discipline, helping students internalize concepts by applying them to real-world situations and contexts both inside *and* outside the classroom. In order to make this material more accessible, we have included numerous activities, illustrations, and student-centered stories.

In special boxes throughout the text, we integrate the themes of communication across cultures and ethical dilemmas in communication. These *Spotlight on Diversity* and *Spotlight on Ethics* boxes encourage you to think critically about the concepts introduced in each chapter. In addition, our *Mission: Possible* activities suggest specific, attainable ways in which you can apply those concepts to your own life.

Each chapter also features a number of student-centered stories. By reading these examples and considering your own experiences, we hope that you will be able to relate the content of this text to your own life.

In striving to create a text that would meet the above goals, we benefited from the contributions of other communication educators. We would like to thank the following individuals who were kind enough to review the first draft and earlier proposal of this book. Their comments were extremely helpful. They are:

Melissa L. Beall (University of Northern Iowa)
Nancy Buerkel-Rothfuss (Central Michigan State University)
Thomas G. Endres (University of St. Thomas)
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Lawrence W. Hugenberg (Youngstown State University)
Terry M. Perkins (Eastern Illinois University)

Kristi Schaller (Georgia State University)
Deanna Sellnow (North Dakota State University)

As teachers and former students ourselves, we know that students often find college textbooks rather dry. We sincerely hope you will find this book readable and even enjoyable. Good luck to you as you take this journey with us to more effective communication and better interpersonal relationships.

Sue DeWine
Melissa K. Gibson
Matthew J. Smith

About the Authors

Sue DeWine has, for over 25 years, been a professor and a consultant to small manufacturing companies, government agencies, educational institutions, and Fortune 500 companies. In addition to teaching and writing, she has been the Director of the School of Interpersonal Communication at Ohio University for the past 11 years. She has published over 30 articles, 5 books, and presented over 100 professional papers in organizational communication, consulting, and relationships in the workplace. DeWine has traveled and taught extensively in Asia. She and her husband, Mike, have two children, Leigh Anne and James.

Melissa Gibson received her M.A. and Ph.D. from Ohio University and is currently an Assistant Professor at Western Michigan University. Her research interests focus on blue-collar workers and power in the workplace. She attributes her teaching style to her father's work ethic and her mother's wit. She is a very successful teacher, winning the Central States Communication Association Young Teacher's Award and Outstanding Teaching Award at WMU in her first two years as a faculty member.

Matthew Smith received his Ph.D. from Ohio University and is currently an Assistant Professor at Indiana University South Bend. His research focus is computer-mediated communication. He teaches in the areas of rhetoric, organizational communication, and mediated communication. He received the Claude E. Kanter Fellowship while at Ohio University, which recognizes outstanding research.

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Part One

Fundamentals of Human Communication

CHAPTER 1



Introducing the Importance of Communication

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As the television camera pulls back, the viewer sees an aerial shot of the crash site on the side of the mountain. It had taken rescue workers eight hours to reach what was left of American Airlines flight 965. Of the 160 passengers and crew, only five survived, including a six-year-old New Jersey girl, Michelle DuSan, and her father. Her mother and brother both died in the crash in the Andes Mountains.

In the hospital Michelle asks her father, "When we go home, I won't have to ride on another airplane, will I? Please don't tell me I must."

The scene switches to airline consultant John Nann who concludes: "What we had here was a classic example of miscommunication and an inability of two parties to communicate in aviation language. This was a lack of communication." The pilot thought he was cleared for one route, while the air controller thought the plane was traveling another. The auto pilot turned the plane directly into the side of a mountain.

Broadcast in December 1995 on the television show *20/20*, this newscast served as a dramatic reminder of the possibly serious consequences of everyday encounters. Pilots and air controllers communicate every day without tragic results. And yet, this time, two of them misunderstood each other. Everyday encounters can serve as the threads that hold our lives together or the ball of string that unravels to bring our lives into a series of serious consequences. Saying "hello" to an acquaintance you met in class, fighting with siblings or your own child, convincing your boss to provide more financial support for you, getting someone you like to like you back, talking with a professor about a grade, giving an oral report in class, or sharing an evening with a good friend—these are all everyday encounters. But they are not ordinary or automatic. They do not happen without thought or effort.

Everyday encounters have significant impact on our lives. The acquaintance you met today may become one of your best friends in the months to come. The person you dated last weekend could become your future spouse. A classmate may end up being a professional colleague. To navigate your way through these encounters successfully—all the while maintaining a positive image of yourself—takes highly developed communication skills. This book should help you identify and develop those skills.

As the authors of this text we will use our own everyday encounters as examples. We will also use stories provided by students in a class we jointly taught on human communication. Both our own and our students' stories are real. These are not hypothetical examples. These life events happened to us or to people we know. The students' stories have enriched our understanding of the communication problems facing college students today. Some of these college students were living away from home for the first time, and some were adults with jobs and families they had to manage in addition to attending classes as nontraditional students. We found their own stories to be poignant, sometimes sad, sometimes funny, but always real. We hope you will find them the same way.

This chapter serves as the beginning of what we hope will be an adventure of self-discovery. As you read this book, try to keep your own personal rela-



tionships in mind and think about the effect your own communication style might have on others. We have already begun to look at the importance of our patterns of communication; in the balance of this chapter we will talk about:

- The definitions of communication.
- Characteristics of the communication process.
- The myths of communication.
- An historical perspective on the field of human communication studies.

You will notice, as you read, that we combine expert opinion with the opinion of college students, like yourself.

My roommate and I drove to school separately, with our parents, but conveniently arrived at the same time. Once everything was in our room, we noticed that we had two of all the major appliances—and that our parents had already left. We had all these things, nowhere to put it all, and no way to get rid of it. For one week, we had to keep all this stuff lying around, and then we each had to go home to drop off the extra computer, answering machine, television, and stereo. We had to spend our first real weekend of college at home. It was awful. That, I think, is a good example of how communication plays an important role in every day life. If Val and I had communicated better about our plans about what to take, we would not have had to deal with all those inconveniences.

— Jenny, first-year college student

Jenny learned very early in her relationship with her roommate how important communication was to making her life less stressful. Another one of our students also explained the importance of communication to his life:

I try to have a lot of interaction with my daughter. Typically we talk in the evenings before she goes to bed. Recently I had a sore throat and couldn't really talk much, so I had to listen while she talked. She started talking about school and since I didn't interrupt with my usual battery of questions she kept right on talking in great detail. As I listened I learned she was having trouble with another child in her class. It took her a long time to get to that point in her story, but since I never interjected my own thoughts or questions she finally got to the point she wanted to talk about. Because she brought it up it gave me an opportunity to help her come up with some strategies for dealing with this difficult situation. I wonder if I ever would have heard about it had I not had a sore throat. It certainly reminded me of how important it is just to listen to your children.

— Phil, nontraditional student

As a nontraditional student, Phil has to adapt his communication to a variety of settings: as a student, a dad, a husband, and an employee, to name



just a few of his roles. His communication patterns change with each new setting and each new role he assumes. Thus, he makes hundreds of decisions every day about the appropriateness of his messages.

We know from many years of research that we spend about 75 percent of each day engaged in some form of communication, which means we daily make countless decisions about how to communicate effectively. Those decisions involve not only the message but the method we choose to deliver that message. More and more of our communication is mediated, meaning it is done through technology: E-mail, writing papers on computers, voice mail, interactive video games, etc. Regardless of the method, the challenge is to figure out how to ensure your message will be received as intended, and consciously to select the best method of sending it. Blaming misunderstandings on the listener, “Oh, you misunderstood,” is not good enough. Whether you intended it or not, the message still had a certain impact. Because of the many consequences of our communication efforts, we need to increase our understanding of how the communication process works. We begin by working our way toward a basic definition of communication.

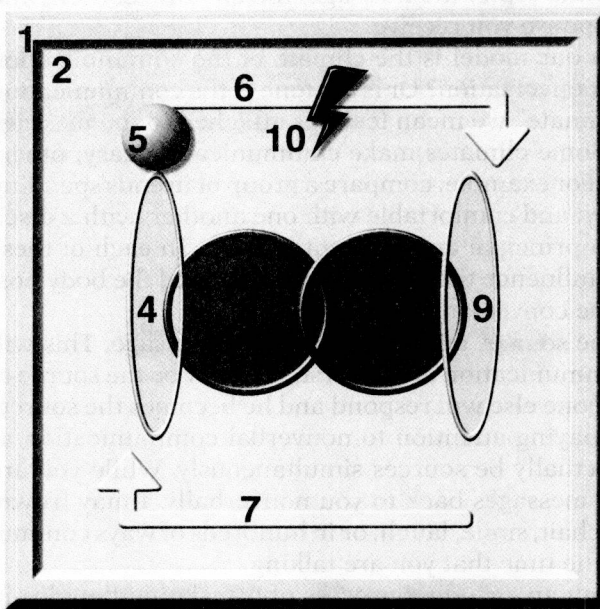
Definitions of Human Communication

Nearly 30 years ago one well-known communication scholar reviewed scholarly articles and textbooks and identified 95 different definitions of human communication (Dance, 1970). The number has probably more than doubled in the past two decades. The reason there are so many definitions of communication is the complex nature of this process. The art of expressing yourself involves many complicated physical as well as psychological skills. Therefore, we want to take some time to understand some of these processes.

Some of the common concepts included in Frank Dance’s review of definitions are the following: a verbal process by which we understand others and reduce uncertainty through the use of symbols. Other definitions suggest that communication must be intentional. Although all of these concepts are important considerations, for the purpose of this text we will define human communication as shared meaning between two or more individuals using a symbol system. First of all, human communication is sharing or reaching a common understanding of a message between two or more people. (We will be discussing *intrapersonal* communication, or communication with your inner self, in Chapter 5, and group and organizational communication in Chapters 7 and 8, but for the most part we are interested in communication between two or more individuals). Second, human communication is based on the use of some sort of symbol system. We use symbols that have common meanings only because we have agreed that certain words will stand for the objects or ideas they represent.

In Figure 1.1 the process of communication is represented as intersecting circles. As humans move through their routines, they are constantly “bumping up against” other persons. It is when our lives touch each other that there is a chance for shared meaning. Each of our “bubbles” is made up of experiences, training or education, and individual background. The occurrence of successful interaction with another individual depends to some extent on the degree to which these “bubbles” intersect. That is why successful communicators are always looking for ways to find common links to the person(s) with

Figure 1.1 Communication Model



1. Context
2. Climate
3. Source
4. Encoding
5. Message
6. Channel
7. Feedback Loop
8. Receiver
9. Decoding
10. Interference

whom they are talking. The more we can connect on common topics, the greater the chance you will understand me when I introduce an uncommon or unfamiliar topic.

The message travels through a channel, or pathway, that includes written memos, a face-to-face conversation, electronic mail, television, and bulletin board postings. The sender of the message encodes the message: He delivers a thought or idea through some recognized symbol system, which the listener then must decode or translate into some meaningful message. The sender's and the receiver's level of experience, education, and training affects the encoding and decoding process. Accomplishing this process through the mass media (Chapter 9) or through some form of mediated communication (Chapter 15) is a large part of the human communication process today. The basic process is, however, pretty much the same as shown in the model.

The first element we focus on is the context of the communication. Everything else is affected by the type of relationship in which the communication is occurring. The context might be one person talking to one other person—a private, personal conversation that no one else overhears. That is certainly a form of communication different from a public speech, which is intended for a large audience and made accessible to anyone who wants to listen. Even in a small group, you are attempting to communicate simultaneously within several relationships at the same time. For example, if the group is made up of five people (Person A, Person B, Person C, Person D, and Person E), you could be attempting to maintain multiple relationships. You are Person A and you have separate relationships with each of the other people (i.e., A & B, A & C). There are also triads: you & B & C; you & C & D. And so on. Of course there are also



pairs and triads that do not include you (B, C, & D). There are many conversations you are trying to maintain at one time. Therefore, the context for the communication will affect the topic, the message, the channel chosen, and how much feedback or response you receive.

The second element in our model is the **climate** of the communication context. Is this a “friendly” conversation? Or is the tone of the communication tense and stressful? By “climate” we mean feelings attached to the message and the communicators. Some climates make communication easy; others make it next to impossible. For example, compare a group of friends spending an evening together, relaxed and comfortable with one another, with a disciplinary meeting between a principal and a truant student. In each of these examples, the context will influence the tone of voice used and the body posture of those involved in the conversation.

The third element is the **source**, or the sender of the message. This will change throughout the communication event. First, you may be the source of the message and then someone else will respond and he becomes the source. In addition, since we are paying attention to nonverbal communication as well, several people will actually be sources simultaneously. While you are talking, I am also sending messages back to you nonverbally. I may frown, shake my head, shift in my chair, smile, laugh, or in hundreds of ways communicate a message at the same time that you are talking.

The source goes through an **encoding** process of translating the idea in your head into language the other person will understand. We are sure you have had the experience of knowing what you wanted to say but not being able to find the words to say it. You were experiencing an encoding problem.

We have already indicated that the message may be verbal or nonverbal, but it could also be mental. You may say “I’m glad to meet you,” but you are looking away and acting nervous. In this case your message is being sent both through the words you speak and your actions. You may also have had occasions when you felt you were communicating with someone without actually saying the message out loud—you just knew what the person was thinking. As a society we have not fully explored our use of mental translation of messages, but there are certainly individuals among us who would claim that this is a very normal and common way to communicate.

The channel you select will have a dramatic impact on the message you are sending. You might use a memo, a phone call, face-to-face conversation, a meeting, a public forum, E-mail, or mass media. Choosing the wrong channel can have disastrous results. For example, a young man intends to ask his girlfriend to marry him. If he’s not sure of her answer, proposing on the loud speaker at the halftime of a basketball game may prove quite embarrassing for both of them. Likewise, congratulating someone only via E-mail for a significant accomplishment may actually insult the individual. Nothing takes the place of a warm smile and a firm handshake. So, carefully select the channel that best matches the message your are sending.

The receiver goes through a process of **decoding** the message by translating it into his or her world experiences. The language of the message may have different meanings based on our life experiences. Our belief system, our values, our education, family background—in fact, everything that makes each of us a unique individual—shapes our encoding process and determines how we will interpret the message. Have you ever had the experience of paying a compliment to someone only to find out the person thought you were



being critical? In your experience, saying “Let’s get together sometime” may mean you are interested in spending time with the other person. But what if that person has just broken up with a boyfriend who said, “I’m sure we can be friends and even get together sometime”? Suddenly the phrase takes on the meaning of a brush-off. Being sensitive to others’ interpretations of our messages is one of the most important skills demonstrated by effective communicators.

The *feedback loop* occurs when you receive responses to your message. Your memo may ask an individual to respond in writing; your smile and nod of your head may indicate you’d like to hear what the other person thinks in response to your statement; or your phone call may include the following comment: “So, what do you think?” It may be difficult to communicate in a large crowd because the feedback loop may be delayed. For example, the authors have team-taught a class of 450 students. Feedback from students may come days or weeks after a lecture. Even though we work hard at actually “engaging” the class, with that many people we hear from only a small fraction of the students in any one class session. As mentioned earlier, feedback is often spontaneous and not specifically invited—or even welcome. Some communication scholars refer to a “cough index” as indication of a restless, unengaged audience.

Messages are always subject to interference. **Interference** may be **physical**, like loud distracting sounds, or **psychological**, for example when you are worried about something else and are not really listening to the speaker. The environment itself may interfere with the communication process. For example, you may be talking to a friend on the street corner and you are very cold (physical interference). You would like to stay and talk, but you are missing most of what is being said because all you can think about is how cold you are. We also know that the size, shape, and color of the room you are in will affect the content and the process of communicating. You may also be worried about what a listener thinks of you and how he or she will interpret your responses (psychological interference).

Finally, *timing* will have a dramatic impact on the communication process. If you are late meeting someone and a friend stops you to talk about a project, you are probably only picking up part of the message. Or, if you have just eaten a big meal, you may be sleepy and so the message may not come through clearly. Therefore, the timing of the conversation, given all the other things going on in your life, is critical. It would probably be more honest to say to someone that you’re not able to listen than to pretend to hear the message. Invite the person to talk with you at some other predetermined time.

In addition to these basic *elements* of the communication event there are unique *characteristics* of the process that make it difficult to analyze precisely. We will discuss these characteristics of communication next.

Characteristics of Human Communication

First of all, it is very difficult to discuss communication as if we could stop it in process, hold it still for a few moments, analyze it, and then let it start again. Three of the most obvious characteristics of communication are that the process is continuous, ongoing, and dynamic. This means the process never