Chapter **1**

Communication Concepts

Learning **Objectives**

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to meet the following objectives:

1. Understand the importance of communication.
2. Explain the elements that make up the communication process.
3. Describe how the five communication principles influence interpersonal relationships.
4. Explain how barriers can interfere with effective communication.
5. Recognize the impact of technology on communication.

"Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him."

Virginia Satir

Communication Is Important

Congratulations! You have made an excellent choice by enrolling in a community college program that will profoundly affect your future. William D. Green, chairman and CEO of Accenture, made a similar choice back in 1971 (figure 1.1). Green comments in the following excerpt from *Newsweek* (2006):

> If you had told me back in 1971—the year I graduated high school—that I'd be going off to college soon, I would have assured you that you were sorely mistaken. I was the son of a plumber living in western Massachusetts, and we had all assumed that in the end I'd be a plumber too.
>
> I spent the year after high school working in construction. Then one day I went to visit some friends who were students at Dean College, a two-year residential college 45 minutes outside of Boston, and my mind-set began to change. As I walked around campus and listened to my friends talk about their experiences, I realized this was an opportunity to change my path that might not come again—an opportunity to take another shot at learning. So I enrolled at Dean, and I can honestly say it was a life-altering experience. (Green, 2006, p. 22)
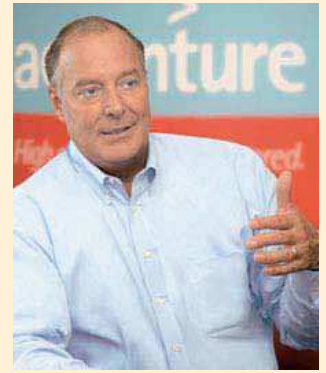

FIGURE 1.1 ■ William D. Green, chairman and CEO of Accenture

Today Green is running a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company that employs 180,000 workers with $20 billion in revenue. He comments in the article that "there is no doubt that my two years at Dean College not only prepared me for advancing my education and gearing up for a career, but also transformed me as a person. And that's not a bad start no matter where life takes you" (Green, 2006, p. 22).

Whenever Green has the opportunity, he talks to young people, urging them to consider other options than four-year schools. He states, "Junior and community colleges can help them [students] become better equipped to continue their education and to face real-world challenges. These colleges can smooth their transition from high school to work life, provide them with core decision-making skills and teach them how to think and learn" (Green, 2006, p. 22).

Whether you are preparing for a career in nursing, accounting, the culinary arts, or child care at your community college, you will have the opportunity to develop the technical skills needed to excel in your field. However, these technical skills alone are not sufficient. The cultivation of effective communication skills will largely determine the career success and personal satisfaction you experience.

In the spring of 2006, the Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management surveyed human resource professionals to determine what skills are necessary for two-year college graduates to meet the needs of tomorrow's workforce (figure 1.2). The report noted, "For two-year college graduates, the five most frequently reported applied skills considered 'very important' are *Professionalism/Work Ethic* (83.4 percent),
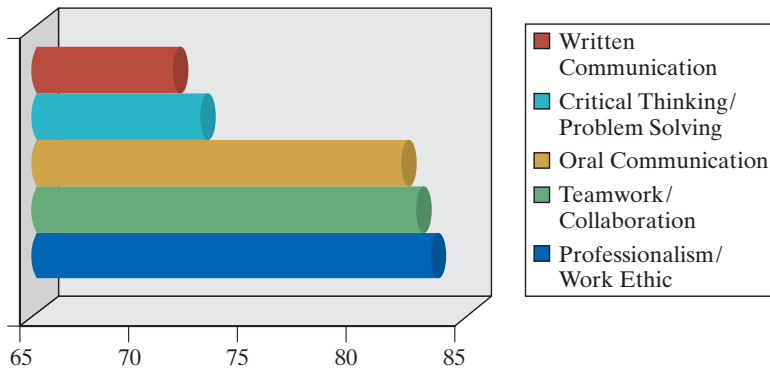
FIGURE 1.2 ■ Very Important Skills
Source: Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce, by J. Casner-Lotto and L. Barrington (2006, October).

Teamwork/Collaboration (82.7 percent), *Oral Communication* (82.0 percent), *Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving* (72.7 percent), and *Written Communication* (71.5 percent)" (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006, p. 20).

We can also explore specific careers, such as law enforcement, to discover the importance of effective communication skills.

According to the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), an international and nonprofit leadership training organization based in Washington, DC, "Most situations in protective services are resolved with voluntary compliance. Communication skills are one of the officer's most important weapons on the street. While many hours of instruction are provided on firearms, most officers will use their firearms infrequently throughout their careers. In contrast, effective communication skills are essential on a daily basis, yet very little emphasis is placed on this important skill in most academy training" (NCBI, n.d., p. 2).

Nursing is another field that places emphasis on the importance of effective communication. An article published by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science, and Training claims that communication skills are essential for a nurse's success. As a social activity, nursing requires excellent interpersonal interactions with patients. Equally important, poor communication skills can lead to tragic consequences for patients and result in costly litigation (Francis, Bowman, & Redgrave, 2001, p. 1).

The article asserts that the communication skills most necessary for nurses are as follows: listening, relationship building, instructing, motivating, exchanging routine information, and giving feedback (figure 1.3).

It is safe to assume that these skills required in nursing and law enforcement are also demanded in other occupational areas. The significance of these skills is discussed in an article titled "Behavior Matters: Communication Research on Human Connections." The article states that communication "is what needs improvement when relationships go poorly, when organizations struggle, or when nations are at an impasse. It is suspect when bad decisions are made, whether communication processes are faulty or not" (National Communication Association, p. 3). On the other hand, the ability to communicate enhances our development, strengthens our self-concept, and increases our ability to influence others. Effective communication makes employment possible, builds stronger relationships with co-workers from diverse backgrounds, and enhances our problem-solving skills.

FIGURE 1.3 ■ Necessary Communication Skills

Development of the skills required for effective communication is what this text is all about. As you read the material that follows, both in this chapter and in upcoming chapters, you will discover information and strategies that will enhance your communication with others. These skills will offer you opportunities for enjoying greater career satisfaction and rewarding personal relationships.

Communication Defined

What is communication? This is the first question to consider before you undertake the study of it. Obviously, communication means different things to different people. To a student in class, it is a means of learning new concepts and skills. To an employee, it is a way of making sure that the job gets done. To those who love us, it is a way of maintaining those relationships. To friends and co-workers, it is the tool that helps us to get along.

Communication is sometimes defined as the process of sending and receiving messages. When a customer explains a problem to you about the exhaust system of a car, a message has been sent, and you have, supposedly, received it. What if the language used, however, is not clear? For example, if the customer says, "Every time I'm driving, my car makes funny noises, and smoke comes from that thing in the back and from that little jobber over yonder." A message has been sent, and you have received it. Communication, as previously defined, has taken place. However, you still do not know what is wrong with the car or how the customer wants the problem fixed.

This situation suggests that more needs to happen for communication to be effective. For one thing, the customer needs to be more specific in describing the problem. You need to listen carefully and ask clarifying questions. The key to effective communication is *shared understanding* of the information. Consequently, a more accurate definition of communication is a shared understanding between the sender and the receiver of the message sent.

In addition, effective communication involves more than just understanding the information. It involves the shared understanding of the feelings, thoughts, wants, needs, and intentions of the communicators, which may not be openly expressed in words. Note that shared understanding and receiving the message are different. For example, you may "get the message" that your boss wants customer accounts filed a particular way, but you may not share her understanding of why or how important this procedure is in the office. When you share her understanding of the message, you sense her meaning and the feelings she has about the message.

Communication Process Model

One way to see how communication works is to examine a process model. A process model for communication is much like an assembly drawing for a mechanism. They both show the internal workings of a complex process in a simplified way. A communication process model breaks down communication into its separate parts and puts it onto a two-dimensional surface for

inspection. An interpersonal model of effective communication might look like figure 1.4. Elements of the communication process model are described as follows and are shown in figure 1.5.
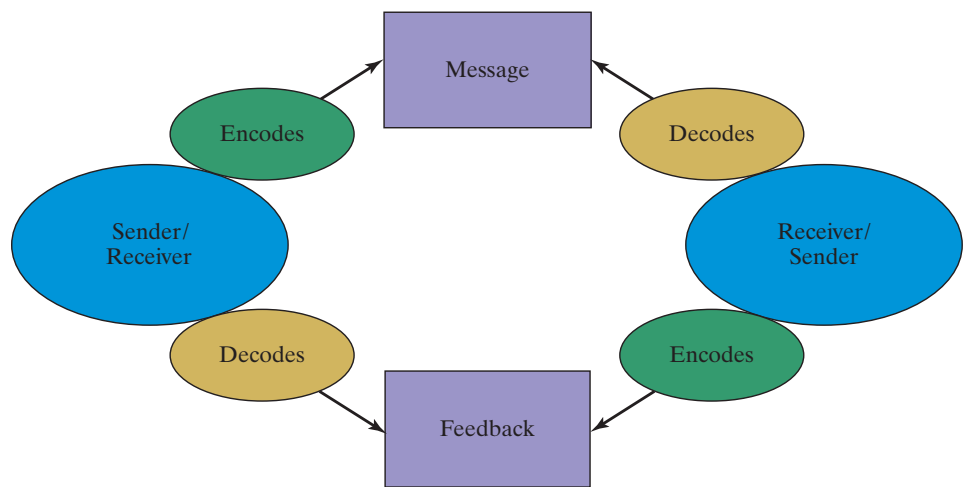
SENDER/RECEIVER

The first component of communication is the sender/receiver. It is important to keep in mind that you send and receive messages simultaneously. For example, while you are speaking to someone, you also are receiving nonverbal feedback, enabling you to act as a "transceiver," both sending and receiving messages.

ENCODING

More specifically, senders originate a communication message. An idea comes into mind, and an attempt is made to put this thought into symbols

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Communication Process Model

FIGURE 1.5 ■ Communication Process Elements

Communication Process Elements	Definitions
Sender/Receiver	You act as a "transceiver."
Encoding	The process of changing thoughts and feelings into symbols.
Decoding	The process of assigning meaning to symbols.
Message	The idea, thought, feeling, or opinion to be communicated.
Channel	The medium through which the message travels.
Feedback	The receiver's response to the sender's message.

(gestures or words) that the receiver will understand. This process of changing thought into symbols is called encoding.

DECODING

The receiver, who is the destination of the communication message, must assign meaning to the symbols in order to understand the message. This process of assigning meaning to symbols is called decoding. Like encoding, decoding happens so fast, you rarely are aware of its occurrence. As you read and listen, you simply assume you understand what the symbols mean. Each person, sender and receiver, is a product of experiences, feelings, gender, occupation, religion, values, mood, etc. As a result, encoding and decoding are unique for each person. For instance, you could tell a co-worker that your new secretarial job has great benefits and mean you are satisfied because you get a three-week paid vacation. Your co-worker may think that you mean you have family insurance coverage.

MESSAGE

The message is the idea, thought, feeling, or opinion to be communicated. Sometimes the message is clear and direct, such as, "Please help me log onto this computer." Other times the message is unclear, as when a job interviewer says, "We'll keep your application on file." Does this comment mean you will be called for the next vacancy, or is this remark a polite way of saying you are not qualified, and you will never hear from the employer again? In addition, at all times, you are sending several messages simultaneously. Along with the actual content of a message, you may nonverbally be sharing a feeling or defining how you see your relationship with the other person.

CHANNEL

The channel is the medium through which the message travels from sender to receiver. In face-to-face communication, messages are carried by sound and light waves. Though you use sound and light primarily, people can and do use any sensory channel. How a person smells communicates, as does how firmly a person shakes hands. In addition, communication technology is requiring you to communicate in new and different ways. Whether you are using email or voice mail, teleconferencing or audio-conferencing, you need to know how and when to use the proper technology.

FEEDBACK

Feedback is the receiver's response to the message and indicates how the message is seen, heard, and understood, and often how the receiver feels about

the message and/or the sender. In the case of oral communication, effective feedback comes after careful listening. Most students and employees spend more time listening than reading, writing, or speaking. Communication experts, in general, estimate that you spend close to 50 percent of your day listening. Part of a listener's responsibility is to provide feedback, making communication a two-person affair, and as important, senders must seek out and attend to the feedback that is offered by their receivers. In interpersonal relationships where understanding is the goal, you will want to stimulate and use as much feedback as possible. In short, feedback is the primary means of increasing personal awareness and establishing a shared understanding. You should give and get as much feedback as possible.

Communication Principles

If you think about the career for which you are preparing, you will probably agree that most careers operate on the basis of certain fundamental principles. Accountants, for instance, balance books, prepare tax documents, and compute payroll by following established accounting principles. Engineers design products and processes, troubleshoot systems, and test new materials using scientific principles. Nurses adhere to ethical principles by treating patients with dignity and respect, being honest and trustworthy in their professional relationships, and maintaining patient confidentiality.

Since communication skills are an integral part of your career, these skills are based upon a set of principles as well. Let's examine some of them.

COMMUNICATION OCCURS WITHIN A CONTEXT

Stop and think for a moment about when, where, why, and with whom you communicate. These factors form the context of your communication with others. Picture this scenario: It is eight o'clock in the morning, and you've had barely four hours of sleep due to a second-shift job (**when**). You're sitting in a hot, stuffy classroom (**where**) listening to an economics lecture on supply and demand (**why**) delivered by an instructor (**whom**) with a monotone delivery that makes it difficult for you to keep your eyes open. Your experience in this instance is likely to be much different than if it were lunchtime (**when**) in the campus cafeteria (**where**), and you were having a lively discussion about an upcoming Super Bowl (**why**) with a group of close friends (**whom**).

Based upon this comparison, you can see how the time of day, the location and purpose of the interaction, and the nature of the relationship all influence the kind of communication that occurs. Being tired, uncomfortable, and bored in the economics classroom, you may not feel inclined to be an active participant. Talking with your friends, on the other hand, in a laid-back setting about a favorite topic will probably stimulate an engaging conversation.

These two examples reveal that your communication with others is influenced by the following contexts:

Physical Context
Influences
Communication

Chronological Context   This context represents the time at which communication occurs. The previous examples referred to time of day, but other chronological frameworks can be just as significant. Consider the days of the week, the seasons of the year, and the sequence of events. These factors can also exert a powerful influence on your interaction with others.

Physical Context   This context refers to the location or setting of your communication. In addition, the location influences the way you send and receive messages. For example, your communication will be different if you are in a classroom, an office cubicle, a posh restaurant, or a neighborhood bar.

Functional Context   This context reflects the purpose of the communication. You communicate to fulfill **practical** needs such as securing a job, renting an apartment, and maintaining your health and safety. You also communicate to satisfy **social** needs. As a human being, you desire to establish connections with others. Building these ties contributes to your sense of belonging and well-being. Finally, you communicate to facilitate **decision making**. Generally, the more information you receive, the better decisions you make. These decisions can range from deciding how to dress for the weather to what job to take, where to live, and whom to marry.

Relational Context   This context is determined by the person or persons with whom you are communicating and the type of relationship you have with these individuals. Obviously, what you say and how you say it will change depending upon whether you are talking to your spouse, a total stranger, your boss, or a prospective date.

Cultural Context   Finally, this context reflects diversity factors that impact interpersonal relationships. They include race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disabilities, and so on. As an example, imagine that you are

Relational Context Influences Communication

Cultural Context Influences Communication

communicating with someone from a different culture. This individual may prefer to stand closer and establish more eye contact than you find comfortable. Maybe your co-worker is more relaxed about time, a perspective that you find annoying when there is work to be done. In addition, cultural context can include **corporate culture**—the way employees view their place of employment. In some companies, for instance, employees may feel comfortable approaching their supervisor who has an open door policy. These employees may also be encouraged to contribute new ideas, participate in decision making, and further their education. In contrast, other companies may discourage involvement, preferring that employees punch in, do their jobs, and punch out. Obviously corporate culture is a significant influence in determining productivity, morale, and personal satisfaction.

COMMUNICATION IS UNAVOIDABLE

Try to stop communicating. What would you do? Leave? Sleep? Go into a corner with your iPod? If nothing else, you would communicate a desire *not* to communicate. Although you may associate communication with the spoken word, nonverbal cues can be just as powerful when it comes to sending and receiving information.

John Francis, Ph.D., and author of the book *Planetwalker: 22 Years of Walking, 17 Years of Silence,* is a testimony to the vital nature of nonverbal communication in human interaction (figure 1.6). A social activist, particularly concerned about the environment, Francis gave up the use of motor vehicles in 1971 after seeing a massive oil spill in San Francisco Bay. Many looked upon his decision as crazy and told him that one person alone couldn't make a difference. He decided that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life arguing, so on his birthday, he gave up speaking for one day. That day, he

FIGURE 1.6 ■ John Francis, Ph.D., A Social Activist Who Used Silence as a Form of Communication

realized he hadn't been listening, so he decided to be quiet for another day. Those two days eventually turned into 17 years of silence, during which he founded a nonprofit organization (Planetwalk.org) and started walking across the country. Even more amazing is the fact that Francis earned a master's degree and Ph.D. in environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin without speaking (Francis, 2006).

Francis' primary means of communication included improvised sign language, notes, and his ever-present banjo. "For the first time, he found he was able to truly listen to other people and the larger world around him, transforming his approach to both personal communication and environmental activism" (Hertsgaard, 2005, p. 1).

Francis' experience also illustrates the **intrapersonal** dimension that makes communication unavoidable. Whether or not you are in the presence of others, you engage in a continual internal monologue that judges, comments, worries, dreams, and analyzes. Silencing that inner voice would be almost as impossible as trying to live without breathing. Francis comments, "As I entered into the silence, I discovered lots of things about myself—some painful; all illuminating. It became a journey of self-discovery" (Francis, 2006, p. 78).

COMMUNICATION OCCURS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS

Stop and think for a moment about the ways you talk to those with whom you live, work, and socialize. A bit of reflection will probably convince you that the nature and depth of your communication occurs on a variety of levels. The intimate sharing of feelings, hopes, and fears that you may do with family members and close friends is likely to be very different than the conversations you have with fellow employees or casual acquaintances.

It is important to remember that because no two of your relationships with others is exactly alike, the levels at which you communicate are going to be different as well. Author John Powell in his book, *Why am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* (1969), explained that people reveal themselves on different levels. Following are four levels that you may have experienced in your communication.

Small Talk   This level of conversation enables you to establish contact with others and build rapport. Greeting a fellow classmate in the hall, talking with an acquaintance about the weather, or introducing yourself to someone you don't know at a party can all be considered small talk. The content is not as important as the interpersonal contact this type of conversation provides. In some cases, your communication with others will never go beyond this level. In other instances, small talk serves as an icebreaker, leading to more substantive content as the relationship develops.

Information Talk   This level of conversation occurs after you have gotten to know someone and feel more comfortable sharing information. The type of information shared can include hobbies and interests, likes and dislikes, personal preferences, and so on. In a workplace setting, co-workers use information to get their jobs done. Whether an automotive service writer explains to a technician what repairs need to be performed on a vehicle or a team of

marketing assistants strategize an ad campaign, both are using information to accomplish their objective.

Opinion Talk   This level of communication is somewhat riskier than the other two levels already described. At this point, you are willing to let others know what you think about various subjects. Co-workers voicing political viewpoints over lunch, classmates telling each other the perspectives they have on the school grading policies, and friends critiquing the latest release of a new interactive video game are all engaging in opinion talk. Whenever you share your opinions, you open yourself to criticism from others. In addition, the disagreement that arises from differences of opinion can escalate into conflicts. Quite often the basis of those conflicts involves attempts to convince someone that your viewpoint is the "right" one. If you recognize that opinions simply represent personal perspectives, all of which are subject to error, you may be less inclined to engage in pointless argumentation.

An ancient parable from India called *The Blind Men and the Elephant* illustrates the limitations of personal perspectives or viewpoints (figure 1.7).

Feelings Talk   This level of communication is frequently the most challenging of all because when you share feelings with others, you expose parts of your innermost selves. Such exposure can make you feel vulnerable or subject to hurt, criticism, and ridicule. Think of the difficulty you may experience when you risk expressing any of the following: "I'm angry about that"; "I love

American poet John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887) based this poem, *The Blind Men and the Elephant,* on a fable that was told in India many years ago. It is a good warning about how our sensory perceptions can lead to misinterpretations.


(Continued)

It was six men of Indostan
　To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
　(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
　Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
　And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
　At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
　Is very like a wall!"
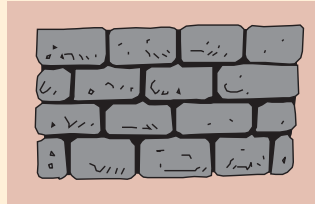
The Second, feeling of the tusk,
　Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
　To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
　Is very like a spear!"
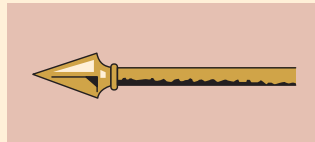
The Third approached the animal,
　And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
　Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
　Is very like a snake!"
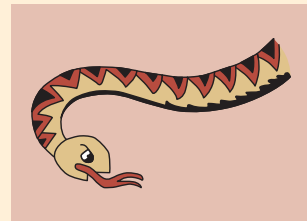
The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
　And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
　Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
　Is very like a tree!"
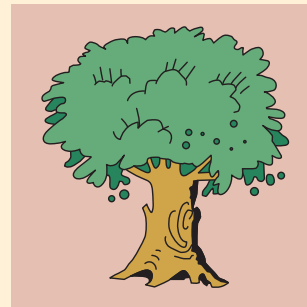
The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
　Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
　Deny the fact who can
This marvel of an Elephant
　Is very like a fan!"
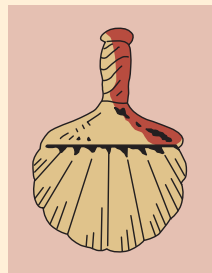
(Continued)

The Sixth no sooner had begun
  About the beast to grope,
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
  That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
  Is very like a rope!"
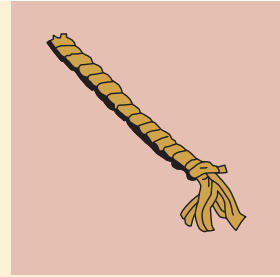
And so these men of Indostan
  Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
  Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
  And all were in the wrong!
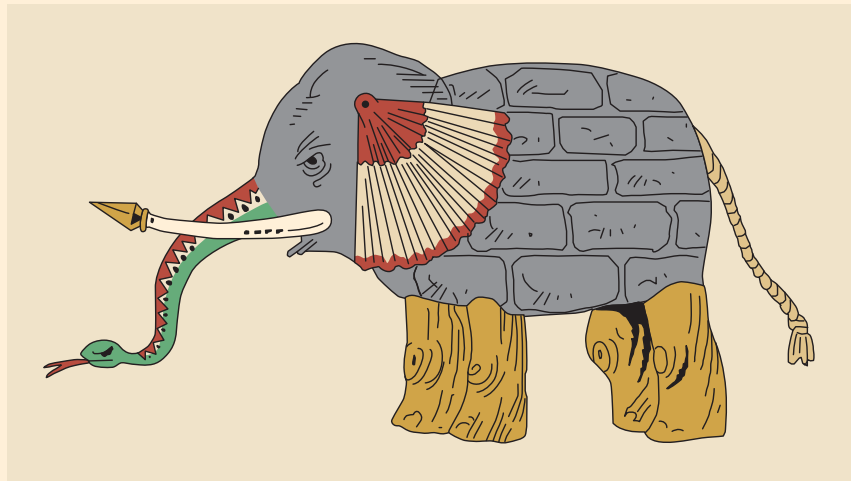
Moral:
So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

FIGURE 1.7 ■ *The Blind Men and the Elephant* Highlights How Our Sensory Perceptions Can Lead to Incorrect Conclusions
Source: Used with permission from www.wordinfo.info.

you"; "I'm feeling afraid." However, taking the risk to share your feelings has some significant benefits as well. Sharing feelings with family promotes intimacy. Researchers are also finding that sharing feelings has a positive effect on surviving serious illnesses. According to a Reuters Health article, one study indicates that sharing thoughts, feelings, and fears of breast cancer survivors can reduce the "effect that negative thoughts can have on quality of life" (Reuters Health, 2000–2005, p. 1). The article goes on to point out that "survivors who disclosed their hopes, fears and concerns with people who were close to them had a better mental and physical quality of life than those

who did not share their feelings, regardless of their cancer treatment" (Reuters Health, 2000–2005, p. 1).

"The results of this study suggest that social support may be an important buffer to long-term negative effects of cancer and its treatment on the lives of long-term survivors," Julie A. Lewis of Children's National Medical Center in Washington, DC, and colleagues write in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* (Reuters Health, 2000–2005, p. 1).

COMMUNICATION REQUIRES ETHICAL CHOICES

Of all of the freedoms you possess as Americans, perhaps one that you value most is the right to free speech. You only need to turn on the radio or television, at any time of the day or night, to discover an endless variety of talk shows ranging from the latest Hollywood gossip to projections about the state of the economy. However, from an ethical standpoint, freedom of speech does not mean that you have the right to say anything you please. Certainly, what you say can nurture others, resolve misunderstandings, and create intimacy. On the other hand, your words can strain relationships, destroy trust, or land you in jail. In other words, your communication choices carry with them a certain responsibility.

Consider, for example, the Enron Corporation scandal, representing one of the most notorious bankruptcy cases in U.S. history. Enron had been the nation's seventh largest publicly traded company with a market value exceeding $77 billion ("Enron Scandal Mushrooms," 2002, p. 1). However, this highly successful company essentially collapsed when it was discovered that its apparent financial status was the result of internal accounting fraud. Unfortunately, investors and employees lost life savings because of the unethical practices of the company.

In addition, you need only read the daily newspaper or listen to the nightly news to learn about political figures who lose credibility with their constituents all because of a thoughtless remark. Even formal apologies fail to repair the damage that has already been done.

On a smaller scale, you can find incidents of plagiarism on college campuses when students neglect to give credit to authoritative sources used for class assignments. Penalties for such careless use of speech can range from failing a course to being expelled from school.

In the workplace, unethical communication can occur when employees falsify records, make inaccurate claims about products or services, withhold information that jeopardizes safety, or engage in some form of harassment.

Unethical Choices in Communication Can Have Far-reaching Ramifications

COMMUNICATION HAS ITS LIMITATIONS

This final principle acknowledges that communication cannot solve all of your interpersonal problems. Although becoming an effective communicator can greatly enhance your relationships with family, friends, and co-workers, the complexity of human nature demands many other skills to make relationships

work. These skills require you to be committed, flexible, open to change, willing to adjust, forgiving, and the list could go on and on.

In addition, factors such as day-to-day stresses, psychological problems, substance abuse, or financial strains can threaten the stability of your relationships at home, work, or school. Many times these problems cannot be resolved only by "talking them out." They may call for major behavioral and attitudinal shifts, along with professional intervention.

A *Time Magazine* article by Amy Dickinson underscores the point that your most intimate connections with others, as in marriage, also require hard work and commitment. She refers to Natalie Low, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and instructor at Harvard.

> Low comments that the couples she sees "are trying to nurture their relationships along with raising perfect kids and maintaining careers, but in this compartmentalized era, they are without the benefit of support systems of extended families and communities." But "the facts of life are very grinding, so the reality of marriage is grinding," says Low, who has been married for 51 years. "Marriage is now, as it has been, hard work. Marriage is not a static event that can be measured, but a series of developments—those triumphs and setbacks—that make up life. There is no obvious course to follow, so couples just have to keep working. A person sees dramatic changes during a marriage," Low says, "so a couple has to be committed to a way of life." (1999, p. 112)

Apart from your personal life, relationships in the workplace can be just as demanding. Working with a difficult boss, co-worker, or customer can create stresses that require you to develop a host of coping skills that do not solely include communication. For example, you may work with individuals who have argumentative personalities, critical natures, or unpleasant dispositions. Although you can use your most effective communication skills, you may also need to accept these individuals just as they are. In addition, you may opt to avoid contact with those you find difficult, if that is possible, or change your own attitudes when you are with those persons.

On a larger scale, you need only look at the problems faced by nations who are attempting to live in harmony with one another in the global community. Peace summits, cease-fire talks, and international accords seem never ending, and yet unrest and hostility still exist among nations. Communication alone is not likely to resolve deeply ingrained differences that are the result of religion, values, or ideological views.

Communication Barriers

On the surface, the communication process may seem pretty simple and straightforward. You need a sender, a message, a channel, and a receiver. However, this process can be affected by a number of factors that make understanding difficult, if not seemingly impossible. These barriers can be grouped under two major headings: noise and gaps.
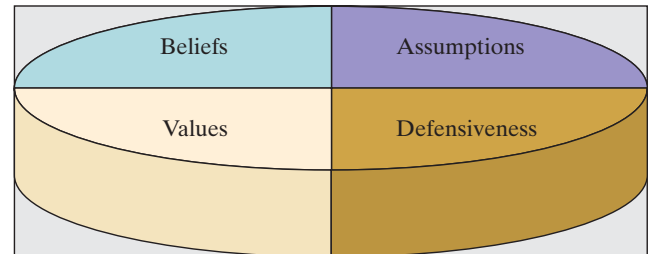
NOISE

Three types of noise contribute to communication breakdowns. These types include internal, external, and semantic noise.

Internal Noise   Although you may think of noise as an environmental distraction, it can also occur inside of both the sender and the receiver. Stop and think for a moment about your own personal barriers. The beliefs you hold, the values you cherish, and the assumptions you make influence how you send and receive messages (figure 1.8). Let's say, for example, that you believe in gender equality in the workplace and that your supervisor has a different point of view. Chances are you may have a hard time convincing this supervisor that both genders are equally capable of performing their tasks well. It may even be that one gender or the other is denied advancement opportunities because of the supervisor's position.

FIGURE 1.8 ■ Sources of Internal Noise

Consider a conversation over lunch in which a co-worker expresses his or her values about gay rights. If your values are unlike the co-worker's, you could have a hard time even hearing the co-worker out. Faulty assumptions can also be the basis for misunderstandings. An abrupt comment from your boss might be interpreted to mean he or she is upset with you. A significant other who breaks a date at the last minute might have you wondering if the relationship is in trouble. Although making these assumptions is perfectly normal, believing them to be true can result in unnecessary concern or anxiety.

In addition, when your beliefs and values are in conflict with those of others or when you make faulty assumptions, emotions can surface and present another form of internal noise. When listening to a powerful motivational speaker or a skillful persuader, for example, audience members may become overly enthusiastic. Such reactions can short-circuit reasoning and prevent the listeners from receiving the information objectively. On the other hand, hostile or defensive responses can occur when speakers present disagreeable or offensive topics. As a result, listeners may mentally block out incoming messages, plan a response to the attack, or distort what is being said. In addition, "trigger" words or "hot buttons" can evoke strong emotional responses in the listener, although reactions to these words vary from person to person. Emotional words for some may include political labels, profanities, ethnic slurs, or stereotypes. Being aware of terms, phrases, or topics that create an emotional response in both you and the people with whom you interact is a necessary first step in overcoming this barrier. Recognize that people have different views of the world and that these differences can enrich relationships. Adopting a curiosity about other viewpoints and why they exist will also be helpful.

Another type of internal noise can occur in the form of defensiveness. The tendency to misinterpret another's comments as a personal attack when that was not the intention is typical of defensiveness. For example, to make conversation, you might ask if a co-worker has heard about the missing equipment in the storage room; the co-worker might assume that you are making an accusation

of theft and react defensively. As another example, an employer might mention that certain employees are not working to their full capacity. Some of the employees may assume that the employer is talking about them. Defensiveness can be minimized by developing an accurate self-concept, by checking possible interpretations with the speaker, and by sharing thoughts and feelings honestly.

External Noise   External noise occurs outside of both sender and receiver. Maybe you work in a busy retail setting where background music and talkative customers compete for your attention while you're answering the phone. Sitting in a classroom lecture when construction work is taking place right outside the window could make it hard for you to hear. Trying to talk to your date at a wedding reception where a few hundred people are conversing at nearby tables might make it difficult to understand one another. Unlike internal noise, external noise may be easier to control by moving to a quieter location or closing a window. However, in other instances, you may be required to speak and listen as best you can in spite of the distractions. Technology also gives rise to various forms of external noise. When the battery is running low on your cell phone, for instance, you may experience difficulty completing a conversation with a friend; network problems might bring a halt to a video conference; a mechanical error in your car's CD player could make it impossible for you to listen to the review lecture you downloaded for one of your classes. Examples such as these often require professional assistance and patience on your part while you wait for the problems to be resolved.

Semantic Noise   Semantic noise, the third type of noise, occurs when the receiver of a message doesn't understand a word or gesture used by the sender or has a different meaning for the word or gesture. This type of barrier can be particularly apparent when you converse with people from diverse cultures. When an East Indian co-worker, for example, talks about "garden eggs" and "blowers," would you have any clue that this worker was referring to eggplants and windbreaker jackets? Also be careful with the gestures you choose when communicating in a cross-cultural setting. To you, the V sign may signal "victory," but someone from a different culture may see it as a symbol of profanity.

Semantic noise is also evident when technicians use jargon with laypersons. Information systems personnel may use acronyms like OLAP (online analytical processing) or NTFS (new technology file system) that leave unfamiliar listeners totally clueless.

In addition, when a supervisor tells you to complete the semi-annual inventory report ASAP, does the supervisor mean drop whatever you're doing or make this report next in line?

Describing the kinds of noise that interrupt communication is one thing; figuring out what to do about these noises is more difficult. One strategy for reducing internal noise is to stay focused on the message by increasing your concentration. In addition, being aware of the topics and words that arouse strong emotions is another important step. With external noise, you need to eliminate distractions by tuning them out, asking others to speak up, or

changing locations. Finally, to reduce semantic noise, you must be aware that people often have different meanings for the same words. Ask questions and paraphrase to clarify meanings and confirm understanding.

GAPS

Gaps represent another barrier to effective communication because people are different. These gaps can result from a variety of differences including gender, age, ethnicity, race, status, and sexual orientation. Consider, for example, the gender gap.

Author Deborah Tannen, in her book *Talking from Nine to Five*, explores the communication gaps that can result when men and women in the workplace communicate with one another. Although each person has his or her unique style of communicating, Tannen observes that a number of these styles do, in fact, seem to be gender based. For instance, in general, women give orders indirectly, offer praise and compliments more often, and establish more eye contact when conversing. Men, in general, give orders directly, offer praise and compliments less often, and use less eye contact when conversing. Certainly these traits are not true for all men and women. However, recognizing the existence of common patterns can help us to better understand those of the opposite gender (Tannen, 1994).

Generation gaps provide another illustration of potential communication barriers. In recent years, categories have emerged in an attempt to classify groups of individuals on the basis of when they were born.

The Generation Mirage (Hudson, 2005) groups these individuals as shown in figure 1.9.

Information abounds about the characteristics of individuals who fall within these groupings. For instance, the Silent Generation is depicted as hard working, economically conservative, and possessing strong moral values. Further on the spectrum, Generation Y is described as materialistic, self-centered, and technologically savvy. While research seems to indicate that these patterns reflect generational stereotypes, it is reasonable to conclude that those born during the Great Depression of the 1920s and '30s, for example, are likely to have a different worldview than those born in the 1980s and '90s, a period of greater economic prosperity.

Generation Category	Year of Birth
Silent Generation	1929–1945
Baby Boomers	1946–1964
Generation X	1965–1977
Generation Y	1978–1994
Generation Z	1995–2005

FIGURE 1.9 ■ The Generations by Category

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

When Play Station 3, Sony's seventh-generation–era video game console, hit the market, consumers lined up outside retail stores nationwide days in advance of the sale. A Milwaukee-area Best Buy provided turf for eager gamers to set up tents and lawn chairs, making themselves as cozy as possible as they braved the brisk November temperatures. News articles even told of prospective buyers trying to sell their place in line for $500. Such incidents indicate that computer technology is here to stay.

The popularity of computer technology is by no means limited to gaming alone. In fact, education is capitalizing on this popularity by making instruction more appealing to computer-savvy students.

An article by Sandy Cullen in the *Madison State Journal* (2006) discussed how University of Wisconsin-Madison students are using iPods. To help students absorb the material presented in lectures, "some instructors have begun making their lectures and supplemental material available as podcasts—audio and video files that students can access online, download to their personal computers and put on their iPods"(p. 1).

The result of this technology is that students can replay important information at their convenience. Working out at the gym, taking a long bike ride, or making the commute to school provide opportunities for reviewing course content before a major exam. UW-Madison student Kelly Egan comments that her life has been made easier now that she can listen to her lectures again and hone in on the information her professor has emphasized (Cullen, p. 1).

Some additional facts of interest come from a 2006 survey conducted by UW-Madison's Division of Information Technology:

Nearly 70 percent of students have used an online course-management system.
Laptop computer ownership surpassed desktop ownership for the first time:
Almost two-thirds of students own a laptop, compared to 46 percent of students who own a desktop computer.
More than half of laptop owners use wireless Internet in their homes.
Seventy-nine percent of students own a cell phone.
More than half of students own a portable music or video player.
Students use the Internet an average of 19 hours per week. (Cullen, p. 3)

Given these trends, we might well ask how technology will impact communication. Certainly, students and workers alike need to become computer literate. Gone are the days when computer skills were relegated to information systems personnel. Nowadays, students are expected to word process assignments, email instructors, and access course materials over the Internet. Workers need to email customers and clients, enter information into databases, and take part in videoconferencing.

Apart from technical "know-how," we all need to acknowledge how technology demands adjustments in our communication styles. For example, an article on videoconferencing entitled "Seven Steps to a Vital Videoconference" (2004) offered the following suggestions for participants (figure 1.10):

Even though technology offers seemingly endless potential for communicating with others, some claim that this potential does not come

Prepare. Preparation requires participants to familiarize themselves with the technology before showing up to speak.

Pause and Listen. Time delays may occur, so participants need to wait for a response before making their next comments.

Use Small Gestures. Because movements are amplified during videoconferencing, expansive gestures can result in "distorted, fuzzy images."

Appoint a Moderator. Moderators can facilitate the meeting as well as operate the technology, thereby freeing participants to focus on their message.

Dress for TV. Distracting jewelry, shiny outfits, and bold prints should be avoided.

Create a Connection. Start off with hellos. Waves are also standard forms of greeting in videoconferencing.

Minimize Distractions. Keep noise down, turn off beepers and cell phones, and consider posting a "Do Not Enter" sign on the door.

FIGURE 1.10 ■ Seven Steps to a Vital Videoconference
Source: DiResta, D. (2004, pp. 1–2).

without a price. Syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman raises such concerns in her editorial "Technology Has Weakened Our Connections."

She indicates that the swiftness and efficiency of communication technology also contributes to a more hectic, stressful lifestyle. Along with the desire for innovative ways to stay in touch with one another, we actually have become less connected to those around us, including colleagues, friends, and family (Goodman, 2005, B9). In other words, email and text-messages are "short and sweet," but what about the comfort and support we can give each other when we just sit and talk about what matters most to us over a cup of coffee? Internet chat rooms may offer exciting opportunities to meet new acquaintances, but what about the time many spend in front of a computer screen instead of looking into the eyes of a spouse, child, or close friend?

Maybe what we can take away from Goodman's editorial is the need to find balance in our communication with others. Although technology offers us speed and convenience, face-to-face contact nurtures the connections that transform encounters into relationships.

Source: www.CartoonStock.com.

Review Questions

1. Briefly explain three specific situations where communication skills will be important in your future occupation.

2. Your text states that the goal of effective communication is to achieve "shared understanding." Explain what shared understanding means. Provide three suggestions that you think would make this goal more likely to occur between senders and receivers.

3. The section "Communication Process Model" mentions that when communicating, you function as a "transceiver." Describe two situations where you were a transceiver, both sending and receiving messages simultaneously.

4. Communication occurs within a context. Describe the physical, functional, relational, and cultural context of an interaction you recently had with someone else.

5. Give some recent examples of messages you have sent to others at each of the following levels:
   a. Small talk
   b. Information talk
   c. Opinions talk
   d. Feelings talk

6. Find a short article from a magazine, newspaper, or Internet site that illustrates the relationship between communication and ethics. Provide a brief summary of the article.

7. Describe one of the barriers discussed in chapter 1 with which you have some difficulty. What makes this barrier especially troublesome for you? List two steps you think you could take to minimize this barrier.

8. Brainstorm a list of at least three advantages and three disadvantages of communication technology.

Key Terms and Concepts

Channel   7

Chronological Context   9

Cultural Context   10

Decoding   7

Effective Communication   4

Encoding   6

External Noise   18

Feedback   7

Feelings Talk   12

Functional Context   9

Gaps   19

Information Talk   11

Internal Noise   17

Message   7

Opinion Talk   12

Physical Context   9

Receiver   6

Relational Context   9

Semantic Noise   18

Sender   6

Small Talk   11

Web Activities

- For an interesting view of future trends in communication and technology check out "Did You Know; Shift Happens–Globalization; Information Age" on You Tube at http://youtube.com/watch?v=ljbI-363A2Q.

- A mini tutorial of the communication process and other aspects of communication is provided by Happy Fun Communication Land at http://www.rdillman.com/HFCL/TUTOR/ComProcess/ComProc1.html.

- An interactive PowerPoint presentation presents "Noise in the Communication Process" at http://www.wisc-online.com/objects/index_tj.asp?objID=OIC2501.

Assignments

ASSIGNMENT 1.1: COMMUNICATION PROCESS MODEL

Directions: Think of a misunderstanding you experienced when communicating with someone else at work, home, or school. Then fill in the blanks of the chart below.

Who was the sender?	
Who was the receiver?	
What was the message?	
What channel was used to send the message?	
What was the misunderstanding that occurred?	
How could the misunderstanding have been avoided?	

Bring your completed chart to class for sharing in small groups. After each group member has shared his or her example with other group members, answer the following questions:

1. What did you learn about the communication process from this activity?
2. What seemed to be the main causes of the misunderstandings?
3. What tips can you suggest for preventing misunderstandings in communication?

Each group will report its responses to the rest of the class.

ASSIGNMENT 1.2: FEEDBACK EXERCISE

This exercise will help you discover the importance of feedback as it relates to creating a shared understanding. Read the following instructions before you begin.

1. To complete this assignment, work with another student.
2. Each of you will have five 3x5 cards on a table or desk in front of you.
3. Sit so that the two of you are back to back, facing away from one another.
4. The student who is the sender will place one set of 3x5 cards in an arrangement.
5. The sender will then give directions to the receiver explaining how to arrange the other set of cards so that the receiver's arrangement matches the sender's.
6. The receiver may not provide any verbal or nonverbal feedback to the sender.
7. In the table below, note the following information under Arrangement1:
   a. Accuracy: How many of the receiver's cards were in the same positions as the sender's cards?
   b. Confidence: How sure were both of you that your cards matched the sender's cards?
   c. Time: How much time was needed to arrange the cards?

	Arrangement 1 Without Feedback	Arrangement 2 With Feedback
Accuracy		
Confidence		
Time		

8. After this exchange, have the sender rearrange the cards and give directions for the revised arrangement.
9. This time have the receiver provide as much feedback as needed to create a shared understanding of the sender's directions.
10. In the previous table, under Arrangement 2, note information as you did with item 7.

Answer the following questions after completing this feedback assignment.

1. Which arrangement took longer explaining? Why?
2. Which arrangement was more frustrating to listen to?
3. Which arrangement had the higher degree of accuracy?
4. Which arrangement had the higher level of confidence?
5. What conclusions can you draw from this assignment about the role of feedback in communication?

ASSIGNMENT 1.3: COMMUNICATION TIPS PRESENTATION

Find a two- to three-page article that provides helpful suggestions for overcoming barriers or improving workplace communication. You can find articles online or in the periodical section of your school or local library.

Make a photocopy of the article and prepare a typed summary of the key information contained in the article.

You will turn in the photocopy and typed summary to your instructor and present a two- to three-minute presentation to your class, sharing with them what you learned.

ASSIGNMENT 1.4: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TALK

The goal is to increase your confidence in speaking before groups. You are asked to share a personal experience from your life and explain the lesson you learned from that experience.

The guidelines for this speech experience are as follows:

1. Choose a personal experience that was meaningful and true. The talk may be serious or humorous. The experience you share should also be one you feel will be of interest to the class.
2. Be sure to share all the necessary details of the experience by including answers to the questions of who, what, where, when, and why. Create a storytelling atmosphere by using specific and vivid language.
3. Finish your talk with a short and clear statement of what you learned from the experience.
4. The amount of time suggested for this presentation is between two and three minutes.
5. Practice the speech several times before the actual classroom presentation. Practice in front of a friend and ask for improvement suggestions.
6. Include *who, where, when, what,* and *why* in your talk. You are encouraged, however, to speak extemporaneously—carefully prepared but delivered without notes.

ASSIGNMENT 1.5: COMMUNICATION SELF-ASSESSMENT

This survey is intended to give you an opportunity to see your strengths and weaknesses as they relate to your communication abilities. This survey is not going to be used by any person other than yourself, so you should be honest in answering the questions. When completed, this survey will give you some idea of which areas you may want to pay particular attention to as you proceed through the course.

Scoring should be based on the following scale:

3 points = a definite strength

2 points = an area needing improvement

1 point = a definite weakness

_____ 1. Able to define effective communication.
_____ 2. Give and receive feedback.
_____ 3. Communicate with sensitivity to ethical considerations.
_____ 4. Seek to minimize communication barriers.
_____ 5. Use communication technology appropriately.
_____ 6. Recognize the limitations of first impressions.
_____ 7. Understand the origins of your perceptions.
_____ 8. Believe that not everyone views the world in the same way.
_____ 9. Separate facts from opinions.
_____ 10. Check the accuracy of perceptions you have.
_____ 11. Value diverse traditions and customs.
_____ 12. Recognize intercultural communication styles.
_____ 13. Communicate with sensitivity to cultural differences.
_____ 14. Recognize stereotyped treatment of others.
_____ 15. Work to overcome personal biases.
_____ 16. Understand that words can have multiple meanings.
_____ 17. Use specific language to communicate ideas.
_____ 18. Seek clarification of ambiguous nonverbal cues.
_____ 19. Use nonverbal cues to enhance the verbal messages.

_____ 20. Appreciate the role of nonverbal communication in human interaction.

_____ 21. Listen attentively without distraction.

_____ 22. Respond to others in a way that shows you are listening.

_____ 23. Detect main ideas and supporting facts.

_____ 24. Use clarifying questions to promote understanding.

_____ 25. Summarize information and feelings you receive from others.

_____ 26. Build satisfying relationships.

_____ 27. Maintain satisfying relationships.

_____ 28. Repair troubled relationships.

_____ 29. Treat others with respect.

_____ 30. Share feelings, opinions, and wants confidently.

_____ 31. Recognize different types of conflicts.

_____ 32. Choose appropriate styles of conflict management.

_____ 33. Identify the benefits of conflict.

_____ 34. Avoid destructive behaviors in conflict.

_____ 35. Respond appropriately to criticism.

_____ 36. Identify benefits of teamwork.

_____ 37. Recognize characteristics of effective teams.

_____ 38. Participate skillfully as a team member.

_____ 39. Demonstrate team leadership responsibilities.

_____ 40. Employ successful problem-solving techniques.

_____ 41. Develop central ideas with main points.

_____ 42. Support main points with verbal and visual information.

_____ 43. Organize outlines for oral presentations.

_____ 44. Research information for a speech using a variety of resources.

_____ 45. Deliver a speech confidently with minimal notes.

_____ 46. Influence others with emotional appeals.

_____ 47. Recognize logical fallacies.

_____ 48. Present a message with maximum credibility.

_____ 49. Use persuasive strategies to convince others.

_____ 50. Organize a message to persuade others.

Communication Self-Assessment Scoring Key

Use the following scoring key to assess your perceived ability to communicate. Total your points for items 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, etc. When finished scoring, check your rating and answer the questions which follow.

Communication Concepts (1–5) _____	Perception Skills (6–10) _____	Diversity Skills (11–15) _____	Language Skills (16–20) _____	Listening Skills (21–25) _____
Interpersonal Skills (26–30) _____	Conflict Skills (31–35) _____	Teamwork Skills (36–40) _____	Speaking Skills (41–45) _____	Persuasive Skills (46–50) _____

Rating Scale for Communication Survey

11–15 points	No perceived problem with these communication skills.
6–10 points	Need work to improve these skills.
5 points	Need maximum efforts to develop communication strengths.

Answer the following questions:
1. What do the results of this survey tell you about your ability to communicate?
2. How closely do these results compare with your own personal assessment of your communication ability?
3. In what areas do you need special improvement? How might you go about improving your ability in these areas?

ASSIGNMENT 1.6: CASE STUDY: ETHICAL DILEMMA

In October 2006, 13-year-old Missouri girl, Megan Meier, took her life, and her parents believe her suicide was the result of harassment she experienced on MySpace.com, a social networking site.

The news media alleged that the mother of Megan's former friend created the fictitious profile of "Josh Evans," a supposed 16-year-old boy who befriended Megan online.

Unfortunately, what began as a potential friendship resulted in a devastating outcome when comments made by "Josh" became cruel and insulting.

Megan, who reportedly suffered from low self-esteem and depression, apparently found the personal attacks too much to bear and tragically ended her young life.

The mother supposedly claimed she created "Josh" as a way of finding out what Megan was saying online about her daughter, Megan's former friend.

Sometime after the incident, Missouri changed its laws against harassment to include "cyberbullying."

Questions:

1. Do you think whoever created "Josh" should face criminal charges? Why or why not?
2. Should users of web sites like MySpace.com be allowed to say whatever they want as a form of free speech? Why or why not?
3. What standards should web sites meet in order to prevent online bullying and harassment?

References

Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006, October). Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st Century U.S. workforce. The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management. Retrieved October 4, 2006, from http://www.cvworkingfamilies. org/downloads/FINAL_PDF_9_29_06.pdf?CFID= 9383895&CFTOKEN=49915062

Cullen, S. (2006, November 10). Professor in an iPod. *Wisconsin State Journal*, A1.

Dickinson, A. (1999, September 27). Positive illusions. *Time Magazine*, vol. 154, issue 13, 112.

DiResta, D. (2004). Seven steps to a vital videoconference. *Ezine Articles*. Retrieved November 16, 2006, from http://www.ezinearticles.com/?Seven-Steps-to-a-Vital-Videoconference&id=956

Enron scandal mushrooms. (2002, January 7). *San Diego Union Tribune*. Retrieved December 7, 2007, from https://resourcea.wctc.edu/Ancillaries/temp/ 63998tempe00231.asp

Francis, J. (2006, October). The sound of silence. *Deliciousliving,* 78.

Francis, K., Bowman, S., & Redgrave, M. (2001, December 4). Rural nurses: Knowledge and skills required to meet the challenges of a changing work environment in the 21st Century: A review of the literature.

Commonwealth Department of Education, Science, and Training. Retrieved November 10, 2006, from http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/nursing/pubs/ rural_nurses/9.htm

Goodman, E. (2005, August 13). Technology has weakened our connections. *Boston Globe*, p. B9.

Green, W. D. (2006, May 1). We've overlooked one of our greatest assets. *Newsweek*, 22.

Hertsgaard, M. (2005, May 10). Ped dispenser. *Grist*. Retrieved October 17, 2006, from http://www.grist.org/news/maindish/2005/05/10/ hertsgaard-francis/

Hudson. (2005). *The generation mirage*. Hudson Highland Group, Inc. Retrieved December 22, 2006, from http:// nz.hudson.com/documents/emp_au_ whitepaper_ generation_mirage.pdf

International Listening Association. (2005, June 12). *Listening factoids*. Retrieved November 10, 2007, from http://www.listen.org/Templates/factoids.htm

National Coalition Building Institute. (n.d.). About NCBI. Retrieved November 10, 2006, from http://www.ncbi .org/what_we_offer/customized_programs/ law_enforcement___protective_services/

National Communication Association. (n.d.). Behavior matters: Communication research on human connections. Decade of Behavior. Retrieved September 22, 2006, from http://www.decadeofbehavior.org/ NCA_pamphlet.2.pdf

Powell, J, (1969). *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?* Niles, IL: Argus Communications.

Reuters Health. (2000–2005). Sharing feelings can help breast cancer survivors. *Ad Council/Cancerpage.Com.* Retrieved October 25, 2006, from http://www.cancerpage.com/news/article.asp?id=3007

Saxe, J. G. (n.d.). Blind men and the elephant. Retrieved October 24, 2006, from http://www.wordinfo.info/words/index/info/view_unit/1/?letter=B&spage=3

Tannen, D. (1994). *Talking from nine to five.* New York: HarperCollins.