



## Introduction to the World of Communication

First Edition

Edited by Tammy R. Vigil

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# Sneak Preview

# INTRODUCTION TO THE World of **COMMUNICATION**

REVISED FIRST EDITION

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTIONS TO THE READINGS BY

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# Introduction

By Tammy R. Vigil



W elcome to the world of communication. While this welcome is somewhat belated—because humans are active participants in a communicative world for the better part of their existence—the decision to study communication actively in a systematic way marks a new and exciting moment in anyone’s relationship, to both the general act of communicating and the various specific communication career fields. No matter if approaching this study with an eye toward academic enlightenment or with a focus on professional preparation and development, anyone studying communication will find that it is a field with unexpected challenges and opportunities at every turn. This text is intended as an overview and introduction to the discipline and its corresponding professions.

## The Communication Tradition

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There is a common misperception that the study of communication is a relatively young discipline. While it is true the study of mass communication and the development of communication departments, schools and colleges have a relatively short history—beginning mostly in the early 20th century and initially housed in departments such as English, Psychology, and Auditory Sciences—the systematic study of communication as a human action actually dates back beyond the ancient

Greek and Roman philosophers. As explained in the chapter titled “Human Communication Theory and Research: Traditions and Models” in this text, some of the world’s oldest writings contain lessons in communicating effectively. The study of communication is, in fact, among the oldest and most developed academic pursuits.

The long, rich history of the study of communication has always included the intertwining of intellectual examination with practical application. Whether novices, dilettantes, or experts, scholars of communication generally approach their studies with the aim of improving their own communication skills, the skills of others, or both. For most, this means acquiring a better understanding of some aspect of communication in order to develop suggestions for more effective strategies, to sharpen or expand existing skills, or to chronicle best practices. This is true from the first tomes written centuries ago to modern texts such as this one.

One of the most famous and enduring communication handbooks is *On Rhetoric* written by Aristotle during the 4th century B.C.E. Aristotle’s three-book text examines “all the available means of influence.” It outlines the ways in which humans appeal to one another in order to alter each other’s attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors. While

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\* Aristotle. *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

providing a codification of influences in the form of artistic (author-constructed) and inartistic (external evidence-based) proofs, *On Rhetoric* also provides ample instances of influential appeals, explains the reasons for their effectiveness, and delineates guidelines for successfully using such appeals. This application-oriented approach stems from Aristotle's fascination with communication as a practical aspect of society.<sup>†</sup> His intertwined theories on ethics and communication are secularly based and are intended to help readers apply specific principles in different situations in order to increase the likelihood of a successful communication outcome. Aristotle takes great care to explain both the underlying principles of what makes communication effective and to give suggestions for how a speaker might improve specific skills. Aristotle's concern is with the proper use of communication skills, not just increasing overall effectiveness. In both *On Rhetoric* and a separate book, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle outlines proper and improper uses of effective communication skills. Like any responsible communication scholar, Aristotle encourages effective and ethically responsible application of communicative skills.

Aristotle laid the foundation for the now long-standing tradition of blending both descriptive and prescriptive interests via the study of communication. The blend of intellectual examination, ethical consideration, and practical application has always been (and continues to be) essential in the exploration of communication.

Any effective textbook on communication should constantly blend explanations of “what” and “why” with instructions on “how to.” All major schools and colleges of communication offer a mix of courses that combine theory and research with professional development and skill building. This is because communication is such an essential part of human existence. All human interactions, be they personal, social, or professional, casual or formal, intentional or unintentional, critical or superficial, successful or unsuccessful, are

only possible via communication. Unfortunately, in spite of the vital nature of communication in a social world, communication as an academic discipline is often misunderstood and misjudged.

## Communication: The Misunderstood Discipline

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Anyone who studies the field of communication for any length of time quickly discovers that a variety of misconceptions and erroneous judgments regarding the study of communication exists. It is not unusual for parents, grandparents, and others to wonder what it really means to be a communication major. For many individuals, the act of communicating seems so natural and common that the idea of studying it seems either unusual or unnecessary. This often leads to another misperception: that a major in communication is not “real,” but an easy pursuit lacking rigor or intensity. These perspectives are usually based on a lack of information and a series of stereotypes associated with the discipline.

Majoring in any aspect of communication is not for the faint of heart. Similar in professional focus to the study of business, medicine, or law, the study of communication can prepare any student for a series of specific careers requiring dedicated skills and knowledge sets. Contrary to mistaken assumptions, the study of communication can be a very challenging professional endeavor. It requires students to be broadly educated within the liberal arts, in addition to engaging in professional training and development, because a successful communicator must know more than simply the most effective means of communicating and how to apply them. An effective communication professional must have an understanding of the specific topic information for the context in which he or she will be working (e.g., political reporters must know politics, a PR specialist working for an environmental organization must have some understanding of environmental sciences, a documentary filmmaker must know something about whatever he or she is documenting). Also, because creating

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<sup>†</sup> Aristotle. *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

messages for an audience requires knowledge of the physical and social environment the audience resides in, as well as an understanding of the audience, a student of communication would be wise to establish a broad understanding of the world that provides both content and context for the messages he or she will be creating. This means that a well-educated communicator needs some understanding of human psychological and sociological processes. Also, communication specialists increasingly need to understand developing technologies and their impact and uses in contemporary communication environments.

A good communicator is someone who has something to say that is interesting, important, and informed. No matter the particular career, a student of communication is best served by an understanding of history, sociology, politics, science, psychology, art, and other areas that enrich the communicator's understanding of the world in which he or she operates. Knowing simply how to run a camera does not make someone an effective filmmaker; knowing how to create a storyboard does not make someone an effective advertiser; knowing how to talk on camera does not make someone an effective broadcast journalist. It takes a broader interest and understanding of the world at large to be an effective communicator in any industry.

Unlike its professional counterparts, communication is often devalued because of its common nature. People assume that because we all communicate, the study of this daily activity is unnecessary. While it is true that individuals are socialized into communication (i.e., you learn to communicate by being around people who are communicating), this does not invalidate the study of this action. The shared nature of communication makes its study an essential academic and professional pursuit. The importance of communication to our civilization and civility increases this importance.

Effective communication is the foundation for a civil society. Communication, whether verbal, written, nonverbal, interpersonal, small group, mass mediated, via social networks or face-to-face, is the only portal for civilized interaction

among individuals. Communication facilitates relationships between interdependent entities. Communication allows for the existence of social contracts and bonds. Communication is the only medium for healthy debate and discussion. Therefore, the study of communication is not only an academically important field; it is essential for human social growth and productivity.

The importance of communication extends beyond the boundaries of its own academic walls. Without communication, there are no other disciplines. It is not possible to teach one another any subject absent communication. There are no books to read, no lectures to give, no mentoring to be had. Without communication, businesses cannot function. Without communication, laws cannot be expressed, interpreted, enforced, or questioned. Without communication, there is no history to be learned or learned from. Politics and political science are entirely based on human interactions, or put another way, politics does not exist without communication. All of the *-ologies* (biology, psychology, theology) cannot exist without communication, because the "study of" any subject requires interpretation, understanding, labeling—all based on the development of shared meaning, a meaning shared through communication.

With a better understanding of communication fundamentals, businesses can be more successful, medical professionals can exchange ideas and better interact with patients, political messages can be more effective and more effectively critiqued. Through communication, engineering innovations are more effectively disseminated. Improved communication leads to improved teaching, learning, and mentoring. Understanding communication principles allows for more effective relationship development and conflict resolution. Improving communication is a means for enhancing a democratic society, because through effective communication, it is possible to transmit information, engage in useful debate, encourage the thoughtful exchange of ideas, critique the powerful, and empower the oppressed.

While it is true that communication can be used for ill as well as for good, a good communicator is an ethical communicator. It is good communication that combats the unethical, unscrupulous communication that can hinder the development of a good society. Communication is vital to human society, and well-educated communicators can make great contributions to the world.

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### A Well-Educated Communicator

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The most basic forms of communication do not take much formal study or training. Yet simply practicing the act without thoughtful introspection and assessment limits the growth one might have in improving his or her skills and knowledge. It is always possible to improve communication through systematic study and training. A thoughtful and well-educated student of communication must have a philosophical as well as practical understanding of the art and craft of communicating. Therefore, a well-educated student of communication must understand:

- ... the human nature of communication. The individual influence on all acts of communication opens each message to varying interpretations, resulting in more—or less—effective communication.

- ... the symbolic nature of all communication. Knowing that communication is a human action, and the means by which we communicate are human constructs, allows communicators the ability to embrace the creative opportunities in the art of communicating.

- ... the power of symbols to unite, divide, and shape one's interpretation of the world. A healthy respect for the immense power of symbols is necessary for students to learn to use symbols ethically and responsibly.

- ... the multifaceted nature of symbols provides educated communicators with multiple methods for conveying meaning. Understanding differences in audiences, goals, and various communication strategies makes students more agile in message creation and adaptation in order to

increase the likelihood of successfully and ethically conveying meaning.

- ... the influence of communication technologies on individuals and society. Changes in communication technologies necessarily influence the personal and professional interactions of all communicators. These changes also affect societies in various ways. It is essential for a well-educated communicator to consider these impacts in a meaningful way.

- ... the variety of career opportunities available to an effective communicator. As stated earlier, the tradition of communication is both academic and applied. A well-educated student of communication must consider the professional trades specific to communication, and communication's impact on other professions.

- ... the intertwined nature of communication careers. It is impossible to point to a single communication career that stands alone without influence from or influence on other career fields. It is important for students to understand this mingled discipline in order to prepare effectively for a successful career.

This text is designed to provide readers with an initial introduction to each of the ideas stated above. Each chapter has been selected for its ability to start the reader down the pathway to becoming a well-educated communicator. This overview will serve the reader well in a continued progression through the systematic study of a particular area of communication.

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### The World of Communication: An Overview

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The chapters in this book are arranged in order to provide a logical introduction to communication for someone seeking a well-rounded approach. The first portion is dedicated to understanding key elements of communicative acts. These concepts and ideas transcend any particular area of study or prospective career path, and are applicable in a multitude of contexts. The second portion of this text is designed to stimulate conversation and consideration of the impact of various media.

By understanding the historic transitions and changes in society brought forth by ever evolving communication technology, students become better prepared to be at the vanguard of communication evolution as technologies continue to emerge and converge. This leads to the third portion of the text, the focus on communication professions. The chapters in this section are intended to provide an overview of three broad areas of communication professions: the audio/visual arts of film and television; the informative/critical nature of journalism; and the strategic/persuasive processes of public relations and advertising.

Section One of the book begins with a very basic introductory chapter aimed at helping set the parameters of the study of communication. “Human Communication: What and Why,” by Ronald Adler, George Rodman and Carrie Hutchinson provides insight into the very basics about communication, including what communication is and is not, misunderstandings and myths of communication, and why miscommunication occurs so often.

Chapter 2, “Language,” also by Adler, Rodman and Hutchinson explores one of the most commonly considered parts of communication: the spoken or written word. Because it is the mode of communication most frequently identified as an area of emphasis, it makes sense to start here. However, because language is only one of several ways to communicate, Chapter 3 covers “Nonverbal Communication.” This chapter, by Walid Afifi, expands the parameters of influence and exchange by including physical, visual, and nonlinguistic auditory cues as valuable and influential means of communicating.

The fourth chapter expands further the basic concepts of communication by examining the individual influence on meaning construction. “Viewers Making Meaning,” by Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, approaches communication from the perspective of visual literacy. By discussing the influences and interpretations of visual communication, Sturken and Cartwright drive readers to think about the varied nature of symbols and the human nature of communication.

“On Writing Well,” by Brian Carroll, is the fifth chapter. It focuses on the elements of creating an effective written message in a digital age. The essential elements of good writing are the essential elements of effective communication placed in a particular context and medium. This chapter will help readers improve specific writing skills and think more broadly about effective message construction.

Chapter 6, “Human Communication Theory and Research: Traditions and Models,” by Virginia Richmond and James McCroskey, reviews the ways in which scholars have examined and explained communication over centuries of study. This chapter provides insights into our broader understanding of the field as well as some of the challenges faced by students of such a broad and important discipline.

The seventh chapter, “Communication Ethics,” by Donald K. Wright, outlines key ethical considerations that effective communicators must make. Wright offers an outline of ethical traditions and approaches to ethical decision making, and encourages readers to appreciate more fully the challenges and need for a guiding communication ethic.

Chapter 8, “Communication Law and Regulation in the Digital Age,” by John Pavlik and Shawn McIntosh, examines the history of communication law and contemporary laws of particular concern to communication professionals. Some of the many ideas covered include slander and libel, obscenity laws, FCC powers, the Sullivan Rule, net neutrality, and other key concepts in communication law.

The ninth chapter signals a shift from generally applicable concepts to a focus on mass communication and communication technologies. Chapter 9, “Shaping the American Mass Media: A Brief Overview,” was written by mass communication studies icon Melvin L. DeFleur. This chapter outlines the development of mass communication technologies and systems. DeFleur’s historical perspective provides readers with a deep understanding of the influences mass media have had on the development of American society.

Chapter 10, aptly titled “Understanding Mass Media and the Importance of Media Literacy,” addresses the ways media impact communication. In this chapter, Joseph Turow revisits some key concepts covered in the first chapter and places them in the context of mass media. Moving beyond a simple review and application, Turow also discusses the impact of mass media on society and individuals. The chapter ends with an informative discussion about media literacy—what it means, how it is attained, and why it is vital in an age dominated by mediated communication forums.

In Chapter 11, “Cyberspace, Digital Media, and the Internet,” Jason Whittaker provides a useful overview of evolving communication technologies. Rather than trying to address the most current evolution of technology, a task that is nearly impossible in any textbook format, Whittaker emphasizes an understanding of the emergence of technologies from a historical and developmental perspective. The focus on cyberspace invites readers to consider the larger web of communication technologies that include and extend beyond the Internet.

Chapter 12 “Making Relationships Work,” may initially seem out of place in a section dedicated to mass and mediated communication. However, as one reads the chapter, it becomes clear that while relational communication is traditionally considered personal and dyadic, today’s world of mediated interpersonal communication is dominated by technology and mediation. In this chapter, J. Dan Rothwell guides readers through the complex arena of interpersonal relationships, beginning with traditional approaches to relationship building, maintenance, and dissolution, and quickly moves to a valuable discussion of the impact of emerging technologies on relationships of various sorts. As such, it is ideally situated as a follow-up to readings on mass communication and evolving communication technologies.

Beginning with Chapter 13, “An Overview of the TV Industry,” the text turns toward the communication professions. This chapter provides insights on basic elements of television from a professional perspective. In it, Martie Cook outlines the business side of television, the ever

changing nature of the industry, and the impact of technology on television content and business. This chapter has practical advice for anyone interested in entering the TV industry.

Chapter 14 focuses on film. While less industry-oriented than the previous chapter, “Introduction to Film Studies,” by Amy Villarejo, provides readers with an overview of the cinema, including a brief history of film and film production, an understanding of the breadth of film genres, and insight into the concept of stardom as it relates to film. The chapter encourages readers to consider whether or not there is a difference between cinema, film, and movies.

“Journalism,” by John Pavlik and Shawn McIntosh, is the title and subject of Chapter 15. This chapter provides a summary of the history of journalism and its development into what we now know as the “fourth estate.” It examines the impact of new technologies on news gathering and reporting, including the 24/7 news cycle, non-traditional news sources, and personalization. In addition to discussing convergent journalism, the chapter also addresses enduring concepts related to the field, such as the tension between privacy rights and the public’s right to know. The chapter also covers the business of journalism.

Chapter 16, “The Practice of Public Relations,” by Shannon Bowen, Brad Rawlins, and Thomas Martin, examines some of the basic elements of PR. The chapter begins with an outline of the different types of public relations efforts that exist, and provides examples of each. Building on this foundation, the authors present readers with basic concepts related to the various PR areas such as issue management, strategy building, corporate responsibility, and activism.

This text concludes with the chapter “What Is Advertising?” by Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell. This chapter blends a practical description of key advertising concepts related to both traditional and nontraditional advertising strategies with a critical assessment of the impact of advertising on society. It also briefly addresses the important relationship between advertising and news.

This text is designed to help students begin a serious study of communication by providing a foundational overview. This resource is not meant to present a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of the discipline as a whole, or any individual career field. In order to get the most out of this book, readers must put in some time and effort to understand the text for what it is, and to go beyond the boundaries of these pages for a more complete understanding.

### **Getting the Most Out of *Introduction to the World of Communication***

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This text, an edited selection of readings from a variety of sources, provides readers with many advantages over introductory textbooks by single authors. The writings included here have been selected from dozens of options, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, and each with a different focal point in the world of communication. The advantage of an edited volume such as this is that readers get a wider view of the field and diverse interpretations of the discipline. The authors of the various chapters have different educational and professional backgrounds. Therefore, readers get multiple perspectives on the discipline from individuals with different areas of specialization. Such an approach encourages readers to develop their own perspectives on the various components and careers in communication, and invites further investigation of the field.

An edited volume such as this is also advantageous in that it allows for a new formulation of content that some may find unusual—but highly useful—when first approaching the field of communication. Traditional approaches to an introduction to communication generally fall along two lines: the “communication studies” side (frequently called “speech com”) that focuses on the day-to-day communication components such as interpersonal communication, small group communication, and public speaking; and “mass communication,” which explains the influence of mass media and outlines career

fields in communication. This text combines the two approaches in order to give readers a quality overview of both avenues, and to empower readers with a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of everyday communication, a grasp of the development and impact of communication media, and an understanding of fundamental communication career paths. The goal of this text is to provide the foundation necessary for the reader to become a well-educated communicator.

While there are many advantages to creating and using an edited textbook like this one, there are a few disadvantages as well. Some drawbacks include an occasionally disjointed feel to the text and periodic awkward references to other content. Authors have somewhat distinct voices, meaning that each chapter offers its own tone, vocabulary, and reading comprehension level. Adjusting to these differences should not be difficult, but can be a bit off-putting to a reader at times. Additionally, there are sometimes references within a chapter to contents of the source from which the chapter was originally housed. Those chapter references are not accurate for this text. However, the original source for each chapter of this text is cited at the base of the first page of the chapter. Therefore, the reader can look up additional information if a topic seems particularly interesting.

In order to capitalize on the advantages and limit the disadvantages of using this edited textbook, try the following recommendations:

- Read each chapter carefully and fully. Analyze the content while focusing on what you can learn from each author on each topic.
- Keep a reading journal. Make entries for each chapter that include paraphrased summaries of important concepts and personalized examples that illustrate salient points. Include personal responses to the content: Does the content ring true? Was something particularly insightful or confusing?
- Take advantage of communication technologies to supplement the readings. Feel free to look up concepts, models, and

examples through various search engines. Getting different illustrations of ideas may help make the concepts more memorable and applicable. Also, looking up examples referenced in the chapters will help enhance their informative value.

- Keep a list of key vocabulary words. Mapping together related terms from different chapters will help emphasize the interrelated nature of the concepts and reinforce the importance of oft-repeated ideas.
- Make use of discussion questions and suggested exercises when they are offered. These are designed to increase knowledge and skill.

While these recommendations may seem time consuming, remember that the study of communication is a serious academic and professional pursuit. Learning it properly requires considerable personal investment. The more a reader puts

into the study of communication, the more he or she will get out of it.

## Summary

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The study of communication is an important pursuit grounded in a long and storied history. As both an academic field and an area of professional study, communication intertwines theoretical understanding, practical application, and ethical consideration. It is essential that a well-educated communicator take seriously the power and potential of the art of communication while understanding the larger context in which communication occurs. For this reason, it is necessary that students of communication embrace the responsibility to establish a strong knowledge base in liberal arts, a solid understanding of the fundamentals of communication, and adaptable skill sets appropriate for an ever changing communication environment.