

Reflect & Relate

an introduction to interpersonal communication

FOURTH EDITION



Steven McCornack

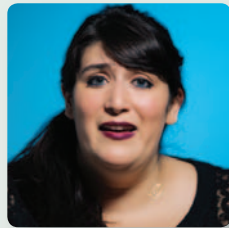
Making Relationship Choices videos take communication to the next level



The *Making Relationship Choices* feature has been expanded to include new, professionally shot videos of challenging interpersonal situations and self-assessment questions on LaunchPad, making the experience even more engaging. Now you'll be able to:

- **Read** the *Making Relationship Choices* background in the text or e-book.
- **React** to the situation.
- **Watch** a video called “The Other Side,” which shows an alternative point of view.
- **Consider** that there are two sides to every encounter.
- **Reevaluate** your initial response through self-assessment questions.
- **Build** a deeper sense of empathy and understanding.

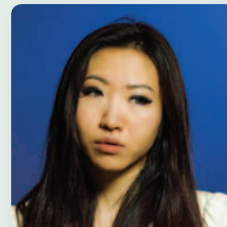
▶ *How would you react to your best friend who's been making some questionable choices and posting about it on Facebook?*



▶ *What's the deal with the guy in your study group who's always late to meetings and doesn't seem to take the group seriously?*

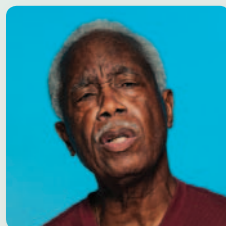


◀ *Things have been tense between you and your brother since your grandmother died—and now he's not even speaking to you.*

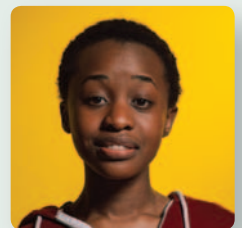


◀ *Your cousin Britney crashed her car and dropped out of college.... Ugh.*

▶ *You've never been that close with your dad, but things got worse last weekend.*



▶ *Your friend Karina is back from the Peace Corps, but she's not the same.*



Making Relationship Choices by chapter

Chapter 1: Introducing Interpersonal Communication: Kaitlyn's story

Chapter 2: Considering Self: Jonathan's story

Chapter 3: Perceiving Others: Dylan's story

Chapter 4: Experiencing and Expressing Emotions: Sam's story

Chapter 5: Understanding Culture: Mom's story

Chapter 6: Listening Actively: Ana's story

Chapter 7: Communicating Verbally: Britney's story

Chapter 8: Communicating Nonverbally: Dakota's story

Chapter 9: Managing Conflict and Power: Devdas's story

Chapter 10: Relationships with Romantic Partners: Javi's story

Chapter 11: Relationships with Family Members: Dad's story

Chapter 12: Relationships with Friends: Karina's story

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Instructor's
Annotated Edition

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FOURTH EDITION

Steven McCornack

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

Instructor's Annotations by **Alicia Alexander**

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville



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One of the greatest blessings we all experience as teachers of interpersonal communication is the chance to connect with an array of interesting, complicated, and diverse people. Each term, a new window of contact opens. As we peer through it on that first day, we see the faces of those who will comprise our class. They are strangers to us at that moment—an enigmatic group distinguished only by visible differences in skin, hair, and mode of dress. But over the weeks that follow, they become individuated *people*. We learn the names that symbolize their now-familiar faces, as well as their unique cultural identities: the intersection of ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, age, and economic background that comprises each of them. And because it's an *interpersonal* class, we also learn their *stories*: the tragedies that linger in sadness etched upon their brows; the aspirations that urge them to lean forward in knowledge-anticipation. Then the term ends, the window closes, and the shade is drawn. All that remains are the after-images imprinted on the retina of our memories: Alex, who came out of the closet—but only to you; Sonia, who struggled to surmount stereotypes of her Pakistani ancestry; Lourdes, who, as the first in her family to attend college, brought to your class all the hopes and dreams of multiple generations.

This seemingly limitless breadth of cultural variation should evoke a sense of unbridgeable distance. But instead, these people whom we come to call *our* students share a common bond that serves to connect them: *they all want to improve their relationships*. They bring to our classes romantic heartbreaks, battles with family members, and betrayals of friends; and they look to us to give them practical, relevant knowledge that will empower them to choose wisely in dealing with these challenges. The skills and knowledge that we provide transform their lives in powerful, constructive ways. The legacy of such impact is found in their e-mails and Facebook messages to us months, and even years, later: “I just wanted you to know that your class changed my life.”

It is this combination of cultural diversity, commonality in goals and concerns, and potential for transformative impact that compelled me to write *Reflect & Relate*, Fourth Edition. But to understand the fourth edition, you need to know the backstory of the editions that precede it. When I wrote the first edition of *Reflect & Relate*, I wanted to provide my fellow teachers and their students with a textbook that was welcoming, friendly, personal, trustworthy, and practical—a book that was rock solid in content, represented the finest of new and classic scholarship in our discipline, and provided a clear sense of the field as a domain of scientific endeavor, not just “common sense.” I also wanted a book that didn't read like a typical textbook but was so engaging that students might read through entire chapters before they realized they had done so. And, of course, my core mission: a book that didn't just tell students what to do but taught students *how* to systematically reason through interpersonal communication challenges. Students could walk away from reading it knowing how to solve their own

problems and flexibly adapt to dynamic changes in contexts and relationships. I also had a very particular view of how I wanted to treat *culture*. Given that cultural variation permeates nearly every aspect of our interpersonal lives, I wanted to have cultural content integrated seamlessly *throughout* the text, rather than sequestered into a single chapter.

As the years have gone by, however, I've come to realize that coverage of culture within the book should reflect our (and our students') *true* experience of culture. Culture isn't just *broadly* disseminated *across* our daily lives; *culture runs deep*. Our cultural backgrounds play a fundamental role in shaping our perceptions, our emotions, our communication, and our relationships. This idea of "culture broad *and* deep" served as the guiding metaphor for my revision: cover cultural applications across all chapters, but also have a chapter devoted to deeply exploring culture. The single biggest change returning users will find in this edition is the inclusion of a new culture chapter, where they'll find classic and new scholarship related to the impact of cultural difference on interpersonal communication and relationships, including coverage of collectivism and individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity and femininity, prejudice, ethnocentrism, and world-mindedness.

At the same time, the fourth edition also contains a ton of new and recent research representing the very best of interpersonal scholarship, including coverage of online competence, the impact of mobile devices on intimacy and disclosure, self-concept clarity, empathy mind-sets, anxiety and emotional contagion, the neuroscience of romantic passion, and blended families. Scores of new examples—*Girls*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Babadook*, to name a few—will resonate with students and illustrate key concepts for them. Meanwhile, the new *Instructor's Annotated Edition* offers more instructional support than ever before.

Also new to the fourth edition is the exciting evolution of the flagship feature of the book: *Making Relationship Choices*. Traditionally, this exercise has challenged students with a perplexing case study in which they must reason through to an optimal solution. For this edition of *Reflect & Relate*, we have added a potent and provocative twist: students read the "story" of the situation and generate a communicative solution, but *then* they have the opportunity to go online and see "The Other Side" of the story, as told in a video recording by the other person in the situation. Subsequently, students can revisit their initial thought on a solution to assess whether it's still the most competent way of dealing with the situation. This feature provides an unprecedented opportunity for students to build and refine their perspective-taking and empathy skills.

I'm thrilled about all that *Reflect & Relate*, Fourth Edition has to offer you and your students, and I would love to hear what you think about this new edition. Please feel free to drop me a line at smcc911@uab.edu or on Facebook so that we can chat about the book and the course, or just talk shop about teaching interpersonal communication.

What's New in the Fourth Edition?

The Fourth Edition of *Reflect & Relate* is truly modern and digital-forward, covering the most important topics in interpersonal communication and connecting them to digital media.

- **Culture!** Expanded coverage of culture in a new chapter, and *Focus on Culture* features throughout all chapters. Since culture permeates every aspect of interpersonal communication, *Reflect & Relate*, Fourth Edition, devotes a chapter to this vital topic. This chapter explores the definitions of *culture* and *co-cultures*, and also dives into specific topics, such as emotional displays, views of time, overcoming prejudice, communication accommodation, and regional dialects. Culture is also covered in other chapters, both in text sections and in *Focus on Culture* boxes, addressing the importance of students being aware of how culture influences interpersonal communication.
- **New videos for the *Making Relationship Choices* feature now help students see a different point of view.** Unique to *Reflect & Relate*, the *Making Relationship Choices* feature presents a challenging interpersonal situation and then helps students reason through it by drawing on the knowledge and skills they've acquired from the text and the course. In the fourth edition, *Making Relationship Choices* has been expanded to include brand-new, professionally shot videos and multimedia content on LaunchPad to make the experience even more engaging. Each video shows the communication partner's point of view; the confessional-style videos express the thoughts and feelings of your best friend, your sister, your coworker, your dad, and other important people in your life. Raw and emotional, the videos provide a window into what the other person is really thinking, and help students practice perspective-taking and build empathy.
- **Extensive coverage of computer-mediated communication** meets students where they are: online. Our modes of communication are changing. Whether via app, text, tweet, or note, learning appropriate digital communication skills is vital to successful communication. Specific examples dedicated to computer-mediated communication help students refine and improve their pervasive use of communication technologies.
- **Access to LaunchPad, a dynamic and easy-to-use platform.** LaunchPad makes instructors' lives easier by putting everything in one place, combining the full e-book with carefully chosen videos, quizzes, activities, instructor's resources, and LearningCurve adaptive quizzing. LaunchPad allows instructors to create reading, video, or quiz assignments in seconds, as well as VideoTools that enable students to embed their own videos or custom content. Instructors can also keep an eye on their students' progress throughout the semester.



(From top to bottom) Amy Eckert/Getty Images; © Mika/Corbis; China Photos/Getty Images; © David Grossman/The Image Works

Reflect & Relate offers lots of new content in areas that interest students the most

Topics like multitasking online, the impact of mobile devices on intimacy and disclosure, social media, and supportive communication can be found in every chapter. This new content reflects issues of concern for today's students and represents the very best scholarship within the field of interpersonal communication.

- **Current, powerful stories and images hook students' interest.** *Reflect & Relate* is full of new, current, and relatable examples that students will want to read. The text and photo program pulls from pop culture—everything from *Scandal*, *Orange Is the New Black*, and *The Dallas Buyer's Club* to *Game of Thrones*—as well as current events and real stories from the author and his students to provide content that resonates with students and is easy to show and discuss in class.
- **New chapter openers feature a diverse group of contributors who share compelling stories** about the impact of interpersonal communication in everyday life. New openers include an interview with the dean of a “Santa School,” Jennifer Andrews, on the important role of listening; and an exploration of the friendships in *SpongeBob SquarePants*. The chapter openers share appealing stories that students can look to, learn from, and use to transform their own lives and relationships.

Flagship Features

Reflect & Relate Offers an Accessible, Innovative Look at the Discipline

- **Reflect & Relate presents a fresh perspective on interpersonal communication.** Discussions of classic and cutting-edge scholarship from interpersonal communication, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics are woven together. Unlike other texts, *Reflect & Relate* continues to focus on how these concepts are linked to interpersonal communication and how communication skills can be improved.
- **Reflect & Relate balances current topics with classic coverage.** The text integrates coverage of social media, workplace bullying, multitasking online, and other novel topics with familiar topics like self-awareness, conflict approaches, and nonverbal communication codes.
- **Integrated discussions on culture and gender appear in every chapter.** *Reflect & Relate* treats individual and cultural influences as integral parts of the story by discussing the myths and realities of how race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and age shape communication. In the fourth edition, new examples and updated coverage include the differences between high- and low-context cultures, and how gender equality and inequality around the world influence power.

- **Reflect & Relate offers clear explanations, engaging examples, and an attractive art program.** The text is truly a page-turner, engaging students' interest with compelling writing. Nearly every major concept is illustrated with examples drawn from pop culture, history, current events, and everyday life—examples that reflect the diversity of students themselves in terms of age, gender, lifestyle, occupation, and culture. Meanwhile, the appealing and pedagogically sound art program works with the examples to grab students' attention and focus them on the subject at hand.

Reflect & Relate Helps Students Look More Deeply at Themselves—and Develop Skills for a Lifetime

- **Self-Reflection questions foster critical self-awareness.** Self-awareness is essential for competent communication, and carefully placed *Self-Reflection* questions show students how to examine their own experiences and communication in light of theory and research. As a result, students gain a better understanding of concepts—such as emotional intelligence, stereotyping, and relationship ethics—and of themselves. They also learn the habit of ongoing critical self-reflection, which can lead to better communication outcomes.
- **Skills Practice exercises strengthen students' abilities.** Every chapter includes three *Skills Practice* exercises—one devoted to online communication—that give step-by-step instruction on practical skills, such as appropriately self-disclosing and interpreting nonverbal codes. *Skills Practice* activities are specifically designed to make it easy for students to implement them in their everyday lives.
- **Focus on Culture boxes and Self-Quiz exercises help students gain knowledge about their own communication.** *Focus on Culture* boxes challenge students to think about how the influence of their own culture shapes their communication. Rooted in research, *Self-Quiz* exercises help students analyze their strengths and weaknesses so that they can focus on how to improve their communication.

Reflect & Relate Helps Students Improve Their Relationships

- **Romantic, family, friend, and workplace relationships are explored.** Tailoring communication strategies to specific relationships is both essential and challenging, so *Reflect & Relate* devotes three full chapters and an appendix to these key communication contexts, giving students in-depth knowledge along with practical strategies for using communication to improve their relationships. Special emphasis is given to relationship maintenance—a key relational concern many students bring to the classroom.
- **Unique Making Relationship Choices case studies take application to a new level.** These activities challenge students to draw on their knowledge when facing difficult relationship issues and to create their own solutions.



(From top to bottom) SHONDALAND/ABC STUDIOS/THE KOBAL COLLECTION; Jessica Miglio/© Netflix/ Everett Collection; Anne Marie Fox/© Focus Features/Everett Collection; Helen Sloan/© HBO/ Courtesy: Everett Collection

Instead of just asking students “What would you do?” or offering them solutions, *Making Relationship Choices* teaches students how to systematically reason through problems in order to generate their own constructive solutions. Students walk step-by-step through realistic scenarios—critically self-reflecting, considering others’ perspectives, determining best outcomes, and identifying potential roadblocks—to make informed communication decisions. They then have the opportunity to experience “The Other Side” of the story by going online to hear and see a first-person account of the situation by watching a video. Becoming aware of both sides of the story allows students to reevaluate their initial reaction and response.

A Multifaceted Digital Experience Brings It All Together

LaunchPad helps students learn, study, and apply communication concepts.

Digital resources for *Reflect & Relate* are available in LaunchPad, a dynamic new platform that combines a collection of relevant video clips, self-assessments, e-book content, and LearningCurve adaptive quizzing in a simple design. LaunchPad can be packaged at a significant discount with *Reflect & Relate*, or it can be purchased separately.

- **NEW *Making Relationship Choices* videos** help students see “The Other Side” of the scenario, helping them develop empathy.
- **LearningCurve provides adaptive quizzing and a personalized learning program.** In every chapter, call-outs prompt students to tackle the game-like LearningCurve quizzes to test their knowledge and reinforce learning of the material. Based on research as to how students learn, LearningCurve motivates students to engage with course materials, while the reporting tools let you see what content students have mastered, allowing you to adapt your teaching plan to their needs.
- **LaunchPad videos help students see concepts in action and encourage self-reflection.** The LaunchPad video feature connects theories in the text with online video illustrations that help students understand interpersonal communication. Videos, including new clips on Culture and Mediated Communication, help students *see* theory in action, while accompanying reflection questions help them *apply* it to their own experiences. More than 70 video activities are easily assignable and make useful journal prompts or discussion starters. An interactive feature, each video activity includes two reflection questions that encourage students to consider how the concepts may impact their own relationships and lives. For ideas on how to integrate video into your course, see the *Instructor’s Annotated Edition* and the Instructor’s Resource Manual. To access the videos, and for a complete list of available clips, see page 458 or visit macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e.

- **VideoTools makes it easy to create assignments and evaluate videos.** The functionality of VideoTools enables instructors to create video assignments. Instructors and students can add video, use time-based comments to discuss video, and assess video using rubrics.

Digital and Print Formats

Whether it's print, digital, or a value option, choose the best format for you. For more information on these resources, please visit the online catalog at macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e/catalog.

LaunchPad for *Reflect & Relate* is a new platform that dramatically enhances teaching and learning. LaunchPad combines the full e-book, videos, quizzes and self-assessments, instructor's resources, and LearningCurve adaptive quizzing. To get access to all multimedia resources, package LaunchPad at a significant discount with a print book or order LaunchPad on its own.

***Reflect & Relate* is available as a print text.** To get the most out of the book, package LaunchPad at a significant discount with the text.

The Loose-leaf Edition of *Reflect & Relate* features the same print text in a convenient, budget-priced format, designed to fit into any three-ring binder. The loose-leaf version can be packaged at a significant discount with LaunchPad.

***Reflect & Relate* e-book option.** The e-book for *Reflect & Relate* includes the same content as the print book and allows students to add their own notes and highlight important information. Instructors can customize the e-book by adding their own content and deleting or rearranging the chapters.

Resources for Students and Instructors

For more information on these resources or to learn about package options, please visit the online catalog at macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e/catalog.

Resources for Students

The Essential Guide to Intercultural Communication, by Jennifer Willis-Rivera (University of Wisconsin, River Falls). This brief and useful guide offers an overview of key communication areas—including perception, verbal and nonverbal communication, interpersonal relationships, and organizations—from a uniquely intercultural perspective.

The Essential Guide to Group Communication, Second Edition, by Dan O'Hair (University of Kentucky) and Mary Wiemann (Santa Barbara City College). This concise and incisive text explains the role of group communication within organizations and other settings, and contains useful guidelines for acting as an effective leader, avoiding groupthink, and achieving optimal results.



The Essential Guide to Rhetoric, by William M. Keith (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee) and Christian O. Lundberg (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill). Written by two leaders in the communication field, this concise guide combines concrete, relevant examples with jargon-free language to provide an accessible and balanced overview of key historical and contemporary rhetorical theories.

Media Career Guide: Preparing for Jobs in the 21st Century, Tenth Edition, by Sherri Hope Culver (Temple University). Practical, student friendly, and revised to include the most recent statistics on the job market, this guide includes a comprehensive directory of media jobs, practical tips, and career guidance for students considering a major in the media industry.

Resources for Instructors

For more information or to order or download the instructor's resources, please visit the online catalog. The Instructor's Resource Manual, Test Bank, and lecture slides are also available on LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e.

Instructor's Annotated Edition for Reflect & Relate, Fourth Edition, edited by Alicia Alexander (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville). A valuable resource for instructors with any level of experience, the comprehensive *Instructor's Annotated Edition* provides more than 120 suggestions for activities and assignments, recommendations for videos and Web sites that illustrate course concepts, and tips for starting in-class discussions. In addition, a special introduction from author Steven McCornack at the front of the *Instructor's Annotated Edition* provides insight into how the book works, while the Activity Guide—a collection of classroom activities submitted by interpersonal communication instructors around the country—is sure to spark ideas for innovative activities in your classroom.

Online Instructor's Resource Manual for Reflect & Relate, Fourth Edition, by Curt VanGeison (St. Charles Community College), Joseph Ortiz (Scottsdale Community College), and Marion Boyer (Kalamazoo Valley Community College, Emeritus). The comprehensive Instructor's Resource Manual is available on LaunchPad and from the Instructor Resources tab at macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate/catalog. It includes teaching notes on managing an interpersonal communication course, organization, and assessment; sample syllabi; advice on addressing ESL and intercultural issues; and tips for using the pedagogical features of *Reflect & Relate*. In addition, a teaching guide provides suggestions for implementing the book's thorough coverage of cultural issues. Every chapter also includes lecture outlines and class discussion starters, class and group exercises, assignment suggestions, video and music recommendations, and Web site links.

Computerized Test Bank for Reflect & Relate, Fourth Edition, by Charles J. Korn (Northern Virginia Community College). Available on LaunchPad and from the Instructor Resources tab at macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate/catalog, the

Test Bank is one of the largest for the introductory interpersonal communication course, with more than 100 multiple-choice, true/false, short-answer, and essay questions for every chapter. This easy-to-use Test Bank also identifies the level of difficulty for each question, includes the number of the page on which the answer is found, and connects every question to a learning objective.

Teaching Interpersonal Communication, Second Edition, by Elizabeth J. Natalle (University of North Carolina–Greensboro) and Alicia Alexander (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville). Written by award-winning instructors, this essential resource provides all the tools instructors need to develop, teach, and manage a successful interpersonal communication course. New and seasoned instructors alike will benefit from the practical advice, scholarly insight, suggestions for integrating research and practice into the classroom—as well as the new chapter dedicated to teaching online.

Coordinating the Communication Course: A Guidebook, by Deanna Fassett and John Warren. This guidebook offers the most practical advice on every topic central to the coordinator/director role. Starting with setting a strong foundation, this professional resource continues on with thoughtful guidance, tips, and best practices on such crucial topics as creating community across multiple sections, orchestrating meaningful assessment, and hiring and training instructors. Model course materials, recommended readings, and insights from successful coordinators make this resource a must-have for anyone directing a course in communication.

Lecture slides for *Reflect & Relate* provide support for important concepts addressed in each chapter, including graphics of key figures and questions for class discussion. The slides are available for download on LaunchPad and from the Instructor Resources tab at macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate/catalog.

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- 1 Introducing Interpersonal Communication 2
-

part one / Interpersonal Essentials

- 2 Considering Self 34
 - 3 Perceiving Others 68
 - 4 Experiencing and Expressing Emotions 100
-

part two / Interpersonal Skills

- 5 Understanding Culture 132
 - 6 Listening Actively 160
 - 7 Communicating Verbally 188
 - 8 Communicating Nonverbally 220
 - 9 Managing Conflict and Power 250
-

part three / Interpersonal Relationships

- 10 Relationships with Romantic Partners 284
- 11 Relationships with Family Members 324
- 12 Relationships with Friends 354
- Appendix** Relationships in the Workplace 384

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Preface vii



1 Introducing Interpersonal Communication 2

What Is Communication? 6

Defining Communication 6

Understanding Communication Models 8

What Is Interpersonal Communication? 10

Defining Interpersonal Communication 11

Principles of Interpersonal Communication 13

Motives for Interpersonal Communication 16

Research in Interpersonal Communication 19

What Is Interpersonal Communication Competence? 20

Understanding Competence 21

Self-Quiz: Test Your Self-Monitoring 23

Improving Your Competence Online 24

Issues in Interpersonal Communication 27

Culture 27

Gender and Sexual Orientation 27

Focus on Culture: Intercultural Competence 29


Online Communication 29

The Dark Side of Interpersonal Relationships 29

▶ Making Relationship Choices: Dealing with a Difficult Friend 30

The Journey Ahead 32

Chapter Review 33

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part one / Interpersonal Essentials



2 Considering Self 34

The Components of Self 37

Self-Awareness 37

Self-Concept 39

Self-Quiz: Test Your Self-Concept Clarity 40

Self-Esteem 40

Focus on Culture: How Does the Media Shape Your Self-Esteem? 43

The Sources of Self 43

Gender and Self 44

Family and Self 44

Culture and Self 46

Presenting Your Self 48

Maintaining Your Public Self 50

The Importance of Online Self-Presentation 51

Improving Your Online Self-Presentation 54

The Relational Self 55

Opening Your Self to Others 55

Your Hidden and Revealed Self 58

Disclosing Your Self to Others 59

Improving Your Self 63

 **Making Relationship Choices:** Workplace Self-Disclosure 64

Chapter Review 67

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3 Perceiving Others 68

Perception as a Process 71

Selecting Information 72

Organizing the Information You've Selected 72

Interpreting the Information 73

Reducing Uncertainty 77

Influences on Perception 79

Perception and Culture 79

Perception and Gender 81

Focus on Culture: Perceiving Race 83

Perception and Personality 83

Forming Impressions of Others 86

Constructing Gestalts 87

Calculating Algebraic Impressions 89

Using Stereotypes 90

Improving Your Perception of Others 92

Offering Empathy 92

Self-Quiz: Test Your Empathy 93

Checking Your Perception 94

Practicing Responsible Perception 95 **Making Relationship Choices:** Balancing Impressions and Empathy 96**Chapter Review** 99 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e

4 Experiencing and Expressing Emotions 100

The Nature of Emotion 103

Defining Emotion 103

Feelings and Moods 105

Types of Emotions 107

Focus on Culture: Happiness across Cultures 108**Forces Shaping Emotion** 109

Personality 110

Gender 112

Managing Your Emotional Experience and Expression 112

Emotional Intelligence 113

Managing Your Emotions After They Occur 114

Preventing Emotions 115

Reappraising Your Emotions 116

Emotional Challenges 117

Anger 117

Self-Quiz: Test Your Chronic Hostility 118

Online Communication and Empathy Deficits 119

Passion 121

Grief 122

Living a Happy Emotional Life 126 **Making Relationship Choices:** Managing Anger and Providing Support 128**Chapter Review** 131 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e

part two / Interpersonal Skills



5

Understanding Culture 132

What Is Culture? 135

Culture Defined 136

Co-Cultures 137

Focus on Culture: Millennials and Technology 139

Prejudice 141

Cultural Influences on Communication 143

Individualism versus Collectivism 143

Uncertainty Avoidance 144

Power Distance 145

High and Low Context 147

Emotion Displays 148

Masculinity versus Femininity 149

Views of Time 151

Creating Intercultural Competence 152

World-Mindedness 152

Attributional Complexity 153

Communication Accommodation 153

Self-Quiz: Are You World-Minded or Ethnocentric? 154

Embracing Difference 155

 **Making Relationship Choices:** Parent-Child Culture Clash 156

Chapter Review 159

 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



6

Listening Actively 160

Listening: A Five-Step Process 163

Receiving 164

Attending 165

Self-Quiz: Multitasking and Attention 166

Understanding 167

Responding 168

Recalling 170

The Five Functions of Listening 171

Listening to Comprehend 171

Listening to Discern	172
Listening to Analyze	172
Listening to Appreciate	172
Listening to Support	173
Adapting Your Listening Purpose	173

Understanding Listening Styles 173

Four Listening Styles	174
Gender Differences in Listening Styles	176
Culture and Listening Styles	177
Focus on Culture: Men Just Don't Listen!	177


Preventing Incompetent Listening 178

Selective Listening	178
Eavesdropping	180
Pseudo-Listening	181
Aggressive Listening	181
Narcissistic Listening	182

The Gift of Active Listening 183

 Making Relationship Choices: Listening When You Don't Want To	184
--	-----

Chapter Review 187

 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



7

Communicating Verbally

 188
Characteristics of Verbal Communication 191

Language Is Symbolic	191
Language Is Governed by Rules	193
Language Is Flexible	193
Language Is Cultural	194
Language Evolves	195

Functions of Verbal Communication 196

Sharing Meaning	197
Shaping Thought	197
Naming	199
Focus on Culture: Challenging Traditional Gender Labels	200
Performing Actions	201
Crafting Conversations	201
Managing Relationships	203

Cooperative Verbal Communication 204

Understandable Messages	205
-------------------------	-----

Washington Crossing the Delaware River, 25th December 1776, 1851 (oil on canvas) (copy of an original painted in 1848), Leutze, Emanuel Gottlieb (1816–68)/Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library

- Using “I” Language 207
- Using “We” Language 208
- Gender and Cooperative Verbal Communication 208

Barriers to Cooperative Verbal Communication 209

- Verbal Aggression 210
- Deception 211
- Self-Quiz:** Test Your Deception Acceptance 212
- Defensive Communication 213
- Communication Apprehension 214

The Power of Verbal Communication 215

-  **Making Relationship Choices:** Dealing with Difficult Truths 216

Chapter Review 219

 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



8 Communicating Nonverbally 220

Principles of Nonverbal Communication 223

- Nonverbal Communication Uses Multiple Channels 224
- Nonverbal Communication Is More Ambiguous 224
- Nonverbal Communication Has Fewer Rules 224
- Nonverbal Communication Has More Meaning 225
- Nonverbal Communication Is Influenced by Culture 225
- Nonverbal Communication Is Influenced by Gender 226
- Nonverbal Communication Is Liberated Through Technology 228
- Nonverbal and Verbal Combine to Create Communication 229

Nonverbal Communication Codes 229

- Communicating Through Body Movements 230
- Communicating Through Voice 232
- Communicating Through Touch 234
- Focus on Culture:** Touch and Distance 235
- Communicating Through Personal Space 236
- Communicating Through Physical Appearance 237
- Communicating Through Objects 238
- Communicating Through the Environment 239

Functions of Nonverbal Communication 239


- Expressing Emotion 240
- Conveying Meanings 241
- Presenting Self 241
- Managing Interactions 242
- Defining Relationships 243

Self-Quiz: Test Your Nonverbal Dominance Knowledge 245

Competently Managing Your Nonverbal Communication 245

 **Making Relationship Choices:** Dealing with Mixed Messages 246

Chapter Review 249

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9

Managing Conflict and Power 250

Conflict and Interpersonal Communication 253

What Is Conflict? 253

Conflict in Relationships 255

Power and Conflict 256

Power's Defining Characteristics 257

Power Currencies 259

Power and Gender 260

Power and Culture 260

Handling Conflict 261

Approaches to Handling Conflict 262

Gender and Handling Conflict 266

Culture and Handling Conflict 267

Focus on Culture: Accommodation and Radical Pacifism 267

Technology and Handling Conflict 268

Conflict Endings 270

Short-Term Conflict Resolutions 271

Long-Term Conflict Outcomes 273

Challenges to Handling Conflict 274

Self-Enhancing Thoughts 274

Destructive Messages 275

Self-Quiz: Test Your Understanding of Destructive Thoughts 275

Serial Arguments 276


Physical Violence 277

Unsolvable Disputes 278

Managing Conflict and Power 279

 **Making Relationship Choices:** Dealing with Family Conflict 280

Chapter Review 283

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part three / Interpersonal Relationships



10

Relationships with Romantic Partners 284

Defining Romantic Relationships 287

Liking and Loving 287

Different Types of Romantic Love 288

Key Elements of Romantic Relationships 290

Romantic Attraction 293

Proximity 293

Physical Attractiveness 294

Similarity 295

Reciprocal Liking 296

Resources 296

Technology and Romantic Attraction 297

Relationship Development and Deterioration 298

Coming Together 298

Coming Apart 301

Maintaining Romantic Relationships 303

Maintenance Strategies 304

Maintaining Romance across Distance 308

Deciding Whether to Maintain 309

The Dark Side of Romantic Relationships 311

Betrayal 312

Self-Quiz: How Often Do You Betray Romantic Partners? 312

Jealousy 315

Focus on Culture: Infidelity Internationally 316


Relational Intrusion 316

Dating Violence 318

The Hard Work of Successful Love 319

 **Making Relationship Choices:** Managing Jealousy about a Partner's Ex 320

Chapter Review 323

 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



11 Relationships with Family Members 324

Defining Family 327

Defining Characteristics of Family 328

Types of Families 329

Family Stories 331

Communicating in Families 334

Communication Dimensions 335

Family Communication Patterns 335

Maintaining Family Relationships 337

Maintenance Strategies for Families 338

Technology and Family Maintenance 339

Dealing with Family Dialectics 340

Focus on Culture: Autonomy and Class: Helicopter Parents 342

Family Relationship Challenges 344


Stepfamily Transition 344

Parental Favoritism 346

Self-Quiz: How Much Family Favoritism Exists? 347

Interparental Conflict 348

The Primacy of Family 349

 **Making Relationship Choices:** Struggling with Family Transitions 350

Chapter Review 353

 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



12 Relationships with Friends 354

The Nature of Friendship 357

Friendship Defined 357

Friendship Functions 359

Friendship across the Life Span 360

Friendship, Culture, and Gender 361

Friendship and Technology 361

Types of Friendships 363
Best Friends 363
Cross-Category Friendships 364
Focus on Culture: Cross-Orientation Male Friendships 367

Maintaining Friendships 368
Following Friendship Rules 369
Maintenance Strategies for Friends 370

Friendship Challenges 372
Betrayal 373
Geographic Separation 374
Self-Quiz: Friendship Distance-Durability 376
Attraction: Romance and FWB Relationships 376

The Importance of Friends 379
▶ Making Relationship Choices: Choosing between Friends 380

Chapter Review 383

 **LaunchPad** For LearningCurve adaptive quizzing and over 100 videos to help you understand key concepts, go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



Appendix

Relationships in the Workplace 384

The Nature of Workplace Relationships A-1

The Culture of the Workplace A-1
Networks in the Workplace A-2
Organizational Climates A-4
Technology in the Workplace A-6

Peer Relationships A-7

Types of Peer Relationships A-7
Maintaining Peer Relationships A-9

Mixed-Status Relationships A-10

Managing Up A-11
Communicating with Subordinates A-12
Focus on Culture: The Model Minority Myth A-13
Maintaining Mixed-Status Relationships A-15

Challenges to Workplace Relationships A-16

Workplace Bullying A-17
Workplace Romances A-19
Sexual Harassment A-20

Workplace Relationships and Human Happiness A-22

Review A-24

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Glossary G-1

References R-1

Name Index I-1

Subject Index I-9

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Valerie Manno Giroux
University of Miami

“I found myself spending hours reading and thinking about the material, especially the opening vignettes and the *Making Relationship Choices* features—two strengths of the text.”

Diane Bazinski
Colorado Christian University

“*Reflect & Relate* is an ideal textbook for an introductory course in interpersonal communication. The author has compiled a thoughtful presentation of the importance of interpersonal communication in our daily lives.”

Curt VanGeison
St. Charles Community College

“*Reflect & Relate* is up-to-date and current, showing great images from past and present, which bring both historical culture and popular culture to life.”

Allison Edgley
Union County College



“I believe that the most important thing a textbook can teach students is how to make better communication decisions so that they can build happier and healthier interpersonal relationships.”

Steven McCornack grew up in Seattle, Washington, in the years before Microsoft and Amazon. For as long as he can remember, he has been fascinated with how people create, maintain, and disband close relationships, especially the challenges confronting romantic couples. As an undergraduate at the University of Washington, he pursued this passion by studying with Malcolm “Mac” Parks, who inspired Steve to devote his life to interpersonal communication, teaching, and research.

Steve moved to the Midwest in 1984, pursuing his graduate studies under the tutelage of Barbara O’Keefe at the University of Illinois, where he received his master’s degree and his PhD. After twenty-seven years at Michigan State University, Steve moved to the South, where he is now a Full Professor at the University of Alabama Birmingham. Steve has published more than 30 articles in leading communication journals and has received several prestigious awards and fellowships related to undergraduate teaching, including the Lilly Endowment Teaching Fellowship, the Amoco Foundation Excellence-in-Teaching Award, the MSU All-University Teacher/Scholar Award, and the MSU Alumni Association Undergraduate Teaching Award. Steve was the 2013 recipient of the National Communication Association’s Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education.

To Steve, authoring *Reflect & Relate* represents the culmination of 30 years of devout interest in how best to share knowledge of interpersonal communication theory and research with undergraduate students. His courses are some of the most popular on campus. Other than his love of teaching, Steve’s principal passions are his family (wife Kelly and three redheaded sons, Kyle, Colin, and Conor), playing and listening to music, yoga, Kona coffee, his Subaru WRX, and meditation.

For Kelly, Kyle, Colin, and Conor:

“You know how everyone’s always saying, ‘seize the moment’? I don’t know, I’m kinda thinkin’ it’s the other way around—you know, like, the moment seizes us.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. It’s constant—the moments. It’s just, it’s like, it’s always ‘right now,’ you know?”

—*Boyhood* (2014)

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Reflect & Relate

an introduction to interpersonal communication



LearningCurve can help you review the material in this chapter. Go to LaunchPad: macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e



1

Introducing Interpersonal Communication



Interpersonal communication is the bridge that connects us to others.

She is home with the kids, who are alternating between angry and clingy.¹ She's trying to cook dinner, but the smoke detector keeps blaring, causing the dog to bark. Sure enough, it's at this moment that the phone rings. Glancing at the caller ID, she sees it is the caller she'd hoped for. She answers, because despite the chaos around her, this could be their last conversation. He says, "I've been waiting in line for two hours to talk, and I only have ten minutes. I've had a really bad day and miss you all." What should she say? Choice #1: *Lie*. Tell him everything's fine, and mask her frustration with coolness. But he'll sense her aloofness and leave the conversation worrying about why she is distracted. Is she angry with him? Having an affair? Choice #2: *Be honest*. Tell him that things are chaotic, and ask whether he can talk to the kids for a minute while she clears her head.

Military wife, author, and *New York Times* columnist Melissa Seligman has lived this scene many times during her husband's combat deployments. She has learned to choose the second path because of the inescapable connection between communication choices and relationship outcomes. As she describes, "When a family member is gone for a *year* at a time, how can you sustain closeness? How do you maintain a three-dimensional marriage in a two-dimensional state? The only way is through open, honest, and loving communication."

¹All information that follows is adapted from a personal interview with the author, July 2011. Published with permission from Melissa Seligman.



Virginia Hagin

1 / Introducing Interpersonal Communication

The Seligmans use multiple media to maintain intimacy, including webcams and exchanging videos, e-mails, phone calls, and letters.

Melissa notes, “This way, we have a rounded communication relationship. We even send care packages of leaves, sand, pine needles, or pieces of fabric with cologne or perfume, to awaken the senses and cement the memories we have of each other.” They also journal, then read each other’s writings when they are reunited. The journals “have the dates, circumstances, and what went unsaid in the day-to-day minutiae of our lives. They are our way of staying connected when ripped apart.”

Melissa Seligman uses similarly diverse communication in her professional work with military support groups. “In my working life, I am on Facebook, Skype, and Web conference calls all the time. Texting. Instant-messaging. All of these are essential.” But she also is

mindful of the limits of technology, recognizing the importance of tailoring the medium to the task. “Technology cannot sustain a relationship, and relying on it to do so will create chaos. Rather, choosing the technology that best suits an individual’s

relationship is the key.”

Through years of experience, Melissa Seligman and her family have learned to cope with intense versions of the challenges we *all* face in our relationships. How can I better manage my anger and frustration? What can I do to maintain closeness with those I love? How can I communicate in a way that’s both honest *and* kind? In 2010, she and coauthor Christina Piper released a children’s book, *A Heart Apart*, which helps young children cope with the absence of military parents. When she is asked to reflect on the importance of communication, Melissa thinks of the next generation: “Children need to know and understand that anger and sadness go along with missing someone. They must be taught the importance of communication, and how to communicate well. This sets them up for success when their emotions begin to flow. Feelings are not right or wrong—it’s what you choose to do with them that counts. Teaching our children to communicate well is the best gift we can give them.”

My wife and I are out to dinner with our three grown sons—Kyle, Colin, and Conor—and our best friends, Tim and Hee Sun, whom we haven't seen since they moved to Korea. The conversation between us flows freely as we drift through discussions of personal events, past stories, politics, world affairs, and even online gaming—a passion Tim shares with my boys. The intimacy of the interaction is enhanced by us going “unplugged”; we've all placed our phones off the table. Nevertheless, the boys succumb to technological temptation when their entrées arrive, snapping photos of their food, which they post to Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook so that their friends and girlfriends can share in the festivities. As the evening ends, phones are retrieved from handbags and pockets, selfies are taken to lock down the memory, and texts are sent to absent family and friends to spread our happiness outward. All in all, it's one of those life events during which you count the minutes as precious yet bittersweet because they pass too quickly.

As I'm driving home, it flashes into my mind that regardless of the particulars, the peak moments of relationship joy that punctuate our lives are created through interpersonal communication. It's not the dinners, the fireworks, the sunsets, or the concerts that connect us to others. Those things are just, well, *things*. Instead, it's our communication. We use interpersonal communication to build, maintain, and even end relationships with romantic partners, family members, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. We do this through tweeting, texting, instant-messaging, social networking site posts and chats, e-mail, face-to-face interactions, and phone calls. And we switch back and forth between these various forms fluidly, effortlessly.

But regardless of how we're communicating, where, or with whom, one fact inescapably binds us: *the communication choices we make determine the personal, interpersonal, and relationship outcomes that follow*. When we communicate well, we create desirable outcomes, such as positive emotions, satisfying relationships, and encounters that linger as happy memories. When we communicate poorly, we generate negative outcomes, such as interpersonal conflict, dissatisfaction with a relationship, and bitter lament over things that shouldn't have been said. By studying interpersonal communication, you can acquire knowledge and skills to boost your interpersonal competence. This will help you build and maintain satisfying relationships and, ultimately, improve your quality of life.

In this chapter, we begin our study of interpersonal communication. You'll learn:

- What communication is and the different models for communication
- The nature of interpersonal communication, the role it plays in relationships, and the needs and goals it helps us fulfill
- How to improve your interpersonal communication competence, both online and off
- Major issues related to the study of interpersonal communication

chapter outline

6

What Is Communication?

10

What Is Interpersonal Communication?

20

What Is Interpersonal Communication Competence?

27

Issues in Interpersonal Communication

32

The Journey Ahead

What Is Communication?

How we create and exchange messages with others

It was the first minute of the first day of the very first communication class I ever taught. I had just finished defining *communication*, when a student raised her hand with a puzzled look on her face. “I understand your definition,” she said, “but isn’t this all just common sense?” Her question has stuck with me all these years because it highlights an important starting point for learning about communication. We all come to communication classes with a lifetime of hands-on experience communicating. This leads some to think that they have little new to learn. But personal experience isn’t the same as systematic training. When you’re formally educated about communication, you gain knowledge that goes far beyond your intuition, allowing you to broaden and deepen your skills as a communicator. It’s like any form of expertise. You know how to kick a ball, and you’ve likely done so hundreds, maybe thousands, of times since you were little. But does that mean you have the knowledge and skills to play in the World Cup? Of course not.

My goal for this text is to provide you with the knowledge and skills to make you a World Cup interpersonal communicator. This process begins by answering a basic question: what *is* communication?

self-reflection

Is good communication just common sense? Does experience communicating *always* result in better communication? When you think about all the communication and relational challenges you face in your daily life, what do you think would help you improve your communication skills?

DEFINING COMMUNICATION

The National Communication Association (n.d.), a professional organization representing communication teachers and scholars in the United States, defines **communication** as the process through which “people use messages to generate meanings within and across contexts, cultures, channels, and media.” This definition highlights the five features that characterize communication.

► Whether we are watching a movie, going to school, visiting with friends, or starting a new romance, communication plays a significant role in our everyday experiences. JoJo Whilden/©Weinstein Company/ Courtesy Everett Collection



First, communication is a *process* that unfolds over time through a series of interconnected actions carried out by the participants. For example, your friend tweets that she is going out to a movie, you text her back to see if she wants to join her, and so forth. Because communication is a process, everything you say and do affects what is said and done in the present and in the future.

Second, those engaged in communication (*communicators*) use *messages* to convey meaning. A **message** is the “package” of information that is transported during communication. When people exchange a series of messages, the result is called an **interaction** (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).

Third, communication occurs in a seemingly endless variety of **contexts**, or situations. We communicate with others at sporting events, while at work, and in our homes. In each context, a host of factors influences how we communicate, such as how much time we have, how many people are in the vicinity, and whether the setting is personal or professional. Think about it: you probably communicate with your romantic partner differently when you’re in class than when you’re watching a movie at home and snuggling on the couch.

Fourth, people communicate through various *channels*. A **channel** is the sensory dimension along which communicators transmit information. Channels can be auditory (sound), visual (sight), tactile (touch), olfactory (scent), or oral (taste). For example, your manager at work smiles while complimenting your job performance (visual and auditory channels). A visually impaired friend reads a message you left her, touching the Braille letters with her fingertips (tactile). Your romantic partner shows up at your house exuding an alluring scent and carrying delicious takeout, which you then share together (olfactory and oral).

Fifth, to transmit information, communicators use a broad range of **media**—tools for exchanging messages. Consider the various media used by Melissa Seligman and her husband, described in our chapter opener. Webcams, cell phones, texting, e-mail, letters, face-to-face interaction—all of these media and more can be used to communicate. And we often use multiple media channels simultaneously—for example, texting while checking our Facebook page. (See Figure 1.1 for common media forms.)



Today we have access to more types of media than ever before. Technologies like tablets and smartphones offer new ways for us to communicate, but they also pose new communication challenges. pixdeluxe/Getty Images



figure 1.1 Five Most Common Forms of Communication Media Used by College Students

Sources: Dean (2011) and Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr (2010).

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION MODELS

Think about all the different ways you communicate each day. You text your sister to check in. You give a speech in your communication class to an engaged audience. You exchange a knowing glance with your best friend at the arrival of someone you mutually dislike. Now reflect on how these forms of communication differ from one another. Sometimes (like when texting) you create messages and send them to receivers, the messages flowing in a single direction, from origin to destination. In other instances (like when speaking in front of your class) you present messages to recipients, and the recipients signal to you that they've received and understood them. Still other times (like when you and your best friend exchange a glance) you mutually construct meanings with others, with no one serving as "sender" or "receiver." These different ways of experiencing communication are reflected in three models that have evolved to describe the communication process: the linear model, the interactive model, and the transactional model. As you will see, each of these models has both strengths and weaknesses. Yet each also captures something unique and useful about the ways you communicate in your daily life.

 **Video**
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Noise
 Watch this clip online to answer the questions below.



What examples of noise can you identify in this video? What sensory channels did they occur on? What type(s) of sensory channel(s) distract you the most? Why? Want to see more? Check out LaunchPad for clips on **channel** and the **linear communication model**.

Linear Communication Model According to the **linear communication model**, communication is an activity in which information flows in one direction, from a starting point to an end point (see Figure 1.2). The linear model contains several components (Lasswell, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In addition to a *message* and a *channel*, there must be a **sender** (or senders) of the message—the individual(s) who generates the information to be communicated, packages it into a message, and chooses the channel(s) for sending it. There also is **noise**—factors in the environment that impede messages from reaching their destination. Noise includes anything that causes our attention to drift from messages—such as poor reception during a cell-phone call or the smell of fresh coffee nearby. Last, there must be a **receiver**—the person for whom a message is intended and to whom the message is delivered.

Interactive Communication Model The **interactive communication model** also views communication as a process involving senders and receivers (see

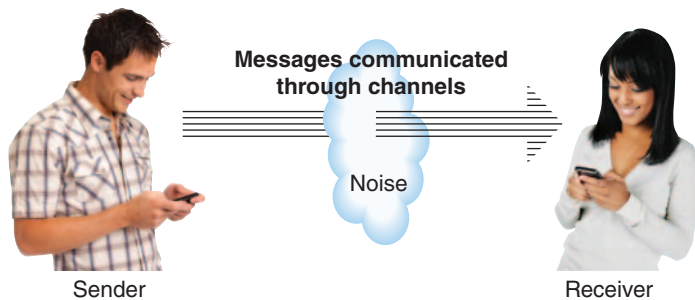


figure 1.2 Linear Model of Communication

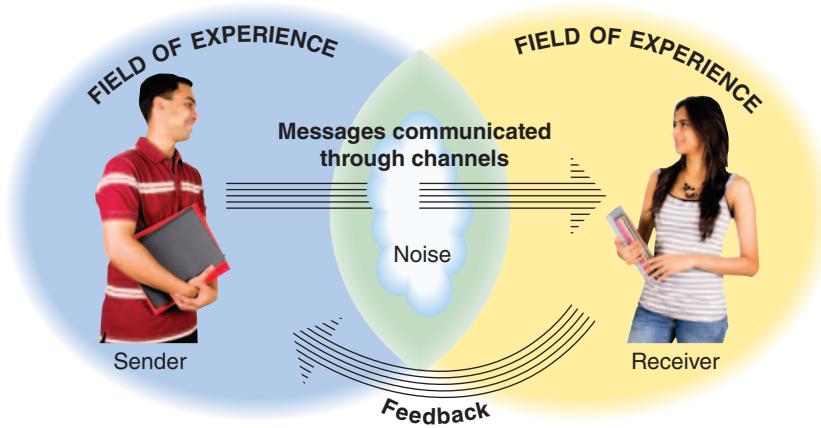


figure 1.3 Interactive Model of Communication

Figure 1.3). However, according to this model, transmission is influenced by two additional factors: feedback and fields of experience (Schramm, 1954). **Feedback** is composed of the verbal and nonverbal messages (such as eye contact, utterances such as “Uh-huh,” and nodding) that recipients convey to indicate their reaction to communication. **Fields of experience** consist of the beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences that each participant brings to a communication event. People with similar fields of experience are more likely to understand each other while communicating than are individuals with dissimilar fields of experience.

Transactional Communication Model The **transactional communication model** (see Figure 1.4) suggests that communication is fundamentally multidirectional. That is, each participant equally influences the communication behavior of the other participants (Miller & Steinberg, 1975). From the transactional perspective, there are no “senders” or “receivers.” Instead, all the parties constantly exchange verbal and nonverbal messages and feedback, *collaboratively* creating

 Video
[macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e](https://www.macmillanhighered.com/reflectrelate4e)

Transactional Communication Model
 Watch this clip online to answer the questions below.



Can you think of situations in which you jointly created meaning with another person? How did this happen? In what ways are these situations different from ones that follow the interactive communication model?

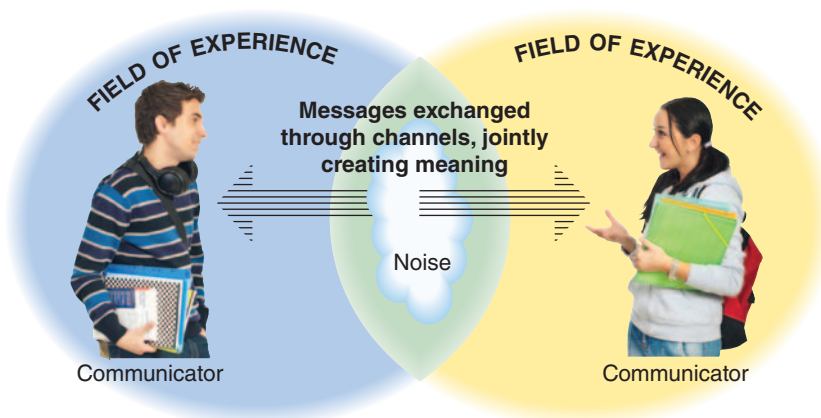


figure 1.4 Transactional Model of Communication