PART ONE
Foundations of Interpersonal Communication

Chapter 1
Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

Chapter 2
Interpersonal Communication and Self

Chapter 3
Interpersonal Communication and Perception

Chapter 4
Interpersonal Communication and Diversity: Adapting to Others

The first four chapters present fundamental concepts that frame our study of interpersonal communication. In Chapter 1, you will learn answers to these questions: What is interpersonal communication? What is the connection between interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships? Why is it important to study relationships? What can I do to improve my relationships with others? You will also learn about the increasing role played by electronically mediated communication in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Chapter 2 offers concepts and skills to help you understand more about who you are and how your self-concept and sense of self-worth influence your relationships. In Chapter 3, you will learn that perception plays a key role in effective interpersonal communication. By recognizing the factors that influence your perceptions and by actively analyzing the meaning of perceptual information, you can become more adept at sharing your sense of the world with others. Finally, Chapter 4 will examine the role diversity plays in interpersonal communication, identify barriers to effective intercultural communication, and give you the tools to improve intercultural competence.
Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

Objectives
1. Compare and contrast definitions of communication, human communication, and interpersonal communication.
2. Explain why it is useful to study interpersonal communication.
3. Compare and contrast communication as action, interaction, and transaction.
4. Describe the key components of the communication process.
5. Discuss electronically mediated communication’s role in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships.
6. Discuss five principles of interpersonal communication.
7. Identify strategies that can improve your communication effectiveness.

Outline
- What Is Interpersonal Communication?
- Why Is Interpersonal Communication Important?
- The Communication Process
- Electronically Mediated Interpersonal Communication
- Principles of Interpersonal Communication
- Improving Your Own Interpersonal Communication Competence
Interpersonal communication is like breathing; it is a requirement for life, and, like breathing, it is inescapable. Unless you live in isolation, you communicate interpersonally every day, whether you’re confiding in a friend, discussing vacation plans with your significant other, or asking a professor to explain an assignment.

It is impossible not to communicate with others. Even before we are born, we respond to movement and sound. With our first cry, we announce to others that we are here, and we continue to communicate until our last breath. Even before we can talk, we communicate our feelings, needs, and wants to others, and as we grow, even though many of our messages are not verbalized, we continually send messages to others through our facial expressions, body language, and gestures. Without interpersonal communication, a special form of human communication that occurs as we manage our relationships, people suffer and even die. For this reason, the United Nations has denounced the practice of long-term solitary confinement, as it is considered a form of torture. \(^1\)

Human communication is at the core of our existence. Think of the number of times you communicate with people each day as you work, eat, study, shop, or go about your other daily activities. How many text messages did you send today? How many emails did you exchange? We spend most of our waking hours engaging in some form of interpersonal communication, and it is through these exchanges that we develop relationships with others.

Because these relationships are so important in our lives, later chapters will focus on the communication skills and principles that explain and predict how we develop, sustain, and sometimes end relationships. Why do we like some people and not others? How can we interpret other people’s unspoken messages with greater accuracy? Why do some relationships blossom and others die? How can we better manage disagreements with others? How can we better understand our relationships with our family, friends, and co-workers?

This chapter charts the course ahead, addressing key questions about what interpersonal communication is and why it is important. We will begin by seeing how our understanding of the interpersonal communication process has evolved, and we will conclude by examining how we initiate and sustain relationships through interpersonal communication.

What Is Interpersonal Communication?

To understand interpersonal communication, we must begin by understanding how it relates to two broader categories: communication in general and human communication. For decades, scholars have attempted to arrive at a general definition of communication, and yet experts cannot agree on a single one. In the broadest sense, however, we can define communication as the process of acting on information. One person does or says something, and others think or do something in response to the actions or words as they understand them.
To refine our broad definition, we can say that human communication is the process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages. We learn about the world by listening, observing, tasting, touching, and smelling; then we share our conclusions with others. Human communication encompasses many media, including speeches, songs, letters, books, articles, poems, advertisements, radio and television broadcasts, email, online discussion groups, texts, and tweets.

Interpersonal communication is a distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships. Three essential elements of this definition set the unique nature of interpersonal communication apart from other forms of human communication:

1. A distinctive form of communication, which involves mutual influence between individuals and helps us manage our relationships.

2. Interpersonal communication is not simply communication that occurs when two people interact face to face. This limited definition suggests that if two people are interacting, then they are engaged in interpersonal communication. Today, interpersonal communication is defined not just by the number of people who communicate but also by the quality of the communication. Interpersonal communication occurs not when you simply interact with someone, but when you treat the other as a unique human being.

Think of all human communication as ranging on a continuum from impersonal to interpersonal communication. Impersonal communication occurs when you treat people as objects, or when you respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique individuals. When you ask a server in a restaurant for a glass of water, you are interacting with the role, not necessarily with the person. You know nothing personal about this individual, and he or she knows nothing personal about you.

Philosopher Martin Buber influenced our thinking about human communication when he presented the concept of true dialogue as the essence of authentic communication. He described communication as consisting of two different qualities of relationships. An “I–It” relationship, in Buber’s terminology, is an impersonal one; the other person is viewed as an “It” rather than as an authentic, genuine person. When you pick up a prescription from the pharmacy, you have a two-person, face-to-face, relatively brief interaction with someone. You communicate. Yet that interchange could hardly be described as intimate or personal. Interpersonal communication occurs when you interact with another person as a unique, authentic individual rather than as an object or “It.” Buber calls this kind of relationship an “I–Thou” relationship. An “I–Thou” relationship involves true dialogue. It is not self-centred. The communicators have developed an attitude toward each other that is honest, open, spontaneous, nonjudgmental, and based on equality rather than superiority.

We’re not suggesting that the goal of every communication exchange is to develop a personal, intimate dialogue. That would be unrealistic and inappropriate. It’s possible to go through an entire day communicating with others but not be involved in interpersonal communication. As we noted earlier, interpersonal communication is a distinctive form of communication; it does not occur just because two people are communicating.

Although interpersonal communication is more intimate and reveals more about the people involved than does impersonal communication, not all interpersonal communication involves sharing closely guarded personal information. As we discuss later in the book, there are degrees of intimacy when interacting with others.
Interpersonal Communication Involves Mutual Influence Between Individuals

*Mutual influence* means that all partners are affected by the transaction. The degree of mutual influence varies a great deal from transaction to transaction. You probably would not be affected a great deal by a brief smile you receive from a stranger on a bus, but you would be greatly affected by hearing the words “I love you” for the first time from your romantic partner. Every interpersonal communication transaction influences us. Sometimes it changes our lives dramatically, sometimes in small ways. Long-lasting interpersonal relationships are sustained not by one person giving and another taking but by a spirit of mutual equality. Both you and your partner listen to and respond with respect for each other. There is no attempt to manipulate others. True dialogue, says researcher Daniel Yankelovich, involves a collaborative climate. It’s not about winning or losing an argument. It’s about being understood and accepted.⁶

Buber asserts that the quality of being fully “present” when communicating with another person is an essential part of an “I–Thou” relationship.⁷ To be present is to give your full attention to the other person. The quality of interpersonal communication is enhanced when both you and your communication partner are simultaneously present and focused on each other.

Interpersonal Communication Helps Us Manage Our Relationships

A *relationship* is the ongoing connection you make with another person through interpersonal communication. When two individuals are in a relationship, everything that one person says or does influences the other person.

We initiate and form relationships by communicating with others whom we find appealing in some way. When we wish to develop a relationship with someone, we seek to increase our interactions with that person, and we use interpersonal communication continually to maintain the relationship. We also use interpersonal communication to redefine or end relationships. In this book, we define interpersonal communication as a unique form of human communication. There are other forms of communication as well. *Mass communication* occurs when someone communicates the same message to many people at once, but the creator of the message is usually not physically present, and listeners have virtually no opportunity to respond immediately to the speaker. An ongoing connection made with another person through interpersonal communication.

*Mass communication*. Type of communication that occurs when one person issues the same message to many people at once; the creator of the message is usually not present and there is virtually no opportunity for listeners to respond to the speaker.
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to the speaker. Messages communicated via radio and TV are examples of mass communication. **Public communication** occurs when a speaker addresses a large audience in person. **Small-group communication** occurs when a group of, say, 3 to 15 people meet to interact with a common purpose and mutually influence one another. The purpose of the gathering could be to solve a problem, make a decision, learn, or just have fun. While communicating with others in a small group, it is also possible to communicate interpersonally, that is, to communicate in order to manage a relationship with one or more individuals in the group. Finally, **intrapersonal communication** is communication with oneself. Thinking is perhaps the best example of intrapersonal communication. In our discussion of self and communication in Chapter 2, we discuss the relationships between one’s thoughts and one’s interpersonal communication with others.

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### RECAP
Comparing Key Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>The process of acting on information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human communication</td>
<td>The process of making sense of the world and sharing that sense with others</td>
</tr>
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<td>Interpersonal communication</td>
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### Why Is Interpersonal Communication Important?

Why learn about interpersonal communication? Because it touches every aspect of your life. Developing quality interpersonal relationships with others is not only pleasant or desirable; it is vital for your well-being. Learning how to understand and improve interpersonal communication can improve relationships with family, loved ones, friends, classmates, and colleagues, and can enhance the quality of your physical and emotional health.

### Improve Relationships with Family

Relating to family members can be a challenge. The divorce statistics in Canada document the difficulties that can occur when people live in relationships with each other: about half of all marriages end in divorce. While we don’t claim that you will avoid all family conflicts if you learn the principles and skills of interpersonal communication, you will be more likely to develop creative, constructive solutions to family conflict if you understand what’s happening and can promote true dialogue with your spouse, parent, sibling, or child. Furthermore, family relationships play a major role in determining how you interact with others. Author Virginia Satir calls family communication “the largest single factor determining the kinds of relationships [people make] with others.”

### Improve Relationships with Friends and Lovers

How many friends do you have? Are you currently in love or have you been in love before? For unmarried people, developing friendships and falling in love can provide crucial sources of satisfaction and happiness in life. Conversely, the end of a relationship
can cause a great deal of stress and can even lead to depression. Studying interpersonal communication may not unravel all the mysteries of romantic love and friendship, but it can offer insight into our behaviour.

**Improve Relationships with Classmates and Colleagues**

Although we choose our friends and lovers, we don’t always have the same flexibility in choosing those with whom we work or attend classes, even though we may spend more time with them than with our family and friends. Understanding how relationships develop at school and on the job can help us avoid conflict and stress and can increase our sense of satisfaction. Experts agree that relationships with peers have a significant impact on student success at the postsecondary level; in fact, one study concluded that “the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years.”

Moreover, success or failure in a job can often hinge on how well we get along with our supervisor and our peers. Recent studies have shown that training workers to relate and communicate as a team improves quality and productivity in many occupations, and so today more and more workplaces are adopting teamwork as a management strategy. In fact, as we discuss in the following *In Canada* box, the Conference Board of Canada and its partners, including business organizations and training/education partners, have identified teamwork skills as one of the three main areas of essential employability skills. These *In Canada* boxes will highlight Canadian research and issues throughout the book.

**Improve Your Physical and Emotional Health**

Research has shown that the lack or loss of a relationship can lead to ill health and even death. Physicians have long observed that patients who are widowed or divorced experience more medical problems, such as heart disease, cancer, pneumonia, and diabetes, than do married people. One Canadian study even found that married people live longer than those who are single, separated, divorced, or widowed. It is impossible to avoid family conflicts altogether, but strong interpersonal communication skills can help you understand and manage them.

*Image: © Jupiterimages/Thinkstock*

**In Canada**

**What Skills Will I Need for Employment?**

If your job search is going to be successful, from the beginning you need to know not just your own goals, but also what employers are looking for. Courses that teach interpersonal communication skills can help you improve your own skills and become a more attractive candidate. The Conference Board of Canada has published a brochure that outlines an Employability Skills Profile based on information gathered from hundreds of Canadian employers. This brochure can assist you in developing various skills.

The brochure summarizes the skills that are in demand under three headings: Academic Skills, Personal Management Skills, and Teamwork Skills. Under the Personal Management Skills heading, the brochure notes that employers look for those with self-esteem and confidence, who recognize and respect people’s diversity and individual differences, who have a positive attitude toward learning, growth, and personal health, and who have the ability to identify and suggest new ideas to get a job done in a creative way. Under the Teamwork Skills heading, the brochure discusses such aspects as respecting the thoughts and opinions of others in the group, using conflict-management strategies to facilitate give-and-take and thereby achieve group results, planning and making decisions with others, and supporting those outcomes.

Although many may view these as “soft skills,” there is no doubt that in an economic climate where getting a job can be challenging, these skills could be the ones that set you apart from other candidates.

In Chapter 11 you will find the Employability Skills presented in full.

*Source: Mary Ann McLaughlin, ED399484 95 Employability Skills Profile: What Are Employers Looking For? (ERIC Publications)*
retired couples reported happier relationships than older couples where one was retired and the other was still working.12

Research findings are similar for mental illness: widowed and divorced individuals are more likely to experience mental illness, especially depression, than those in ongoing relationships.13 In fact, depression is the most commonly diagnosed mental illness. The Canadian Mental Health Association has estimated that 15% of the population will have a major depressive episode at some point in their lives.14 On the positive side, however, establishing a quality social support system can be a major factor in improving and maintaining your health.

All of these findings show that the stress of loneliness can make us sick, but if we have support from people who care about us, we can adjust to life’s challenges and surprises. By learning more about effective communication, you are paving the way for closer, more satisfying relationships and a longer life.

The Communication Process

Interpersonal communication involves more than simply transferring or exchanging messages; it is a complex process of creating meaning in the context of an interpersonal relationship. This process can occur online as well as face to face. So that we can understand this process more fully, it is useful to see how perspectives on the human communication process have evolved over the past half century. We will begin with the simplest and oldest model of the human communication process and then discuss more contemporary models.

Human Communication as Action: Message Transfer

“Did you get my message?” This simple sentence summarizes the communication-as-action approach to human communication. Communication takes place when a message is sent and received. It is a way of transferring meaning from sender to receiver.

Figure 1.1 shows a basic model that depicts communication as a linear input–output process. Today, although they view the process differently, researchers still accept the following definitions for most of the key components in this model.

**Source.** The source for communication is the originator of a thought or emotion who expresses ideas and feelings as a code that can be understood by a receiver. Translating ideas, feelings, and thoughts into a code is called encoding. Vocalizing a word, gesturing, or establishing eye contact are signals that we use to encode our thoughts into a message that can be decoded by the receiver. Decoding, the opposite of encoding, occurs when the words or unspoken signals are interpreted by the receiver.

**Message.** Messages are the written, spoken, and unspoken elements of communication to which we assign meaning. You can send a message intentionally (talking to a professor before class) or unintentionally (falling asleep during class), verbally (“Hi. How are you?”), nonverbally (a smile), or in written form (a tweet, a text, or a Facebook post).

**Channel.** A message is communicated from sender to receiver via a pathway called a channel. Channels correspond to your senses. When you call your mother on the telephone, the channel is an auditory one. When you talk with your mother face to face, the channels are many. You see her (the visual channel), you hear her (the auditory channel), you may smell her perfume (the olfactory channel), and you may hug her (the tactile channel).

**Receiver.** The receiver is the person who decodes and attempts to make sense of what the source encoded. Think of a radio station as a source broadcasting to a receiver.
that picks up the station’s signal. In human communication, however, there is something between the source and the receiver: we filter messages through past experiences, attitudes, beliefs, values, prejudices, and biases.

**Noise.** Noise is anything that interferes with a message and keeps it from being understood and achieving its intended effect. Without noise, all our messages would be communicated accurately. Noise is always present. It may be literal, such as the loud music coming from the apartment next door while you try to have a conversation with your spouse, or your doctor’s cell phone buzzing repeatedly while you try to tell her about your health issue. Or it may be psychological; for instance, instead of concentrating on your professor’s lecture, you may start thinking about the plans you and your friends have made for the weekend. Whichever kind it is, noise gets in the way of the message and may even distort it. Communicating accurate messages, then, involves minimizing both external and psychological noise.

Although the action approach is simple and straightforward, it has a key flaw: human communication is rarely, if ever, as simple and efficient as “what we put in is what we get out.” Others cannot automatically know what you mean just because you think you know what you mean. When the action approach was formulated, scholars had already begun identifying an array of key elements in the communication process; however, the action approach overlooked the complexity of those elements.

**Human Communication as Interaction: Message Exchange**

The communication-as-interaction perspective uses the same elements as the action models but adds two new ones: feedback and context.

Feedback is the response to a message. Think of a table tennis game. Messages, like the ball, bounce back and forth. We talk; someone listens and responds; we
respond to their response, and so forth. This perspective can be summarized using a physical principle: for every action there is a reaction.

Without feedback, communication is rarely effective. When you order a large cup of coffee with cream and sugar and the server says in response, “That’s a large coffee with cream and sugar, right?,” he or she has provided feedback to ensure that the message has been understood correctly. Like other messages, it can be intentional (your mother hugs you when you announce you’re on the dean’s list) or unintentional (you blush when someone you like pays you a compliment); verbal (your mother exclaims, “You’re on the dean’s list? That’s wonderful!”) or nonverbal (you smile in response to the compliment).

A second component recognized by the interaction perspective is context—the physical and psychological communication environment. All communication takes place in some context, which determines the nature of the communication. A conversation with a friend while shopping would likely differ from one the two of you might have in a hospital waiting room. Context encompasses not only the physical environment but also the number of people present and their relationship with the communicators, the communication goal, and the culture of which the communicators are a part.

This approach, as shown in Figure 1.2, is more realistic, but it still has limitations. Although it emphasizes feedback and context, it does not quite capture the complexity of the process if the communication takes place simultaneously. The interaction model of communication still views communication as a linear, step-by-step process, whereas in interpersonal situations, the source and the receiver send and receive messages at the same time.

**FIGURE 1.2**

*A Model for Communication as Interaction*

Interaction models of communication include feedback as a response to a message sent by the communication source and context as the environment for communication.
Human Communication as Transaction: Message Creation

The communication-as-transaction perspective acknowledges that, when we talk to each other, we are constantly reacting to our partner’s responses. The majority of scholars today view this as the most realistic model for interpersonal communication. Like the action and interaction perspectives, the transaction perspective uses various components to describe communication. However, in this model, all the interaction is simultaneous. As Figure 1.3 indicates, we send and receive messages concurrently. Even as we talk, we are also interpreting our partner’s nonverbal and verbal responses.

The transactional approach to communication is based on systems theory. A system is a set of interconnected elements in which a change in one element affects all the other elements. Your body is an example of a system. Key aspects of any system include inputs (all the variables that go into the system), throughputs (all the things that make communication a process), and outputs (what the system produces). Systems theory, from a communication perspective, helps us understand the transactional nature of communication, in that a change in any aspect of the communication system (source, message, channel, receiver, context, feedback, etc.) has a potential influence on all the other elements of the system. Viewing communication as action or interaction does not quite capture the complexity of the communication process in the way that a systems or transactional process does. From a systems theory point of view, all the elements of communication are connected to every other element of communication.

A transactional approach to communication suggests that no single cause explains why you interpret messages the way you do. In fact, it is inappropriate to point to a single factor to explain how you are making sense of the messages of others; communication is messier than that. The meaning of messages in interpersonal relationships evolves from the past, is influenced by the present, and is affected by visions of the future.

**FIGURE 1.3**

A Model for Communication as Mutual Transaction

In this model, the source and the receiver of a message experience communication simultaneously.
One researcher has said that interpersonal communication is “the coordinated management of meaning” through episodes, during which the message of one person influences the message of another. Technically, only the sender and receiver of those messages can determine where one episode ends and another begins.

**RECAP** An Evolving Model for Interpersonal Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Communication as Action</th>
<th>Human communication is linear, with meaning sent or transferred from source to receiver.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Communication as Interaction</td>
<td>Human communication occurs as the receiver of the message responds to the source through feedback. This interactive model views communication as a linear action-and-reaction sequence of events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Communication as Transaction</td>
<td>Human communication is simultaneously interactive. Meaning is created based on a mutual, concurrent sharing of ideas and feelings. This model most accurately describes interpersonal communication.</td>
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**Electronically Mediated Interpersonal Communication**

Can you really communicate *interpersonally* with people on the Internet without meeting them face to face (FtF)? Yes, of course. You probably communicate this way every day, to both initiate and maintain relationships. When you use a medium such as a cell phone or the Internet to carry your message, you are using **electronically mediated communication (EMC)**. When you go on Facebook or text friends and family members, you are using one of the most common and convenient communication tools we have for maintaining relationships. And with social networking applications now available on cell phones, you have quite sophisticated EMC technology at your fingertips wherever you go. We use technology to make, keep, and drop friends, to self-disclose, to respond to and support others, and to coordinate other interactions. There is evidence that some EMC relationships can be as satisfying as FtF relationships. That’s why throughout this book we’ll discuss research findings about EMC as well as FtF interpersonal communication. The new media have a major impact on your real-life relationships.

**Comparing Electronically Mediated Communication with Face-to-Face Communication**

Mediated communication is not new, of course. People have been communicating without being face to face for centuries; sending letters and other written messages is an age-old human way of relating to others. And even before written communication was widespread, humans used smoke signals and drum beats to communicate across long distances. What’s new today is that there are so many different ways of *immediately* connecting with someone, such as using a cell phone, social networking applications (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter), text messages, email, instant messaging, video messages on YouTube, or a host of other Internet-based ways of...
developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Relatively few years ago, email was the hot new way of connecting; then there was instant messaging (IM). There is evidence that these two technologies are declining in use. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, texting and messaging from cell phones, as well as connecting via Twitter and Facebook, are among the most popular ways to communicate using EMC.

We use EMC every day to share information. In 2010, more than three-quarters of Canadian households indicated they had a cell phone, and 13% of households reported that they have given up their landlines and use a cell phone exclusively. We’ve also dramatically increased our use of text messages. Just a few years ago, in 2006, Americans sent 158 billion text messages, double the number sent in 2005. And the numbers continue to grow: as of 2009, 125 million people were on MySpace or Facebook, 18 million of whom were using these applications on their cell phones.

How is electronically mediated interpersonal communication different from live, FtF conversations? There are seven key differences, which have to do with (1) time, (2) anonymity, (3) potential for deception, (4) non-verbal cues, (5) writing style, (6) distance, and (7) permanence.

**Time.** When you interact with others using EMC, you can do so asynchronously. An asynchronous message is a message that is not read, heard, or seen at the same time it is sent; there is a time delay between when you send such a message and when someone else receives it. A text message sent to a friend’s phone or a post on a friend’s Facebook wall are examples of asynchronous messages.

Synchronous messages are those that are sent and received instantly and simultaneously. Face-to-face conversations are synchronous—there is no time delay between when you send a message and when the other person receives it. A video conference is another example of a synchronous message.

The more synchronous an interaction, the more similar it is to FtF interactions. And the more a technology simulates a FtF conversation, the more it creates social presence, which is the feeling we have when we act and think as if we’re involved in an unmediated, FtF conversation. When we send text messages back and forth, or instant-message, we create a shared sense of social or psychological co-presence with our partners. Receiving a tweet from a friend gives us the feeling of being instantly connected to that person.

Another time difference between EMC and FtF messages is that it takes longer to tap out a typewritten message than to speak or to convey a non-verbal message. The amount of delay (which corresponds to silence in FtF interactions) can have an impact on the interpretation of a message’s meaning. When texting, participants may expect to see a response to their message very quickly. This is one reason text messages are often very short and concise. A rapid succession of short messages imitates the back-and-forth of a FtF conversation and fosters a sense of synchronicity and social presence.

**Varying Degrees of Anonymity.** While most of the EMC messages you send and receive are from people you know, when you receive an email message or are “friended” or “poked” by someone, you may not always know precisely with whom you are communicating. It is easy to create an email or Facebook account with a false name. Because EMC allows people to be anonymous, they may say things that are bolder, more honest, or more outrageous than they would if their audience knew who they were. The ease with which someone can create a false persona means that you need to be cautious in forming relationships with strangers over the Internet.
Potential for Deception. It’s easy to lie when communicating electronically because with many forms of EMC you can’t see or hear your audience. In a survey of 191 students at a college in the United States, 40% said that they had lied on the Internet: 15% about their age, 8% about their weight, 6% about appearance, 6% about marital status, and 3% about what sex they were.18

Online deception is almost as easy as typing. We say “almost,” because you can assess the content of a written message for clues to deceit. In a study by Katherine Cornetto, American college-student respondents reported that the most common indicator of deception was someone’s implausible statement or bragging.19 In order to detect deception as friendships develop over the Internet, people come to depend on personal knowledge and impressions of their partners acquired over the course of their correspondence. Interestingly, Cornetto’s study also found that those who reported lying most were the people most likely to suspect other users of lying.

Nonverbal Cues. Words and graphics become more important in EMC than in FtF communication, because in most forms of EMC you must rely solely on words to carry nonverbal messages. Of course, a YouTube video does include nonverbal messages, but even on YouTube some cues may be limited, such as the surrounding context and reactions from others. There are some basic things text users do to add emotion to their messages, including CAPITALIZING THE MESSAGE (equivalent to raising one’s voice), making letters bold, and inserting emoticons—:-) to indicate a smile; :- ( to indicate a sad face, and so on. The ability to tease or make sarcastic remarks is limited with EMC, because there is no tone of voice in the written message—so emoticons must provide information about the intended emotional tone of what is written. You can also write out an accompanying interpretation—“LOL” or “Just kidding”—to compensate for the limited emotional cues.

There is also typically less emphasis on a person’s physical appearance online than in FtF situations, unless you’re using Facebook or MySpace. And in those forums, it’s not only your own appearance that helps determine how others react to you; one study found that the physical attractiveness or unattractiveness of your “friends” rubs off on you. If you have friends who are perceived as attractive, you will be perceived as more popular and attractive.20

Writing Style. Texting or emailing someone allows you time to compose your message and craft it more carefully than you might in an FtF interaction. As a sender of written messages, you have more control over what you say and the impression you create; as the receiver of written messages, you no doubt realize that the other person has had the chance to shape his or her message carefully for its greatest impact on you.

However, not everyone is able to encode thoughts quickly and accurately into written words. One online scholar suggests that a person’s typing ability and writing skills affect the quality of any relationship that is developed.21 Not only do writing skills affect your ability to express yourself and manage relationships, they also affect how others perceive you. A text reading “whaddup? where u at? c u l8r” gives a very different impression from one reading “Hi Sarah. What are you doing this afternoon? Let me know if you want to meet later.” Your written messages provide insights to others about your personality, skills, sense of humour, and even your values.

Distance. Although we certainly can and do send text messages to people who live and work in the same building we’re in (or even the same room), there is typically greater physical distance between people who are communicating using EMC. When
using the Internet or a cell phone, we can just as easily send a text or a video message to someone on the other side of the globe as we can to someone who is at the other side of the room.

**Permanence.** One important difference between EMC and FtF communication is the fact that a text, email, tweet, or Facebook posting provides a record of the communication, which the sender could come to regret in the future. There have been many instances of celebrities whose publicists race to perform damage control after postings on Twitter or Facebook. It is important to realize that, while you might think you are exchanging “private and confidential” texts with a friend, your communication could be shared with hundreds of people (including strangers), and could end up following you around for years. For these reasons, it is crucial to think twice before sending a text, tweet, or email, and it is also a good idea to consider taking some conversations “offline.”

In addition to these seven differences between EMC and FtF messages, there are questions about who is more likely to use EMC messages. For example, researchers have asked whether people who spend a lot of time online generally have more or less personal contact with other people. A team of researchers led by Robert Kraut and Sara Kiesler made headlines when they published the results of their study, which concluded that the more people use the Internet, the less they will interact with others in person. But other research contradicts this finding. Two follow-up studies found that people who use the Internet are more likely to have a greater number of friends, are more involved with community activities, and overall have greater levels of trust in other people. The most recent research seems to suggest that for some people—those who are already prone to being shy or introverted—there may be a link between Internet use and loneliness or feelings of social isolation. However, their isolation may not be because of their use of the Internet, but simply because they are less likely to make contact with others. For those who are generally outgoing and who like to interact with others, the Internet is just another tool to reach out and make contact.

Increasingly, people use EMC forums such as Facebook not to substitute completely for FtF contact, but to enrich it. In fact, using EMC messages can result in relationships becoming more intimate in less time than they would through FtF interpersonal communication. Researchers have found that people develop hyperpersonal relationships using EMC. **Hyperpersonal relationships** are relationships formed primarily through EMC that become even more personal than equivalent FtF relationships, in part because of the absence of distracting external cues (such as physical qualities), an overdependence on just a few tidbits of personal information (which increases the importance of the information), and an idealization of the partner. Hyperpersonal relationships were first identified in a study in which pairs of students who were initially strangers interacted for up to an hour in a simulated instant-messaging situation, while another group of pairs met face to face for up to 15 minutes. Those in EMC interactions skipped the typical superficial getting-acquainted questions and used more direct questioning and disclosing with their partners. Online pairs engaged in more intimate probes and responses and reached a similar level of understanding and ability to predict their partners’ behaviours as those in FtF interactions.

A comprehensive study that investigated whether instant messages and text messages are more like speech or writing concluded that instant messages contain elements of both, but nonetheless differ from speech in grammar, style, syntax, and other language factors. Text messages are more like writing than like spoken messages. There are also gender differences: women’s text and instant messages use more words, 

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**hyperpersonal relationship.** A relationship formed primarily through electronically mediated communication that becomes more personal than an equivalent face-to-face relationship because of the absence of distracting external cues, smaller amounts of personal information, and idealization of the communication partner.
longer sentences, and more emoticons, and discuss and include more social and relational information than do men’s messages.25

Understanding Electronically Mediated Communication

We’ve noted that EMC messages have both similarities to and differences from FtF messages. What theories and models of electronically mediated messages help us understand how relationships are developed and make predictions about how we will use EMC messages?

The communication models we’ve presented (communication as action, interaction, and transaction) on pages 8–12 are certainly applicable to EMC. There are times when EMC resembles the action model of communication. You post a message on a message board, blog, or Facebook wall and you get no immediate response from others. The communication is asynchronous—there’s a time delay, so you’re not really sure you’ve communicated with anyone. During some email or text-message exchanges, your communication is more like the communication-as-interaction model; you send a text message and you wait for the response. There’s a time delay, but sooner or later you get a response. And then there are instances when you can see and hear the other person simultaneously, such as in a live conversation with someone via a webcam, which is a synchronous interaction. In this instance the EMC resembles the transactional communication model, in that communicating this way is almost like being there in person because of the immediacy of the communication.

Three theories have been developed to further explain and predict how EMC works.

Cues-Filtered-Out Theory. One early theory of communication via the Internet was called cues-filtered-out theory. This theory suggested that emotional expression is severely restricted when we communicate using only text messages; nonverbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and tone of voice are filtered out. The assumption was that text messages were best used for brief, task-oriented communication, such as sharing information or asking questions; text messages were assumed to be less effective in helping people establish meaningful relationships with one another.26 The cues-filtered-out theory also suggests that, given the lack of these nonverbal cues and other social information, we’ll be less likely to use EMC to manage relationships because of its limited ability to carry emotional and relational information. Although Facebook and MySpace present photos and ample personal information, communication through those forums is still not as rich as an FtF conversation.

Media Richness Theory. Another theory helps us make predictions about which form of media we will use to send certain kinds of messages. We use different types of media depending on the richness of a medium, that is, whether it allows us to express emotions and relational messages as well as send information. Media richness theory suggests that the richness of a communication channel is based on four criteria: (1) the amount of feedback that the communicator can receive, (2) the number of cues that the channel can convey and that can be interpreted by a receiver, (3) the variety of language that a communicator uses, and (4) the potential for expressing emotions and feelings.27 Using these four criteria, researchers have developed a continuum of communication channels, from communication-rich to communication-lean. Figure 1.4 illustrates this continuum.

Both the cues-filtered-out theory and media richness theory suggest that the restriction of nonverbal cues, which provide information about the nature of the relationship between communicators, hampers the quality of relationships that can
be established using EMC. But a newer perspective suggests that although EMC may communicate fewer relational cues, we are eventually able to discern relational information.

**Social Information-Processing Theory.** Social information-processing theory suggests that we can communicate relational and emotional messages via the Internet, but it may take longer to express messages that are typically communicated with facial expressions and tone of voice. A key difference between FtF and computer-mediated communication is the rate at which information reaches you. During an
in-person conversation, you process a lot of information quickly; you process the words you hear as well as the many nonverbal cues you see (facial expression, gestures, and body posture) and hear (tone of voice and the use of pauses). During text-only interactions, there is less information to process (no audio cues or visual nonverbal cues), so it takes a bit longer for the relationship to develop—but it does develop as you learn more about your partner’s likes, dislikes, and feelings.

Social information-processing theory also suggests that if you expect to communicate with your electronic communication partner again, you will likely pay more attention to the relationship cues—expressions of emotions that are communicated directly (as when someone writes “I’m feeling bored today”) or indirectly (as when an email recipient responds to your long chatty email with only a sentence, which suggests he or she may not want to spend much time “talking” today).

When we use EMC, we often ask questions and interact with others to enhance the quality of our relationship with them. A study by W. Scott Sanders found that people who communicated via Facebook enhanced the nature of the relationship and reduced their uncertainty about others by asking questions based on information that was already present on the other person’s Facebook page. The pattern of differences between computer-mediated communication and face-to-face communication is still being explored as computer-mediated communication becomes an even more significant part of contemporary life.

In summary, we believe that EMC makes it possible for people to develop interpersonal relationships with others, whether they are miles away or in the next room. Lisa Tidwell and Joseph Walther use the “information superhighway” metaphor to suggest that EMC is not just a road for moving data from one place to another, but also a boulevard where people pass each other, occasionally meet, and decide to travel together. You can’t see very much of other drivers unless you do travel together for some time. There are highway bandits, to be sure, who are not what they appear to be—one must drive defensively—and there are conflicts and disagreements when travelling, just as there are in “off-road,” or FtF, interactions.

### RECAP Theories of Electronically Mediated Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cues-Filtered-Out Theory</td>
<td>The communication of emotion and relationship cues is restricted in email or text messages because nonverbal cues, such as facial expression and tone of voice, are filtered out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Richness Theory</td>
<td>The richness, or the amount of information a communication medium has, is based on the amount of feedback it permits, the number of cues in the channel, the variety of language used, and the potential for expressing emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Information-Processing Theory</td>
<td>Emotional and relationship messages can be expressed via electronic means, although such messages take longer to be communicated without the immediacy of nonverbal cues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Principles of Interpersonal Communication

As we introduce the study of interpersonal communication in this chapter, it is useful to present fundamental principles that help explain the nature of this phenomenon. Underlying our current understanding of interpersonal communication are five principles: interpersonal communication connects us to others, is irreversible, is complicated, is governed by rules, and involves both content and relationship dimensions.
Interpersonal Communication Connects Us to Others

Unless you live in a cave or have become a cloistered monk, you interact with others every day. Even if you work at home in front of a glowing computer screen, you encounter other people in the course of living your life. The opportunities for interpersonal communication are ubiquitous—they are everywhere. It is through inescapable interpersonal communication with others that we affect and are affected by other human beings.

Fundamental to an understanding of interpersonal communication is the assumption that the quality of interpersonal relationships stems from the quality of communication with others. It has been said that people can’t not communicate. Even though this perspective is debated among communication scholars because people...
Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

This helical model shows that interpersonal communication never loops back on itself. It expands as the communication partners contribute their thoughts and experiences to the exchange.


Interpersonal Communication Is Complicated

No form of communication is simple. If any were, we would know how to reduce the number of misunderstandings and conflicts in our world. Because of the number of variables involved in interpersonal exchanges, even simple requests are extremely complex. Communication theorists have noted that whenever you communicate with another person, there are really at least six “people” involved: (1) who you think you are; (2) who you think the other person is; (3) who you think the other person thinks you are; (4) who the other person thinks he or she is; (5) who the other person thinks you are; and (6) who the other person thinks you think he or she is.36 Whew! And when you add more people to the interaction, it becomes even more involved.

Moreover, when humans communicate, they interpret information from others as symbols. A symbol is merely a representation of something else, and it can have various meanings and interpretations. Language is a system of symbols. In English, symbols do not resemble the words they represent. The word (symbol) for cow does not look at all like a cow; someone, somewhere, decided that “cow” should mean a beast that chews a cud and gives milk. The reliance on symbols to communicate poses a communication challenge; we are often misinterpreted. Sometimes we don’t know

symbol. A representation of something else.
the code. Only if you are conversant with Canadian English will you know that “riding” refers to an electoral district; “allophone” refers to a Quebecker whose first language is neither French nor English; and “poutine” is french fries with cheese curds and gravy.

Messages are not always interpreted as we intend them. Osmo Wiio, a Finnish communication scholar, points out the messiness of communicating with others when he suggests the following maxims:

If communication can fail, it will.

If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be understood in just that way which does the most harm.

There is always somebody who knows better than you what you meant by your message.

The more communication there is, the more difficult it is for communication to succeed. 

Although we are not as pessimistic as Professor Wiio, we do suggest that the task of understanding each other is challenging.

Interpersonal Communication Is Governed by Rules

According to communication researcher Susan Shimanoff, a rule is a “followable prescription that indicates what behaviour is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts.” The rules that help define appropriate and inappropriate communication in any given situation may be explicit or implicit. For your interpersonal communication class, explicit rules are probably spelled out in your syllabus, but your instructor has other rules that are more implicit. They are not written or verbalized because you learned them long ago: only one person speaks at a time, you raise your hand to be called on, you do not text message during class.

Interpersonal communication rules are developed by the people involved in the interaction and by the culture in which the individuals are communicating. Many times we learn communication rules from experience, by observing and interacting with others.

British researcher Michael Argyle and his colleagues asked people to identify general rules for relationship development and maintenance and then rate their importance. Here are the most important rules:

Partners should respect each other’s privacy.

Partners should not reveal each other’s secrets.

Partners should look each other in the eye during conversation.

Partners should not criticize each other publicly.

Although we may modify rules to achieve the goals of our relationships, these general rules remain fairly constant. In interpersonal relationships, the rules of a relationship are

**Watch:** Art Appreciation
mutually defined and agreed on. Most of us don’t like to be told what to do or how to behave all the time. The expectations and rules are continually renegotiated as the relationship unfolds. Few of us learn relationship rules by copying them from a book. Most of us learn these rules from experience, through observing and interacting with family members and friends. Individuals who grow up in environments in which these rules are not observed may not know how to behave in close relationships.

Interpersonal Communication Involves Both Content and Relationship Dimensions

The content of a communication message consists of the new information, ideas, or suggested actions that the speaker wishes to share. The relationship dimension of a communication message is usually more implied; it offers cues about the emotions, attitudes, and amount of power and control the speaker feels toward the other.

Your tone of voice, amount of eye contact, facial expression, and posture can reveal much about the true meaning of your message. If one of your roommates loudly and abruptly yells, “HEY, SLOB! WASH YOUR DISHES!” and another roommate sends the same verbal message but more gently and playfully, and with a smile—“Hey, slob. Wash your dishes”—both are communicating a message seeking the same outcome. However, the two messages have different relationship cues. The first, shouted message suggests that your roommate may be frustrated and angry with the state of the kitchen, whereas roommate number two’s teasing request suggests he or she may be fondly amused by your failure to clean up after yourself.

Another way of distinguishing between the content and relationship dimensions of communication is to consider that the content of a message refers to what is said, and relationship cues refer to how it is communicated. This distinction explains why reading a transcript of what someone says can reveal a quite different meaning from actually hearing the person say the message.

Given these two dimensions of communication, one dimension can modify or contradict the other. Communication theorists have a word that describes how we can communicate about our communication: metacommunication. Stated in the simplest way, metacommunication is communication about communication; it can be nonverbal or verbal. Accurately decoding these unspoken or even verbalized metacommunications helps you understand what people really mean.

You can express an idea nonverbally (by smiling to communicate that you are pleased), and you can also express your positive feeling verbally (by saying, “I’m happy to be here”). But sometimes your nonverbal communication can contradict your verbal message. You can say “Oh, that’s just great” and use your voice to provide relational cues that express just the opposite of what the verbal content of the message means. The sarcasm communicated by the tone of your voice (a relationship cue) modifies the meaning of your verbal message (the content of your message).

In addition to nonverbal cues, which provide communication about communication, you can use words to explicitly talk about your message. For example, you can ask, “Is what I’m saying bothering you?” Your question is seeking information about
the communication. We use metacommunication to check on how our message is being understood or to make sure we understand what someone else is saying. When you say “I’m not sure what you said is clear to me,” you are using a metamessage to help you better understand the communication; it’s a metamessage because you are talking about your talk. Here’s another example of verbal metacommunication: “I’d like to talk with you about the way we argue.” Again, you are using communication to talk about communication. Taking time to talk about the way you talk can help clarify misunderstandings. Being aware of the metamessage, in both its verbal and nonverbal forms, can help improve the accuracy of your interpretations of the meaning of message content as well as enhance the quality of your relationships with others.

Improving Your Own Interpersonal Communication Competence

Now that we have previewed the study of interpersonal communication, you may be saying to yourself, “Well, that’s all well and good, but is it possible to improve my own interpersonal communication? Aren’t some people just born with better interpersonal skills than others?” Just as some people have more musical talent or greater skill at passing a puck, evidence suggests that some people may indeed have an inborn, biological talent for communicating with others.

A growing body of research called the communibiological approach to communication suggests that some people inherit certain traits that affect the way they communicate with others. There may be a genetic basis for why people communicate as they do. For example, you or people you know may have been born to have more stage fright or anxiety when communicating with others. Additionally, some people may not be as comfortable interacting in interpersonal situations as others are.

So what are the implications of the communibiological approach to communication? Does this mean you can’t improve your interpersonal communication? Absolutely not! Some researchers and teachers believe that the communibiological approach gives too much weight to biology and not enough to how we can learn to compensate for what nature did not give us. The underlying premise of our study of interpersonal communication is that you can learn ways to enhance the quality of your interpersonal relationships.

Social learning theory suggests that we can learn how to adapt and adjust our behaviour toward others; how we behave is not solely dependent on our genetic makeup. By observing and interacting with others (hence the name social learning), we discover that we can adapt and adjust our behaviour. Although biology unquestionably plays a key role in how we behave, we can’t blame biology for all aspects of our behaviour. We believe that people can learn how to enhance their communication competence.

To be competent in communication is to communicate in ways that are perceived to be both effective and appropriate. You communicate effectively when your message is understood by others and achieves its intended effect. For example, if you want your roommate to stop using your hair dryer, and after you talk to your roommate he stops using your hair dryer, your message has been effective.

Competent communication should also be appropriate. By appropriate, we mean that the communicator should consider the time, place, and overall context of the message and should be sensitive to the feelings and attitudes of the listener. Who determines what is appropriate? There is no single best way to communicate with others. There are, however, avenues that can help you become both more effective and more appropriate when communicating with others. We suggest the following six-part strategy for becoming a more effective communicator.
Become Knowledgeable

By reading this chapter, you have already begun to improve your skills. Competent communicators are knowledgeable. They know how communication works. They understand the components, principles, and rules of the communication process. As you read on in this book, you will learn theories, principles, concepts, and rules that will permit you to explain and predict how humans communicate.

Understanding these things is a necessary prerequisite for enhancing your interpersonal effectiveness, but this kind of knowledge alone does not make you competent. You would not let someone fix your car’s carburetor if he or she had only read a book on the subject. Knowledge must be coupled with skill, and we acquire skill through practice.

Become Skilled

Effective communicators know how to translate knowledge into action. You can memorize the characteristics of a good listener but still not listen well. To develop skill requires practice and helpful feedback from others who can confirm the appropriateness of your actions.

Learning a social skill is not that different from learning how to drive a car or operate a computer. To learn any skill, you must break it down into subskills that you can learn and practise. “Hear it, see it, do it, correct it” is the formula that seems to work best for learning any new behaviours. In this book we will examine the elements of complex skills such as listening, offer activities that will let you practise the skill, and provide opportunities for you to receive feedback and correct your application of the skill.

Become Motivated

Practising skills requires work. You need to be motivated to use your information and skill. You must want to improve, and you must have a genuine desire to connect with others if you wish to become a competent communicator. You may know people who understand how to drive a car and have the skill to drive yet are reluctant to get behind the wheel. Or perhaps you know someone who took a course in public speaking but is still too frightened to stand in front of a crowd. Similarly, you may pass a test about interpersonal communication principles with flying colours, but unless you are motivated to use your new-found skills, your interactions with others may not improve.

Become Adaptable

Effective communicators appropriately adapt their messages to others; they are flexible. In this book, we do not identify tidy lists of sure-fire strategies that you can use to win friends and influence people. The same set of skills is not effective in every situation, so competent communicators do not assume that “one size fits all.” Rather, they assess each unique situation and adapt their behaviour to achieve the desired outcome. They examine the context, the situation, and the needs, goals, and messages of others to establish and maintain relationships.

Become Ethical

Ethics are the beliefs, values, and moral principles by which we determine what is right or wrong. Ethics and ethical behaviour have long been a critical component of human behaviour. Effective interpersonal communicators are ethical. To be an ethical communicator means to be sensitive to the needs of others, to give people choices.
rather than forcing them to act a certain way. Unethical communicators believe that they know what other people need, even without asking them for their preferences. As we discuss in Chapter 6, being manipulative and forcing opinions on others usually results in a climate of defensiveness. Effective communicators seek to establish trust and to reduce interpersonal barriers. Ethical communicators keep confidences; they keep private information that others wish to be kept private. They also do not intentionally decrease others’ feelings of self-worth. Another key element in being an ethical communicator is honesty. If you intentionally lie or distort the truth, then you are not communicating ethically or effectively.

**Become Other-Oriented**

It’s not always about you. Lucy Van Pelt in the Peanuts cartoon seems startled to learn that the world does not revolve around her. Perhaps you know someone like Lucy. Sometimes we may need someone like Linus to remind us that we’re not the centre of the universe. The signature concept for our study of interpersonal communication is the goal of becoming other-oriented in relationships. To be an other-oriented communicator is to consider the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners, while still maintaining your own integrity. The choices we make in forming our messages, in deciding how best to express those messages, and in deciding when and where to deliver those messages will be made more effectively when we consider the other person’s thoughts and feelings. To emphasize the importance of being an other-oriented communicator, throughout this book we will offer sidebar comments and questions to help you apply the concept of being other-oriented to your own interpersonal relationships.

Being other-oriented involves a conscious effort to consider the world from the point of view of those with whom you interact. This effort occurs almost automatically when you are communicating with those you like or who are similar to you. Thinking about the thoughts and feelings of those you dislike or who are different from you is more difficult and requires more effort and commitment.

Are people more self-focused today than in the past? Sociologist Jean Twenge suggests that people today are increasingly more narcissistic (self-focused) than they have been in previous generations—she dubs today’s narcissistic generation the “me generation.” Her research found that “in the early 1950s, only 12% of teens aged 14 to
16 agreed with the statement ‘I am an important person.’ By the late 1980s, an incredible 80%—almost seven times as many—claimed they were important.42 Using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, an instrument designed to assess egocentrism and self-focus, Twenge and two of her colleagues found corroborating evidence for an increased self-focus among contemporary students.

We may find ourselves speaking without considering the thoughts and feelings of our listener when we have a need to purge ourselves emotionally or to confirm our sense of self-importance, but doing so usually undermines our relationships with others. A self-focused communicator often alienates others. Fortunately, research suggests that, almost by necessity, we adapt to our partner in order to carry on a conversation.43 Adaptation includes such things as simply asking questions in response to our partner’s disclosures, finding topics of mutual interest to discuss, selecting words and examples that are meaningful to our partner, and avoiding topics that we don’t feel comfortable discussing with another person.

Adapting messages to others does not mean that we tell them only what they want to hear; that would be unethical. Nor does being considerate of others mean abandoning all concern for our own interests; that would be unwise. Other-oriented communicators maintain their own personal integrity while simultaneously being aware of the thoughts and feelings of others. Being other-oriented is more than just being “nice.” It involves being principled enough to be considerate of others while making mindful choices about how and when to adapt our interpersonal messages.

How do you become other-oriented? Being other-oriented is really a collection of skills rather than a single skill. We devote considerable discussion throughout the book to developing this collection of essential communication skills.

Focusing on others begins with an accurate understanding of your self-concept and self-esteem; we discuss these foundation principles in the next chapter. As you will learn in Chapter 3, developing an accurate perception of both yourself and others is an important element of effectively relating to others.

**APPLYING AN OTHER-ORIENTATION to Being a Competent Interpersonal Communicator**

To be a competent interpersonal communicator is to be an other-oriented communicator—to focus on the needs, interests, values, and behaviors of others while being true to your own principles and ethical credo. In this chapter we’ve previewed some of the knowledge needed, provided a rationale for being motivated to master interpersonal competencies, and offered a glimpse of the skills that enhance an other-orientation.

**Knowledge.** When you view communication as a transactive process rather than as a simplistic action or even an interactive process, you gain realistic insight into the challenge of communicating with others and the potential for misunderstandings. Knowing the messiness and dynamic nature of communication, as well as the various components of the process (source, message, channel, receiver, context, and feedback), can help you better diagnose communication issues in your own relationships and improve your ability to accurately decode the messages of others.

**Motivation.** Why learn how to be other-oriented? As we’ve noted, learning about interpersonal communication has the potential to enhance both the quality of your relationships with others and your health. Developing your skill at and knowledge of interpersonal communication can enhance your confidence to improve your relationships with family members, friends, lovers, and colleagues.

**Skill.** To becompetently other-oriented takes more than knowledge of the elements and nature of communication (although that’s a good start), and more than a strong motivation to enhance your abilities. It takes skill. As you begin your study of interpersonal communication, you can be confident that in the chapters ahead
you will learn how to listen to, respond to, use, and interpret verbal messages, express and interpret emotional meanings of messages, more accurately use and interpret nonverbal messages, manage conflict, and adapt to human differences. To be other-oriented is to have the knowledge, nurture the motivation, and develop the skill to relate to others in effective and ethical ways.

People gain insight into others’ feelings by being sensitive to nonverbal messages as well as to the explicit verbal statements they make. We discuss verbal communication skills in Chapter 6 and nonverbal communication skills in Chapter 7. The skills and principles of managing conflict presented in Chapter 8 provide tools and ideas for understanding others when you disagree.

Becoming other-oriented also involves adapting to those who may be considerably different from you. Your communication partner may have a different cultural background, be of the opposite sex, or be older or younger than you. In Chapter 4 we explore some of these differences, especially the cultural differences that can sometimes challenge effective and appropriate communication with others; we also suggest specific strategies to help you adapt to others who differ from yourself. Throughout the text, we include Understanding Diversity boxes like the one that appears in this section to help you develop your sensitivity to important issues related to cultural diversity.

Understanding Diversity

In a culturally diverse society, we can make mistakes without meaning to offend or confuse the other person. Our goal is not to be insulting or misunderstood; it’s just that values and practices differ from one culture to another, and sometimes the differences can lead to unintended errors.

Every culture has different rules for verbal and nonverbal communication. For example, in some cultures, it is considered rude to look another person directly in the eye when speaking, whereas in other cultures eye contact is seen as a sign of honesty and openness.

In many First Nations cultures, it is customary to respond to a question or comment only after a lengthy period of observation and reflection in order to allow the listener to thoughtfully consider the speaker’s words. The desire for adequate time to observe and reflect may explain why some First Nations students are not quick to respond verbally to questions asked in the classroom. This is often mistakenly interpreted by teachers as communicating shyness, passivity, or lack of knowledge rather than thoughtfulness and mutual respect.44

In addition, different cultures have different expectations for nonverbal communication. Depending on the culture, direct and sustained eye contact could be understood as communicating respect, disrespect, aggression, flirtation, or focused attention and interest.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11 build on the principles of interpersonal relationships introduced in this chapter to help you understand how relationships evolve, are maintained, and sometimes end. The final chapter applies our discussion of other-oriented interpersonal communication to various contexts such as families, friends, and colleagues. Our goal is to help you to better understand how you relate to others and to develop enhanced interpersonal skills.
### What Is Interpersonal Communication, and Why Is It Important? (pages 3-8)

**Key Terms**  
- Communication 3  
- Mass communication 5  
- Human communication 4  
- Public communication 6  
- Interpersonal communication 4  
- Small-group communication 6  
- Impersonal communication 4  
- Intrapersonal communication 6  
- Relationship 5  
- Depression 7

**Critical Thinking Questions**
1. Draw a relationship scale on a piece of paper, and label it “impersonal” at one end and “intimate” at the other. Place your family members, friends, and work colleagues on the scale. Why do some fall toward the “impersonal” end? What makes those relationships less personal than others? Discuss and compare your entries with those of classmates.
2. Ethics: Think about your primary goal for this course. Is it effective? Analyze the exchange. Write down some of the dialogue if you remember it. Did the other person understand you? Did your communication have the intended effect? Was your message ethical?

**Activities**
Briefly describe a recent interpersonal communication exchange that was not effective. Analyze the exchange. Write down some of the dialogue if you remember it. Did the other person understand you? Did your communication have the intended effect? Was your message ethical?

**Web Resources**
- www.natcom.org This is the homepage of the National Communication Association, the largest professional association in the world. The site offers information, references, and resources about human communication.

### The Communication Process (pages 8-12)

**Key Terms**
- Source 8  
- Noise 9  
- Encoding 8  
- Feedback 9  
- Decoding 8  
- Context 9  
- Messages 8  
- Systems theory 11  
- Channel 8  
- Episode 12  
- Receiver 8

**Critical Thinking Questions**
1. What makes interpersonal communication a complex process? Explain, drawing on some of your own everyday communication exchanges.
2. Think of some recent interpersonal communication exchanges you’ve had. Which communication model best captures the nature of each exchange? Analyze each exchange, identifying the components of communication discussed in this section of the chapter. Was feedback an important component? Were you and your partner experiencing the communication simultaneously? What was the context? What were sources of internal and external noise? Did you or your partner have problems encoding or decoding each other’s messages?

**Activities**
Keep a one-day log of your electronically mediated interactions (e.g., phone calls, Facebook messages, text messages). Describe each one, noting whether there was a greater emphasis on the content or the relational elements of the messages you exchanged during the interaction.

### Electronically Mediated Interpersonal Communication (pages 12-18)

**Key Terms**
- Electronically mediated communication (EMC) 12  
- Cues-filtered-out theory 16  
- Asynchronous message 13  
- Media richness theory 16  
- Synchronous message 13  
- Social information-processing theory 17  
- Hyperpersonal relationship 15

**Critical Thinking Questions**
1. Does electronically mediated communication make us more or less other-oriented than FtF communication? Explain. Think of the different types of EMC that you use in your daily life. How does each of these affect your social presence?
2. Ethics: There is a greater potential for deception with EMC than with face-to-face communication. What other ethical issues arise with EMC? What are some steps you can take to make sure you are communicating ethically via electronic media? And how do you evaluate the credibility and reliability of the electronically mediated communication you receive?
Chapter 1

Introduction to Interpersonal Communication

You don’t want to hurt your parents’ feelings, so you tell them that you are working on an important project and won’t be able to come home for the holidays. Your message is understood. It achieves the intended effect: your parents don’t seem to have hurt feelings, and you don’t go home. Explain whether your message is ethical or unethical.

Activities

Review the discussion of principles of interpersonal communication that begins on page 18. Give an example from your own relationships that illustrates each principle.

Web Resources

www.khake.com/page66.html This website offers a host of resources and links to other sites that provide information about human communication.