

# Chapter 1: Foundations of Interpersonal Communication

## Chapter Overview

This chapter examines why we study interpersonal communication; the nature, elements, and principles of interpersonal communication; and interpersonal competence.

Interpersonal communication is defined as the verbal and nonverbal interaction between two interdependent people (sometimes more). The essential elements of interpersonal communication include the *source-receiver*, *messages*, *channel*, *noise*, and *context*.

Several essential principles provide the foundation for interpersonal communication:

1) Interpersonal communication is purposeful, 2) is a package of signals, 3) involves content and relationship messages, 4) is a process of adjustment, 5) involves power, 6) is ambiguous, 7) punctuated by observers, and 8) is inevitable, irreversible, and unrepeatable.

## Chapter Objectives

1. Explain the personal and professional benefits of the study of interpersonal communication.
2. Define *interpersonal communication*.
3. Diagram a model of communication containing *source-receiver*, *messages*, *channel*, *noise*, and *context*, and define each of these elements.
4. Explain the principles of interpersonal communication, and give examples of each.
5. Define *communication competence* and explain the essential interpersonal competencies.

## Student Objectives

### *Content Objectives:*

To describe the nature of interpersonal communication

To list and define the essential elements of interpersonal communication

To explain the principles of interpersonal communication

### *Skills Objectives:*

To recognize the impact of the elements when communicating

To apply and understand the principles of interpersonal communication

## Skills Evaluation

1. **Objective: *To recognize the process of interpersonal communication using the essential elements.*** Diagram a model of communication containing the essential elements of interpersonal communication, and include a definition of each element.
2. **Objective: *To recognize the impact of the elements when communicating.*** Write appropriate responses for “Giving Feedforward,” an Interpersonal Choice Point from the text.
3. **Objective: *To apply the principles of interpersonal communication.*** Write responses to “Distinguishing Content and Relationship Messages,” a Skill Building Exercise at the end of the chapter.
4. **Objective: *To recognize the impact of the essential elements when communicating.*** Students work in pairs to create a brief dialogue that illustrates one or more communication elements failing to fully function. Students present the updated, corrected dialogue to class and explain which elements were dysfunctional.

## Chapter Outline

- I. Why Study Interpersonal Communication
  - A. Personal Success
  - B. Professional Success
- II. The Nature of Interpersonal Communication
  - A. Interpersonal Communication Involves Interdependent Individuals
  - B. Interpersonal Communication Is Inherently Relational
  - C. Interpersonal Communication Exists on a Continuum
  - D. Interpersonal Communication Involves Verbal and Nonverbal Messages
  - E. Interpersonal Communication Exists in Varied Forms
  - F. Interpersonal Communication Is Transactional
- III. The Elements of Interpersonal Communication
  - A. Source-Receiver
  - B. Messages
    1. Metamessages
    2. Feedback messages
    3. Feedforward messages
  - C. Channel
  - D. Noise
    1. Physical noise
    2. Physiological noise
    3. Psychological noise
    4. Semantic noise
  - E. Context
    1. Physical context
    2. Social-psychological noise

3. Temporal context
4. Cultural context
- IV. Principles of Interpersonal Communication
  - A. Interpersonal Communication Is Purposeful
    1. To learn
    2. To relate
    3. To influence
    4. To help
    5. To play
  - B. Interpersonal Communication Is a Package of Signals
  - C. Interpersonal Communication Involves Content *and* Relationship Messages
  - D. Interpersonal Communication Is a Process of Adjustment
  - E. Interpersonal Communication Involves Power
    1. Legitimate power
    2. Referent power
    3. Reward power
    4. Coercive power
    5. Expert power
    6. Information or persuasion power
  - F. Interpersonal Communication Is Ambiguous
  - G. Interpersonal Communication Is Punctuated
  - H. Interpersonal Communication Is Inevitable, Irreversible, and Unrepeatable
- V. Interpersonal Competence
  - A. The Competent Interpersonal Communicator Thinks Critically and Mindfully
  - B. The Competent Interpersonal Communicator Makes Reasoned Choices
  - C. The Competent Interpersonal Communicator Is an Effective Code-Switcher
  - D. The Competent Interpersonal Communicator Is Skillful
  - E. The Competent Interpersonal Communicator Is Culturally Aware and Sensitive
  - F. The Competent Interpersonal Communicator Is Ethical

## Teaching Strategies

1. Use the questionnaire, *Meeting Interesting People*, at the end of this chapter as a mixer for students to meet one another.
2. Have students write two paragraphs: the first paragraph should outline their career goals. They may want to own their own businesses, land jobs in information technology and computers, or work in health careers. They should further describe whether they will be managing people, coordinating services, working with clients, or negotiating sales. The second paragraph should draw from the introductory section of Chapter 1, "Why Study Interpersonal Communication" to find research on similar jobs and their requirements for communication. Students should understand how communication competence will help them reach and fulfill their goals.

3. Use *Test Yourself: What Do You Believe About Interpersonal Communication?* in the text as a springboard for ideas about skills and attitudes that will help them in their future jobs.
4. Break students into small groups of 3-4. Using various well-known activities (for example, the Super Bowl, a wedding, a local charity event, or a school activity), have them identify who/what is demonstrating the five purposes of communication: to learn, to relate, to influence, to help, and to play.
5. Select a short clip from a sitcom or movie to demonstrate either effective or ineffective interpersonal communication. A suggestion is to select a series students are familiar with and that can be used throughout the semester. One idea is to have students identify a series they all enjoy/watch and use weekly clips from that series during the semester for discussion.
6. Assign students to interview a person in the career field in which they hope to work. Have the students ask the individuals about communication in their respective fields. Is it more online or face-to-face? Do they attend meetings during the week? How many? What role do social networks play in their career fields? What workplace problems occur related to communication?

## Vignette

These three cases illustrate some of the range of topics that will be covered in the text and course.

- Pat and Chris have been dating for the last three years and plan to move in together and enter into a permanent relationship. But one issue is creating serious conflict and has given Chris serious pause as to whether they should even continue their relationship: Pat is addicted to chat groups, often spending four or five hours a day chatting. Pat refuses to allow Chris to see any messages or to participate in the chat groups. This is private. Chris feels left out and wonders if Pat is really committed to the traditional relationship they originally envisioned. Pat minimizes this “problem” and says that love conquers all; once they commit themselves fully, chat-room communication will lessen.
- Reno has five children and works as a superintendent in a large condo complex in Boston. Although he’s deeply interested in the lives of his wife and children, he feels ignored. His children rarely confide in him; whenever there’s important news they go to their mother. Reno feels his only function is to earn money, and he has seriously considered leaving his family and starting another life in another city.
- For the last 14 years, Karla has worked in a toy factory in Michigan that was recently purchased by a Japanese investment firm. The production department that Karla has headed for the last four years has been reorganized and is now run by three people—two Japanese businessmen and Karla. Although production is up,

morale is down. Karla used to handle most problems informally by talking with the crew over lunch or at company parties. Now, however, the managers handle all problems at formal business meetings. Karla feels that the new owners have virtually eliminated her job and that she is being kept on only because the union contract protects her. She's thinking of asking for a transfer or seeking a position with another company.

*Comments:* These situations all revolve around problems in interpersonal communication. All of these people would profit from learning the principles and skills of interpersonal communication. Whether a person is in a relationship that is romantic, friendship, family, or professional, the principles outlined in this text are powerful tools for dealing with relational conflicts in any situation.

- Chris and Pat, for example, don't seem to know how to communicate with each other and derive the kind of benefits that Pat is obviously receiving from chat communication. The belief that love will conquer all prevents Pat from seeing the difficulties this obsession with the Internet is causing Chris and his feelings about their relationship. Pat's thinking seems unrealistic—both about the power of love and about how deep-seated attachment to chat rooms is going to change so easily. Instead of dealing with the problem, Pat wants to ignore it as if it will go away once the couple exchanges vows. Pat needs to learn to see the situation from Chris's perspective, and Chris needs to see it from Pat's perspective (issues discussed in Chapter 3). Both need to confront and deal effectively with the differences that now only cause conflict (a topic you will see covered in Chapter 11).
- Reno feels left out and he neither knows how to facilitate self-disclosures on the part of his children or his wife, nor does he know how to communicate his own feelings. So it's not surprising that his children have learned that he's not the parent to go to with feelings. Reno wants involvement, but he doesn't know how to get it. The suggestions for facilitating self-disclosure and for communicating empathy and support will also be discussed in Chapters 3 and 9, and would prove helpful to Reno.
- Karla is having trouble communicating in this new intercultural setting. Although morale is down throughout the plant, the new owners are unaware of it, largely because no one has voiced concern. Karla's self-esteem has been damaged; she feels she's lost her importance and doesn't know how to deal with the situation. Karla would profit from the discussion of self-esteem (a topic that will be covered in Chapter 3, as well as through discussions of culture in Chapter 2).

Using these situations for discussion, it's easy to convey the idea that interpersonal communication is an extremely practical art with numerous personal and professional benefits.

## Activities for Student-Based Learning

### ***Communication Competence Activity***

This activity is an effective and entertaining way of teaching communication effectiveness, the communication model, and communication competence.

Before class, find some basic pictures that students could easily draw, such as a stick figure, a car, a boat, a doll, or your school's logo. Make copies of each of the pictures.

During class, ask each student to find one partner. Then, randomly pick two students who are partners, and assign one student to be the "communicator" and the other student to be the "artist." Have the artist face the chalkboard and be prepared to draw what the communicator tells him or her.

Give the communicator a picture and tell this person that he or she is not allowed to show the artist what that picture is. In other words, the communicator cannot say *explicitly* what the picture is. For instance, if the picture is a Christmas tree, he or she cannot say "draw a Christmas tree." Instead, the communicator must find other ways of describing the picture.

To make it more challenging, teachers can write out words associated with the picture that the communicator is *not* allowed to say to the artist.

For bigger classes, it might be wise to only use a few students for this example or have five artists in front of the classroom with five communicators. Or, students can be paired up and complete the assignment in teams rather than in front of the class.

Afterwards, discuss how the communicators could have improved their communication effectiveness, and determine whether each was a competent communicator in the scenario. You might ask: "Was the communication two-way?"; "Did the artists get the exact message each and every time? Why or why not?"; "What are some examples of how they communicated incompetently?"

### ***Tapping Out Songs***

Sometimes students automatically assume they can communicate effectively. However, they will be surprised to learn that sometimes it is very difficult to communicate. Have students divide into pairs. One person will be a "tapper" and the other a "listener." Then on the board, have only the tappers look at a list of popular recognized songs, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "Happy Birthday," or "Jingle Bells." Then, ask the tappers to tap out their song to the listeners. The tappers should guess whether the listeners will be able to identify the song. Oftentimes, this activity is harder than it seems. Listeners will not always be able to guess the song. Hence, this can lead to a good discussion about competent communicators, context, message, and channel.

## ***48 Hours***

Have students reflect on the past 48 hours of their lives. Consider the various communication situations they have experienced and/or observed. Ask them to write a brief description of a communication scenario where it seems the participants used effective communication strategies. What happened? What did the participants do or not do? Then, ask the students to do the same but this time for a situation where the communication situation did not seem to be effective. What happened? Depending on the classroom environment, have students share in a small group, report to the whole group, or submit the descriptions to the instructor for selection/discussion.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Section: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***Meeting Interesting People***

**Directions:** First, fill in the last blank (61) something no one would ever guess about you. Then introduce yourself to classmates one-on-one and learn each person's name. Have the classmates find at least one blank they can legitimately sign. Briefly discuss that item, and in the margin, make any notes that will help you remember that person. In the time allotted by your instructor, meet approximately one person every two minutes.

1. I ate breakfast this morning. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I drove more than 40 miles to class today. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I have never ridden a horse. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I eat sushi. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I have taken a subway to work. \_\_\_\_\_
6. I have climbed a 14,000-foot-high mountain. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I have flown in a hot air balloon. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I have never changed a diaper. \_\_\_\_\_
9. I have worked in the fast food industry. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I have lived in a city with fewer than 20,000 people. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I am a vegetarian. \_\_\_\_\_
12. I walked from home to class today. \_\_\_\_\_
13. I can write my name upside down. \_\_\_\_\_
14. I enjoy snow skiing. \_\_\_\_\_
15. I enjoy skate boarding. \_\_\_\_\_
16. This is my first college class. \_\_\_\_\_
17. I have four children. \_\_\_\_\_
18. I am a twin. \_\_\_\_\_
19. I have already read Chapter 1 in the text. \_\_\_\_\_



20. I have lived in four different states in the U.S. \_\_\_\_\_
21. I have lived in a foreign country. \_\_\_\_\_
22. To get home, I need to take an airplane or ship. \_\_\_\_\_
23. I enjoy public speaking. \_\_\_\_\_
24. I can do magic tricks. \_\_\_\_\_
25. I am very, very shy. \_\_\_\_\_
26. Cooking gourmet meals is my hobby. \_\_\_\_\_
27. I have never changed a tire. \_\_\_\_\_
28. I like sailing a boat. \_\_\_\_\_
29. I have saved someone's life. \_\_\_\_\_
30. I write poetry. \_\_\_\_\_
31. I was on a varsity sports team in high school. \_\_\_\_\_
32. I have worked in corporate America. \_\_\_\_\_
33. Woodworking and remodeling are fun for me. \_\_\_\_\_
34. I play a stringed musical instrument. \_\_\_\_\_
35. I have voted in two presidential elections. \_\_\_\_\_
36. Digital photography is my hobby. \_\_\_\_\_
37. I paint landscapes and still lifes. \_\_\_\_\_
38. I have visited the Smithsonian. \_\_\_\_\_
39. I have bought and sold items on eBay. \_\_\_\_\_
40. Acting on stage is my passion. \_\_\_\_\_
41. I collect comic books. \_\_\_\_\_
42. I sing solos in public. \_\_\_\_\_
43. I have attended three operas. \_\_\_\_\_
44. I can name all seven dwarfs. \_\_\_\_\_

45. I read mysteries. \_\_\_\_\_
46. I can name ten Academy Award winners. \_\_\_\_\_
47. Last Monday I watched a soap opera. \_\_\_\_\_
48. I own a Monopoly game set. \_\_\_\_\_
49. I play chess. \_\_\_\_\_
50. I eat anchovies on my pizza. \_\_\_\_\_
51. I have traveled to an Asian country. \_\_\_\_\_
52. I speak three or more languages. \_\_\_\_\_
53. I already have a college degree. \_\_\_\_\_
54. I have taught in a children's camp. \_\_\_\_\_
55. I do weekly volunteer work in the community. \_\_\_\_\_
56. I am involved in student government. \_\_\_\_\_
57. I have shaken a U.S. president's hand. \_\_\_\_\_
58. Someone famous is in my family. \_\_\_\_\_
59. I have an unusual pet. \_\_\_\_\_
60. If you have computer woes, call me. \_\_\_\_\_
61. Something you would never guess about me is \_\_\_\_\_.