



This is “Improving Verbal and Nonverbal Group Interactions”, chapter 6 from the book [An Introduction to Group Communication \(index.html\)](#) (v. 0.0).

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Chapter 6

Improving Verbal and Nonverbal Group Interactions

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Can you match the words to their meaning?

___ 1. phat	A. Weird, strange, unfair or not acceptable
___ 2. dis	B. Something stupid or thoughtless, deserving correction
___ 3. wack	C. Excellent, together, cool
___ 4. Smack	D. Old car, generally in poor but serviceable condition
___ 5. down	E. Insult, put down, to dishonor, to display disrespect
___ 6. hooptie	F. Get out or leave quickly
___ 7. my bad	G. Cool, very interesting, fantastic or amazing
___ 8. player	H. To be in agreement
___ 9. tight	I. Personal mistake
___ 10. jet	J. Person dating with multiple partners, often unaware of each other

- Do people use the same language in all settings and contexts? Your first answer might be “sure,” but try this test. For a couple of hours, or even a day, pay attention to how you speak, and how others speak: the words you say, how you say them, the pacing and timing used in each context. For example, at home in the morning, in the coffee shop before work or class, during a break at work with peers or a break between classes with classmates all count as contexts. Observe how and what language is used in each context and to what degree they are the same or different.
- It’s not just what you say but how you say it. Choose a speech to watch. Examples may include famous speeches by historical figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Winston Churchill, current elected officials, or perhaps candidates for local and state office that may be televised. Other examples could be from a poetry slam, a rap performance, or a movie. Watch the presentation without sound and see what you observe. Does the speaker seem comfortable and confident? Aggressive or timid? If possible, repeat the speech a second time with the sound on. Do your perceptions change? What patterns do you observe?

3. Invasion of space. When someone “invades” your space, how do you feel? Threatened, surprised, interested, or repulsed? When can learn a lot from each other as we come to be more aware of normative space expectations and boundaries. Set aside 10 minutes where you can “people watch” in a public setting. Make a conscious effort to notice how far apart they stand from people they communicate. Record your results. Your best estimate is fine and there is no need to interrupt people, just watch and record. Consider noting if they are male or female, or focus only on same-sex conversations. When you have approximate distances for at least 20 conversations or 10 minutes have passed, add up the results and look for a pattern. Compare your findings with those of a classmate.

Answers to Exercise #1:

1-C, 2-E, 3-A, 4-B, 5-H, 6-D, 7-I, 8-J, 9-G, 10-F

Good communication is as stimulating as black coffee and just as hard to sleep after.

- Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The meanings of words are not in the words; they are in us. Hayakawa, S. I. (1978). *Language in thought and action*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p. 212.

- S. I. Hayakawa

The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.

- Peter F. Drucker

Getting Started

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Successful group communication is often associated with writing and speaking well, being articulate or proficient with words. Yet, in the quote above, the famous linguist S. I. Hayakawa wisely observes that meaning lies within us, not in the words we use. Indeed, communication in this text is defined as the process of understanding and sharing meaning. Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An introduction to human communication: understanding and sharing*. Boston: McGraw-Hill. When you communicate you are sharing meaning with one or more other people—this may include members of your family, your community, your work community, your school, or any group that considers itself a group.

How do you communicate? How do you think? We use language as a system to create and exchange meaning with one another, and the types of words we use influence both our perceptions and others interpretation of our meanings. What kinds of words would you use to describe your thoughts and feelings, your preferences in music, cars, food, or other things that matter to you?

Imagine that you are using written or spoken language to create a bridge over which you hope to transport meaning, much like a gift or package, to your receiver. You hope that your meaning arrives relatively intact, so that your receiver receives something like what you sent. Will the package look the same to them on the receiving end? Will they interpret the package, its wrapping and colors, the way you intended? That depends. What is certain is that they will interpret it based on their framework of experience. The package represents your words arranged in a pattern that both the source (you) and the receiver (your group) can interpret. The words as a package try to contain the meaning and deliver it intact, but they themselves are not the meaning. That lies within us. So is the package empty? Are the words we use empty? Without us to give them life and meaning, the answer is yes. Knowing what words will correspond to meanings that your group members hold within themselves will help you communicate more effectively. Professional jargon can be quite appropriate, even preferred, when everyone around the table understands the terminology. Knowing what meanings lie within you is your door to understanding yourself.

In this chapter's third Introductory Exercise, we focus on how a person presents ideas, not the ideas themselves. Have you ever been in class and found it hard to listen to the professor, not because he or she wasn't well informed or the topic wasn't interesting or important to you, but because the style of presentation didn't engage you as a listener? If your answer is yes, then you know that you want to avoid making the same mistake when you share information with your group or team. It's not always what you say, but how you say it that makes a difference. We sometimes call this "body language," or "nonverbal communication," and it is a key aspect of effective group communication.

One common concern is when to present your idea within a group setting to make sure it gets considered. Timing is an important aspect of nonverbal communication, but trying to understand what a single example of timing means is challenging. Context may make a difference. For example, if you have known the group member for years and they have always responded positively to your input, you may not have reason for concern. If their behavior doesn't match what you are familiar with, and this sudden, unexplained change in the established pattern may mean that you need to follow up. Group dynamics, like communication itself, is constantly changing.

This chapter discusses the importance of verbal and nonverbal communication. It examines how the characteristics of language interact in ways that can both improve and diminish effective group communication. We will examine how language plays a significant role in how you perceive and interact with the world, and how culture, language, education, gender, race and ethnicity all influence this dynamic process. We will look at ways to avoid miscommunication and focus on constructive ways to improve effective group communication.

6.1 Principles of Verbal Communication

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Identify and describe five key principles of verbal communication.

Verbal communication is based on several basic principles. In this section, we'll examine each principle and explore how it influences everyday communication. Whether it's a simply conversation with a co-worker or a formal sales presentation to a board of directors, these principles apply to all contexts of communication.

Language Has Rules

Language is a code, a collection of symbols, letters, or words with arbitrary meanings that are arranged according to the rules of syntax and are used to communicate. Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An introduction to human communication: understanding and sharing*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, p. 54.

In this chapter's Introductory Exercise #1, were you able to successfully match the terms to their meanings? Did you find that some of the definitions did not match your understanding of the terms? The words themselves have meaning within their specific context or language community. But without a grasp of that context, "my bad" may have just sounded odd. Your familiarity with the words and phrases may have made the exercise easy for you, but it isn't an easy exercise for everyone. The words themselves only carry meaning if you know the understood meaning and have a grasp of their context to interpret them correctly.

There are three types of rules which govern or control our use of words. You may not be aware that they exist, or that they influence you, but from the moment you text a word or speak, these rules govern your communications. Think of a word that is all right to use in certain situations and not in others. Why? And how do you know?

Syntactic rules¹ govern the order of words in a sentence. In some languages, such as German, syntax or word order is strictly prescribed. English syntax, in contrast, is relatively flexible and open to style. Still, there are definite combinations of words that are correct and incorrect in English. It is equally correct to say, “Please come to the meeting in the auditorium at 12 noon on Wednesday” or, “Please come to the meeting on Wednesday at 12 noon in the auditorium.” But it would be incorrect to say, “Please to the auditorium on Wednesday in the meeting at 12 noon come.”

Semantic rules² govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them. Martinich, A. P. (ed.) (1996), *The philosophy of language*, 3rd edition. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press. Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It considers what words mean or are intended to mean, as opposed to their sound, spelling, grammatical function, and so on. Does a given statement refer to other statements already communicated? Is the statement true or false? Does it carry a certain intent? What does the sender or receiver need to know in order to understand its meaning? These are questions addressed by semantic rules.

Contextual rules³ govern meaning and word choice according to context and social custom. For example, suppose Greg is talking about his co-worker, Carol, and says, “She always meets her deadlines.” This may seem like a straightforward statement that would not vary according to context or social custom. But suppose another co-worker asked Greg, “How do you like working with Carol?” and, after a long pause, Greg answered, “She always meets her deadlines.” Are there factors in the context of the question, or social customs, that would influence the meaning of Greg’s statement?

Even when we follow these linguistic rules, miscommunication is possible, for our cultural context or community may hold different meanings for the words used than the source intended. Words attempt to represent the ideas we want to communicate, but they are sometimes limited by factors beyond our control. They often require us to negotiate their meaning, or to explain what we mean in more than one way, in order to create a common vocabulary. You may need to state a word, define it, and provide an example in order to come to an understanding with your team about the meaning of your message.

1. Govern the order of words in a sentence.
2. Govern the meaning of words and how to interpret them.
3. Govern meaning and word choice according to context and social custom.

Our Reality Is Shaped by Our Language

What would your life be like if you had been raised in a country other than the one where you grew up? Malaysia, for example? Italy? Afghanistan? or Bolivia? Or suppose you had been born male instead of female, or vice versa. Or had been raised in the northeastern U.S. instead of the Southwest, the Midwest instead of the

Southeast. In any of these cases, you would not have the same identity you have today. You would have learned another set of customs, values, traditions, other language patterns and ways of communicating. You would be a different person who communicated in different ways.

You didn't choose your birth, customs, values, traditions, or your language. You didn't even choose to learn to read this sentence or to speak with those of your community, but somehow you accomplished this challenging task. As an adult, you can choose to see things from a new or diverse perspective, but what language do you think with? It's not just the words themselves, or even how they are organized, that makes communication such a challenge. Your language itself, ever changing and growing, in many ways determines your reality. Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Science and linguistics*. In J. B. Carroll (Ed.), *Language, thought and reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 207–219. You can't escape your language or culture completely, and always see the world through a shade or tint of what you've been taught, learned, or experienced.

Suppose you were raised in a culture that values formality. At work, you pride yourself on being well dressed. It's part of your expectation for yourself and, whether you admit it or not, for others. Many people in your organization, however, come from less formal cultures, and they prefer "business casual" attire. You may be able to recognize the difference, and because humans are highly adaptable, you may get used to a less formal dress expectation, but it won't change your fundamental values.

Thomas Kuhn, T. (1996). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. makes the point that "**paradigms**⁴, or a clear point of view involving theories, laws, and/or generalizations that provide a framework for understanding, tend to form and become set around key validity claims, or statements of the way things work." McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 50. The paradigm, or worldview, may be individual or collective. And paradigm shifts are often painful. New ideas are always suspect, and usually opposed, without any other reason than because they are not already common. Ackerman, B. A. (1980). *Social justice in the liberal state*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

As an example, consider the earth-heavens paradigm. Medieval Europeans believed that the Earth was flat and that the edge was to be avoided, otherwise you might fall off. For centuries after the acceptance of a "round earth" belief, the earth was still believed to be the center of the universe, with the sun and all planets revolving around it. Eventually, someone challenged the accepted view. Over time, despite

4. A clear point of view involving theories, laws, and/or generalizations that provide a framework for understanding.

considerable resistance to protect the status quo, people came to better understand the earth and its relationship to the heavens.

In the same way, the makes of the Intel microprocessor once thought that a slight calculation error, unlikely to negatively impact 99.9% of users, was better left as is and hidden. Emery, V. (1996). The pentium chip story: A learning experience. Accessed at <http://www.emery.com/1e/pentium.htm>. Like many things in the information age, the error was discovered by a user of the product, became publicly known, and damaged Intel's credibility and sales for years. Recalls and prompt, public communication in response to similar issues are now the industry-wide protocol.

Paradigms involve premises that are taken as fact. Of course the Earth is the center of the universe, of course no one will ever be impacted by a mathematical error so far removed from most people's everyday use of computers, and of course you never danced the macarena at a company party. We now can see how those facts, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of "cool" are overturned.

How does this insight lends itself to your understanding of verbal communication? Do all people share the same paradigms, words, or ideas? Will you be presenting ideas outside of your group's frame of reference? Outside of their worldview? Just as you look back at your macarena performance, get outside of your own frame of reference and consider how to best communicate your thoughts, ideas and points to a group that may not have your same experiences or understanding of the topic.

By taking into account your group's background and experience, you can become more "other-oriented," a successful strategy to narrow the gap between you and your group members. Our experiences are like sunglasses, tinting the way we see the world. Our challenge, perhaps, is to avoid letting them function as blinders, like those worn by working horses, which create tunnel vision and limit our perspective.

Language Is Arbitrary and Symbolic

As we have discussed previously, words, by themselves, do not have any inherent meaning. Humans give meaning to them, and their meanings change across time. The arbitrary symbols, including letters, numbers, and punctuation marks, stand for concepts in our experience. We have to negotiate the meaning of the word "home," and define it, through visual images or dialogue, in order to communicate with our team or group.

Words have two types of meanings: denotative and connotative. Attention to both is necessary to reduce the possibility of misinterpretation. The **denotative meaning**⁵ is the common meaning, often found in the dictionary. The **connotative meaning**⁶ is often not found in the dictionary but in the community of users itself. It can involve an emotional association with a word, positive or negative, and can be individual or collective, but is not universal.

With a common vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms, effective communication becomes a more distinct possibility. But what if we have to transfer meaning from one vocabulary to another? That is essentially what we are doing when we translate a message. In such cases, language and culture can sometimes make for interesting twists. *The New York Times* Sterngold, J. (1998). Lost, and gained, in the translation. *New York Times* (November 15). noted that the title of the 1998 film *There's Something about Mary* proved difficult to translate when it was released in foreign markets. The movie was renamed to capture the idea and to adapt to local groups' frame of reference: In Poland, where blonde jokes are popular and common, the film title (translated back to English for our use) was *For the Love of a Blonde*. In France, *Mary at All Costs* communicated the idea, while in Thailand *My True Love Will Stand All Outrageous Events* dropped the reference to Mary altogether.

Capturing our ideas with words is a challenge when both conversational partners speak the same language, but across languages, cultures, and generations the complexity multiplies exponentially.

Language Is Abstract

Words represent aspects of our environment, and can play an important role in that environment. They may describe an important idea or concept, but the very act of labeling and invoking a word simplifies and distorts our concept of the thing itself. This ability to simplify concepts makes it easier to communicate, but it sometimes makes us lose track of the specific meaning we are trying to convey through abstraction. Let's look at one important part of life in America: transportation.

Take the word "car" and consider what it represents. Freedom, status, or style? Does what you drive say something about you? To describe a car as a form of transportation is to consider one of its most basic, and universal aspects. This level of abstraction means we lose individual distinctions between cars until we impose another level of labeling. We could divide cars into sedans (or saloon) and coupe (or coupé) simply by counting the number of doors (i.e., four versus two). We could also examine cost, size, engine displacement, fuel economy, and style. We might arrive at an American classic, the Mustang, and consider it for all of these factors and its legacy as an accessible American sports car. To describe it in terms of

5. A word's common meaning, often found in the dictionary.

6. A meaning not often found in the dictionary but in the community of users; it can involve an emotional association, and can be individual or collective, but is not universal.

transportation only is to lose the distinctiveness of what makes a Mustang a desirable American sports car.

We can see how, at the extreme level of abstraction, a car is like any other automobile. We can also see how, at the base level, the concept is most concrete. “Mustang,” the name given to one of the best selling American sports cars, is a specific make and model, with specific markings, size, shape and coloring and a relationship with a classic design. By focusing on concrete terms and examples, you help your group grasp your content.

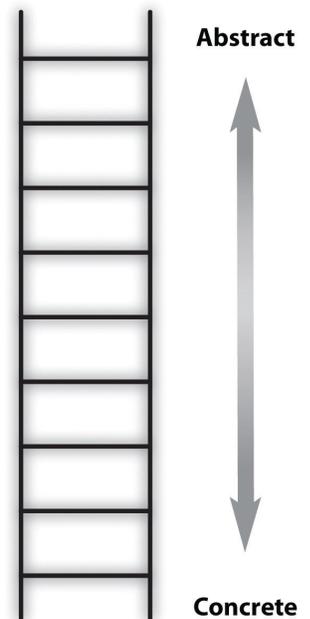
Language Organizes and Classifies Reality

We use language to create and express some sense of order in our world. We often group words that represent concepts by their physical proximity or their similarity to one another. For example, in biology, animals with similar traits are classified together. An ostrich may be said to be related to an emu and a nandu, but you wouldn’t group an ostrich with an elephant or a salamander. Our ability to organize is useful, but artificial. The systems of organization we use are not part of the natural world but an expression of our views about the natural world.

What is a doctor? A nurse? A teacher? If a male came to mind in the case of the word “doctor,” but a female came to mind in reference to “nurse” or “teacher,” then your habits of mind include a gender bias. There was once a time in the United States where that gender stereotype was more than just a stereotype, it was the general rule, the social custom, the norm. Now it no longer holds true. More and more men are training to serve as nurses, and *Business Week* noted in 2008 that one-third of the U.S. physician workforce was female. Arnst, C. (2005). Are there too many women doctors? As an MD shortage looms, female physicians and their flexible hours are taking some of the blame. *Business Week* (April 17).

We all use systems of classification to navigate through the world. Imagine how confusing life would be if we had no categories such as male/female, young/old, tall/short, doctor/nurse/teacher! These categories only become problematic when we use them to uphold biases and ingrained assumptions that are no longer valid.

Figure 6.1 Abstraction Ladder



Source: Adapted from DeVito, J. (1999). *Messages: building interpersonal communication skills*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, p. 119.

We may assume, through our biases, that elements are related when they have no relationship at all. As a result, our thinking is limited and our grasp of reality impaired. It is often easier to spot these biases in others, but it behooves us as communicators to become aware of them in ourselves. Holding them unconsciously will limit our thinking, our grasp of reality, and our ability to communicate successfully.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Language is a system governed by rules of syntax, semantics, and context; and we use paradigms to understand the world and frame our communications.

EXERCISES

1. Write at least five examples of English sentences with correct syntax. Then rewrite each sentence, using the same words in an order that displays incorrect syntax. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
2. Think of at least five words whose denotative meaning differs from their connotative meaning. Use each word in two sentences, one employing the denotative meaning and the other employing the connotative. Compare your results with those of your classmates.
3. Do you associate meaning with the car someone drives? Does it say something about them? List five cars you observe people you know driving and discuss each one, noting whether you perceive it says something about them or not. Share and compare with classmates.

6.2 Language Can Be an Obstacle to Communication

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LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Demonstrate six ways in which language can be an obstacle to communication.

As you use language to make sense of your experiences, As part of our discussion you no doubt came to see that language and verbal communication can work both for you and against you. Language allows you to communicate, but it also allows you to miscommunicate and misunderstand. The same system we use to express our most intimate thoughts can be frustrating when it fails to capture our thoughts, to represent what we want to express, and to reach our group. For all its faults, though, it is the best system we have, and part of improving the communication process is the clear identification of where it breaks down. Anticipate where a word or expression may need more clarification and you will be on your way to reducing errors and improving verbal communication.

In an article titled “The Miscommunication Gap,” Susan Washburn lists several undesirable results of poor communication in business: Washburn, S. (2008). The miscommunication gap. *ESI Horizons* 9:02 (February). Accessed at <http://www.esi-intl.com/public/Library/html/200802HorizonsArticle1.asp?UnityID=8522516.1290>.

- damaged relationships
- loss of productivity
- inefficiency and rework
- conflict
- missed opportunities
- schedule slippage
- scope creep...or leap
- wasted resources
- unclear or unmet requirements

In this section we discuss how words can serve either as a bridge, or a barrier, to understanding and communication of meaning. Our goals of effective and efficient group communication mean an inherent value of words and terms that keep the bridge clear and free of obstacles.

Cliché

A **cliché**⁷ is a once-clever word or phrase that has lost its impact through overuse. If you spoke or wrote in clichés, how would your group react? Let's try it. How do you react when you read this sentence: "A cliché is something to avoid like the plague, for it is nothing but a tired old war horse, and if the shoe were on the other foot you too would have an axe to grind"? As you can see, the problem with clichés is that they often sound silly or boring.

Clichés are sometimes a symptom of lazy communication—the person using the cliché hasn't bothered to search for original words to convey the intended meaning. Clichés lose their impact because readers and listeners tend to gloss over them, assuming their common meaning while ignoring your specific use of them. As a result, they can be obstacles to successful communication.

Jargon

Let's pretend you've been assigned to the task of preparing a short presentation on your company's latest product for a group of potential customers. It's a big responsibility. You only have one opportunity to get it right. You will need to do extensive planning and preparation, and your effort, if done well, will produce a presentation that is smooth and confident, looking simple to the casual group member.

What words do you use to communicate information about your product? Is your group of clients familiar with your field and its specialized terms? As potential customers, they are probably somewhat knowledgeable in the field, but not to the extent that you and your co-workers are; even less so compared to the "techie" who developed the product. For your presentation to succeed, your challenge is to walk a fine line between using too much profession-specific language on the one hand, and "talking down" to your group on the other hand.

While your potential customers may not understand all the engineering and schematic detail terms involved in the product, they do know what they and their organizations are looking for in considering a purchase. Your solution may be to focus on common ground—what you know of their past history in terms of contracting services or buying products from your company. What can you tell

7. A once-clever word or phrase that has lost its impact through overuse.

from their historical purchases? If your research shows that they place a high value on saving time, you can focus your presentation on the time-saving aspects of your new product and leave the technical terms to the user's manual.

Jargon⁸ is an occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Jargon does not necessarily imply formal education, but instead focuses on the language people in a profession use to communicate with each other. Members of the information technology department have a distinct group of terms that refer to common aspects in their field. Members of the marketing department, or advertising, or engineering, research, and development also have sets of terms they use within their professional community. People who work with sewing machines, or in automobile factories, or in agriculture also have jargon in their profession, independent of formal education.

Whether or not to use jargon is often a judgment call, and one that is easier to make in speaking than in writing. In an oral context, we may be able to use a technical term and instantly know whether or not they “got it.” If they didn't, we can define it on the spot. In written language, we lack that immediate response and must attend more to the context of receiver. The more we learn about our group, company, or corporation, the better we can tailor our chosen words. If we lack information or want our document to be understood by a variety of readers, it pays to use common words and avoid jargon.

Slang

Think for a moment about the words and expressions you use when you communicate with your best friends. If a co-worker was to hang out with you and your friends, would they understand all the words you use, the music you listen to, the stories you tell and the way you tell them? Probably not, because you and your friends probably use certain words and expressions in ways that have special meaning to you.

This special form of language, which in some ways resembles jargon, is slang. **Slang**⁹ is the use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, non-standard, humorous or rebellious effect. It differs from jargon in that it is used in informal contexts, among friends or members of a certain age group, rather than by professionals in a certain industry.

If you say something is “phat,” you may mean “cool,” which is now a commonly understood slang word, but your co-worker may not know this. As word “phat”

8. An occupation-specific language used by people in a given profession. Think of the way medical caregivers speak to one another, frequently using abbreviations for procedures and medications.

9. The use of existing or newly invented words to take the place of standard or traditional words with the intent of adding an unconventional, non-standard, humorous or rebellious effect.

moves into the mainstream, it will be replaced and adapted by the communities that use it.

Since our emphasis in group communication is on clarity, and a slang word runs the risk of creating misinterpretation, it is generally best to avoid slang. You may see the marketing department use a slang word to target a specific, well-researched group, but for our purposes of your general presentation introducing a product or service, we will stick to clear, common words that are easily understood.

Sexist and Racist Language

Some forms of slang involve put-downs of people belonging to various groups. This type of slang often crosses the line and becomes offensive, not only to the groups that are being put down, but also to others who may hear it. In today's workplace there is no place where sexist or racist language is appropriate. In fact, using such language can be a violation of company policies and in some cases anti-discrimination laws.

Sexist language¹⁰ uses gender as a discriminating factor. Referring to adult women as “girls” or using the word “man” to refer to humankind are examples of sexist language. In a more blatant example, several decades ago a woman was the first female sales representative in her company's sales force. The men resented her and were certain they could outsell her, so they held a “Beat the Broad” sales contest. Today, a contest with a name like that would be out of the question.

Racist language¹¹ discriminates against members of a given race or ethnic group. While it may be obvious that racial and ethnic slurs have no place in group communication, there can also be issues with more subtle references to “those people” or “you know how they are.” If race or ethnicity genuinely enters into the subject of your communication—in a drugstore, for example, there is often an aisle for black hair care products—then naturally it makes sense to mention customers belonging to that group. The key is that mentioning racial and ethnic groups should be done with the same respect you would desire if someone else were referring to groups you belong to.

10. Uses gender as a discriminating factor.

11. Discriminates against members of a given race or ethnic group.

12. Involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning.

Euphemisms

In seeking to avoid offensive slang, it is important not to assume that a euphemism is the solution. A **euphemism**¹² involves substituting an acceptable word for an offensive, controversial, or unacceptable one that conveys the same or similar meaning. The problem is that the group still knows what the expression means, and

understands that the communicator is choosing a euphemism for the purpose of sounding more educated or genteel.

Euphemisms can also be used sarcastically or humorously—“H-E-double-hockey-sticks,” for example, is a euphemism for “hell” that may be amusing in some contexts. If your friend has just gotten a new job as a janitor, you may jokingly ask, “How’s my favorite sanitation engineer this morning?” But such humor is not always appreciated, and can convey disrespect even when none is intended.

Euphemistic words are not always disrespectful, however. For example, when referring to a death, it is considered polite in many parts of the U.S. to say that the person “passed” or “passed away,” rather than the relatively insensitive word, “died.” Similarly, people say, “I need to find a bathroom” when it is well understood they are not planning to take a bath.

Still, these polite euphemisms are exceptions to the rule. Euphemisms are generally more of a hindrance than a help to understanding. In group communication the goal is clarity, and the very purpose of euphemism is to be vague. To be clear, choose words that mean what you intend to convey.

Doublespeak

Doublespeak¹³ is the deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning. Doublespeak is often present in bureaucratic communication, where it can serve to cast a person or an organization in a less unfavorable light than plain language would do.

When you ask a friend, “How does it feel to be downsized?” you are using a euphemism to convey humor, possibly even dark humor. Your friend’s employer was likely not joking, though, when the action was announced as a “downsizing” rather than as a “layoff” or “dismissal.” In military communications, “collateral damage” is often used to refer to civilian deaths, but no mention of the dead is present. You may recall the “Bailout” of the U.S. economy in 2008, which quickly came to be called the “Rescue” and finally the “Buy In” as the U.S. bought interests in nine regional and national banks. The meaning changed from saving an economic system or its institutions to investing in them. This change of terms, and the attempt to change the meaning of the actions, became common in comedy routines across the nation.

13. The deliberate use of words to disguise, obscure, or change meaning.

Doublespeak can be quite dangerous when it is used deliberately to obscure meaning and the listener cannot anticipate or predict consequences based on the

(in)effective communication. When a medical insurance company says “we insure companies with up to 20,000 lives,” is it possible to forget that those “lives” are people? Ethical issues quickly arise when humans are dehumanized and referred to as “objects” or “subjects.” When genocide is referred to as “ethnic cleansing,” is it any less deadly than when called by its true name?

If the meaning was successfully hidden from the group, one might argue that the doublespeak was in fact effective. But our goal continues to be clear and concise communication with a minimum of misinterpretation. Learn to recognize doublespeak by what it does not communicate as well as what it communicates.

Each of these six obstacles to communication contribute to misunderstanding and miscommunication, intentionally or unintentionally. If you recognize one of them, you can address it right away. You can redirect a question and get to essential meaning, rather than leaving with a misunderstanding that impacts the relationship. In group communication, our goal of clear and concise communication remains constant, but we can never forget that trust is the foundation for effective communication. Part of our effort must include reinforcing the relationship inherent between source and receiver, and one effective step towards that goal is to reduce obstacles to effective communication.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- To avoid obstacles to communication, avoid clichés, jargon, slang, sexist and racist language, euphemisms, and doublespeak.

EXERCISES

1. Identify at least five common clichés and look up their origins. Try to understand how and when each phrase became a cliché. Share your findings with your classmates.
2. Using your library’s microfilm files or an online database, look through newspaper articles from the 1950s or earlier. Find at least one article that uses sexist or racist language. What makes it racist or sexist? How would a journalist convey the same information today? Share your findings with your class.
3. Identify one slang term and one euphemism you know is used in your community, among your friends, or where you work. Share and compare with classmates.

6.3 Improving Verbal Communication

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Demonstrate six strategies for improving verbal communication.

Throughout the chapter we have visited examples and stories that highlight the importance of verbal communication. To end the chapter, we need to consider how language can be used to enlighten or deceive, encourage or discourage, empower or destroy. By defining the terms we use and choosing precise words, we will maximize our group's understanding of our message. In addition, it is important to consider the group members, control your tone, check for understanding, and focus on results. Recognizing the power of verbal communication is the first step to understanding its role and impact on the communication process.

Define Your Terms

Even when you are careful to craft your message clearly and concisely, not everyone will understand every word you say or write. As an effective group communicator, you know it is your responsibility to give every group member every advantage in understanding your meaning. Yet your presentation would fall flat if you tried to define each and every term—you would end up sounding like a dictionary!

The solution is to be aware of any words you are using that may not be familiar to everyone in your group, and provide clues to meaning in the process of making and supporting your points. Give examples to illustrate each concept. Use parallels from everyday life. Rephrase unfamiliar terms in different words. In summary, keep your group members in mind and imagine yourself in their place. This will help you to adjust your writing level and style to their needs, maximizing the likelihood that your message will be understood.

Choose Precise Words

To increase understanding, choose **precise words**¹⁴ that paint as vivid and accurate a mental picture as possible for your group. If you use language that is vague or abstract, your meaning may be lost or misinterpreted. Your document or presentation will also be less dynamic and interesting than it could be.

Table 6.1 "Precisely What Are You Saying?" lists some examples of phrases that are imprecise and precise. Which one evokes a more dynamic image in your imagination?

Table 6.1 Precisely What Are You Saying?

<p>The famous writer William Safire died in 2009; he was over 70.</p>	<p>The former Nixon speech writer, language authority, and New York Times columnist William Safire died of pancreatic cancer in 2009; he was 79.</p>
<p>Clumber spaniels are large dogs.</p>	<p>The Clumber Spaniel Club of America describes the breed as a “long, low, substantial dog,” standing 17 to 20 inches high and weighing 55 to 80 pounds.</p>
<p>It is important to eat a healthy diet during pregnancy.</p>	<p>Eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy products can improve your health during pregnancy and boost your chances of having a healthy baby.</p>
<p>We are making good progress on the project.</p>	<p>In the two weeks since inception, our four-member team has achieved three of the six objectives we identified for project completion; we are on track to complete the project in another three to four weeks.</p>

14. Words that paint as vivid and accurate a mental picture as possible for your group.

<p>For the same amount of spend, we expected more value added.</p>	<p>We have examined several proposals in the \$10,000 range, and they all offer more features than what we see in the \$12,500 system ABC Corp. is offering.</p>
<p>Officers were called to the scene.</p>	<p>Responding to a 911 call, State Police Officers Arellano and Chavez sped to the intersection of County Route 53 and State Highway 21.</p>
<p>The victim went down the street.</p>	<p>The victim ran screaming to a neighbor’s house.</p>
<p>Several different colorways are available.</p>	<p>The silk jacquard fabric is available in ivory, moss, cinnamon, and topaz colorways.</p>
<p>This smartphone has more applications than customers can imagine.</p>	<p>At last count, the BlueBerry Tempest has more than 500 applications, many costing 99 cents or less; users can get real-time sports scores, upload videos to TwitVid, browse commuter train schedules, edit emails before forwarding, and find recipes—but so far, it doesn’t do the cooking for you!</p>
<p>A woman was heckled when she</p>	<p>On August 25, 2009, Rep. Frank Pallone (Democrat of New Jersey’s 6th congressional district) hosted a “town hall” meeting on health care reform where many audience members heckled and booed a</p>

spoke at a health care event.	woman in a wheelchair as she spoke about the need for affordable health insurance and her fears that she might lose her home.
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Consider Your Group Members

In addition to precise words and clear definitions, contextual clues are important to guide your group members as they read. If you use a jargon word, which may be appropriate for many people in your group, follow it by a common reference that clearly relates its essential meaning. With this positive strategy you will meet group member's needs with diverse backgrounds. Internal summaries tell us what we've heard and forecast what is to come. It's not just the words, but also how people hear them that counts.

If you say the magic words "in conclusion," you set in motion a set of expectations that you are about to wrap it up. If, however, you introduce a new point and continue to speak, the group will perceive an expectancy violation and hold you accountable. You said the magic words but didn't honor them. One of the best ways to display respect for your group is to not exceed the expected time in a presentation or length in a document. Your careful attention to contextual clues will demonstrate that you are clearly considering your group.

Take Control of Your Tone

Does your writing or speech sound pleasant and agreeable? Or does it come across as stuffy, formal, bloated, ironic, sarcastic, flowery, rude, or inconsiderate? Recognition may be simple, but getting a handle on how to influence tone and to make your voice match your intentions takes time and skill.

One useful tip is to read your document out loud before you deliver it, just as you would practice a presentation before you present it to your group. Sometimes hearing your own words can reveal their tone, helping you decide whether it is correct or appropriate. Another way is to listen or watch others' presentations that have been described with terms associated with tone. Martin Luther King Jr. had one style while President Barack Obama has another. You can learn from both. Don't just take the word of one critic but if several point to a speech as an example of pompous eloquence, and you don't want to come across in your presentation as pompous, you may learn what to avoid.

Check for Understanding

When we talk to each other face to face, seeing if someone understood you isn't all that difficult. Even if they really didn't get it, you can see, ask questions, and clarify right away. That gives oral communication, particularly live interaction, a distinct advantage. Use this immediacy for feedback to your advantage. Make time for feedback and plan for it. Ask clarifying questions. Share your presentation with more than one person, and choose people that have similar characteristics to your anticipated group or team.

If you were going to present to a group that you knew in advance was of a certain age, sex, or professional background, it would only make sense to connect with someone from that group prior to your actual performance to check and see if what you have created and what they expect are similar. In oral communication, feedback is core component of the communication model and we can often see it, hear it, and it takes less effort to assess it.

Be Results Oriented

At the end of the day, the assignment has to be complete. It can be a challenge to balance the need for attention to detail with the need to arrive at the end product—and its due date. Stephen Covey (1989). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. New York: Simon & Schuster. suggests beginning with the end in mind as one strategy for success. If you have done your preparation, know your assignment goals, desired results, have learned about your group members and tailored the message to their expectations, then you are well on your way to completing the task. No document or presentation is perfect, but the goal itself is worthy of your continued effort for improvement.

Here the key is to know when further revision will not benefit the presentation and to shift the focus to test marketing, asking for feedback, or simply sharing it with a mentor or co-worker for a quick review. Finding balance while engaging in an activity that requires a high level of attention to detail can be challenge for any communicator, but it is helpful to keep the end in mind.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- To improve communication, define your terms, choose precise words, consider your group members, control your tone, check for understanding, and aim for results.

EXERCISES

1. Choose a piece of writing from a profession you are unfamiliar with. For example, if you are studying biology, choose an excerpt from a book on fashion design. Identify several terms you are unfamiliar with, terms that may be considered jargon. How does the writer help you understand the meaning of these terms? Could the writer make them easier to understand? Share your findings with your class.
2. In your chosen profession, identify ten jargon words, define them, and share them with the class.
3. Describe a simple process, from brushing your teeth to opening the top of a bottle, in as precise terms as possible. Present to the class.

6.4 Principles of Nonverbal Communication

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Demonstrate nonverbal communication and describe its role in the communication process.
2. Understand and explain the principles of nonverbal communication.

Nonverbal Communication Is Fluid

Chances are you have had many experiences where words were misunderstood, or where the meaning of words was unclear. When it comes to nonverbal communication, meaning is even harder to discern. We can sometimes tell what people are communicating through their nonverbal communication, but there is no foolproof “dictionary” of how to interpret nonverbal messages. **Nonverbal communication**¹⁵ is the process of conveying a message without the use of words. It can include gestures and facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture and where you stand as you communicate. It can help or hinder the clear understanding of your message, but it doesn’t reveal (and can even mask) what you are really thinking. Nonverbal communication is far from simple, and its complexity makes our study, and our understanding, a worthy but challenging goal.

Where does a wink start and a nod end? Nonverbal communication involves the entire body, the space it occupies and dominates, the time it interacts, and not only what is not said, but how it is not said. Confused? Try to focus on just one element of nonverbal communication and it will soon get lost among all the other stimuli. Let’s consider eye contact. What does it mean by itself without context, or chin position, or eyebrows to flag interest or signal a threat? Nonverbal action flows almost seamlessly from one to the next, making it a challenge to interpret one element, or even a series of elements.

15. The process of conveying a message without the use of words.

We perceive time as linear, flowing along in a straight line. We did one task, we’re doing another task now, and we are planning on doing something else all the time. Sometimes we place more emphasis on the future, or the past, forgetting that we

are actually living in the present moment whether we focus on “the now” or not. Nonverbal communication is always in motion, as long as we are, and is never the same twice.

Nonverbal communication is irreversible. In written communication you can write a clarification, correction, or retraction. While it never makes the original statement go completely away, it does allow for correction. Unlike written communication, oral communication may allow “do-overs” on the spot: you can explain and restate, hoping to clarify your point. You can also dig the hole you are in just a little bit deeper. The old sayings “When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging” and “Open mouth, insert foot” can sometimes apply to oral communications. We’ve all said something we would give anything to take back, but we all know we can’t. Oral communication, like written communication, allows for some correction, but it still doesn’t erase the original message or its impact. Nonverbal communication takes it one step further. You can’t separate one nonverbal action from the context of all the other verbal and nonverbal communication acts, and you can’t take it back.

In a speech, nonverbal communication is continuous in the sense that it is always occurring, and because it is so fluid, it can be hard to determine where one nonverbal message starts and another stops. Words can be easily identified and isolated, but if we try to single out a group member’s gestures, smile, or stance without looking at how they all come together in context, we may miss the point and draw the wrong conclusion. You need to be conscious of this aspect of public speaking because, to quote another old saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” This is true in the sense that people often pay more attention to your nonverbal expressions more than your words. As a result, nonverbal communication is a powerful way to contribute to (or detract from) your success in communicating your message to the group.

Nonverbal Communication Is Fast

Let’s pretend you are at your computer at work. You see that an e-mail has arrived, but you are right in the middle of tallying a spreadsheet whose numbers just don’t add up. You see that the e-mail is from a co-worker and you click on it. The subject line reads “pink slips.” You could interpret this to mean a suggestion for a Halloween costume, or a challenge to race for each other’s car ownership, but in the context of the workplace you may assume it means layoffs.

Your emotional response is immediate. If the author of the e-mail could see your face, they would know that your response was one of disbelief and frustration, even anger, all via your nonverbal communication. Yes, when a tree falls in the forest it

makes a sound, even if no one is there to hear it. In the same way, you express yourself via nonverbal communication all the time without much conscious thought at all. You may think about how to share the news with your partner, and try to display a smile and a sense of calm when you feel like anything but smiling.

Nonverbal communication gives our thoughts and feelings away before we are even aware of what we are thinking or how we feel. People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated. Your nonverbal communication includes both intentional and unintentional messages, but since it all happens so fast, the unintentional ones can contradict what you know you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react.

Nonverbal Communication Can Add to or Replace Verbal Communication

People tend to pay more attention to how you say it than what you actually say. In presenting a speech this is particularly true. We communicate nonverbally more than we engage in verbal communication, and often use nonverbal expressions to add to, or even replace, words we might otherwise say. We use a nonverbal gesture called an **illustrator**¹⁶ to communicate our message effectively and reinforce our point. Your co-worker Andrew may ask you about “Barney’s Bar after work?” as he walks by, and you simply nod and say “yeah.” Andrew may respond with a nonverbal gesture, called an **emblem**¹⁷, by signaling with the “OK” sign as he walks away.

In addition to illustrators or emblematic nonverbal communication, we also use regulators. “**Regulators**¹⁸ are nonverbal messages which control, maintain or discourage interaction.” McLean, S. (2003). *The basics of speech communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. For example, if someone is telling you a message that is confusing or upsetting, you may hold up your hand, a commonly recognized regulator that asks the current speaker in a group to stop talking.

Let’s say you are in a meeting presenting a speech that introduces your company’s latest product. If your group members nod their heads in agreement on important points and maintain good eye contact, it is a good sign. Nonverbally, they are using regulators encouraging you to continue with your presentation. In contrast, if they look away, tap their feet, and begin drawing in the margins of their notebook, these are regulators suggesting that you had better think of a way to regain their interest or else wrap up your presentation quickly.

16. Nonverbal expression that reinforces a verbal message.

17. Nonverbal gesture that carries a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words.

18. Nonverbal expression that controls, encourages or discourages interaction.

“**Affect displays**¹⁹ are nonverbal communication that express emotions or feelings.”McLean, S. (2003). The basics of speech communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. pp.77 An affect display that might accompany holding up your hand for silence would be to frown and shake your head from side to side. When you and Andrew are at Barney’s Bar, smiling and waving at co-workers who arrive lets them know where you are seated and welcomes them.

“**Adaptors**²⁰ are displays of nonverbal communication that help you adapt to your environment and each context, helping you feel comfortable and secure.”McLean, S. (2003). The basics of speech communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. pp.77 A **self-adaptor**²¹ involves you meeting your need for security, by playing with your hair for example, by adapting something about yourself in way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose. Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior. An **object-adaptor**²² involves the use of an object in a way for which it was not designed. You may see group members tapping their pencils, chewing on them, or playing with them, while ignoring you and your presentation. Or perhaps someone pulls out a comb and repeatedly rubs a thumbnail against the comb’s teeth. They are using the comb or the pencil in a way other than its intended design, an object-adaptor that communicates a lack of engagement or enthusiasm in your speech.



Combing your hair would be an example of a purposeful action, unlike a self-adaptive behavior.

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Intentional nonverbal communication can complement, repeat, replace, mask or contradict what we say. When Andrew invited you to Barney’s, you said “yeah” and nodded, complementing and repeating the message. You could have simply nodded, effectively replacing the “yes” with a nonverbal response. You could also have decided to say no, but did not want to hurt Andrew’s feelings. Shaking your head “no” while pointing to your watch, communicating work and time issues, may mask your real thoughts or feelings. Masking involves the substitution of appropriate nonverbal communication for nonverbal communication you may want to display. McLean, S. (2003). The basics of speech communication. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. pp.77 Finally, nonverbal messages that conflict with verbal communication can confuse the listener. Table 6.2 "Some Nonverbal Expressions" summarizes these concepts.

- 19. An expression of emotion or mood.
- 20. Something that helps us feel comfortable or indicates emotions or moods.
- 21. Adapting something about yourself in way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose.
- 22. Use of an object for a purpose other than its intended design.

Table 6.2 Some Nonverbal Expressions

Adaptors	Help us feel comfortable or indicate emotions or moods
Affect displays	Express emotions or feelings
Complementing	Reinforcing verbal communication
Contradicting	Contradicting verbal communication
Emblems	Nonverbal gestures that carry a specific meaning, and can replace or reinforce words
Illustrators	Reinforce a verbal message
Masking	Substituting more appropriate displays for less appropriate displays
Object-adaptors	Using an object for a purpose other than its intended design
Regulators	Control, encourage or discourage interaction
Repeating	Repeating verbal communication
Replacing	Replacing verbal communication
Self-adaptors	Adapting something about yourself in a way for which it was not designed or for no apparent purpose

Nonverbal Communication Is Universal

Consider the many contexts in which interaction occurs during your day. In the morning, at work, after work, at home, with friends, with family, and our list could go on for quite awhile. Now consider the differences in nonverbal communication across these many contexts. When you are at work, do you jump up and down and say whatever you want? Why or why not? You may not engage in that behavior because of expectations at work, but the fact remains that from the moment you wake until you sleep, you are surrounded by nonverbal communication.

If you had been born in a different country, to different parents, perhaps even as a member of the opposite sex, your whole world would be quite different. Yet nonverbal communication would remain a universal constant. It may not look the same, or get used in the same way, but it will still be nonverbal communication in its many functions and displays.

Nonverbal Communication Is Confusing and Contextual

Nonverbal communication can be confusing. We need contextual clues to help us understand, or begin to understand, what a movement, gesture, or lack of display

means. Then we have to figure it all out based on our prior knowledge (or lack thereof) of the person and hope to get it right. Talk about a challenge. Nonverbal communication is everywhere, and we all use it, but that doesn't make it simple or independent of when, where, why, or how we communicate.

Nonverbal Communication Can Be Intentional or Unintentional

Suppose you are working as a salesclerk in a retail store, and a customer communicated frustration to you. Would the nonverbal aspects of your response be intentional or unintentional? Your job is to be pleasant and courteous at all times, yet your wrinkled eyebrows or wide eyes may have been unintentional. They clearly communicate your negative feelings at that moment. Restating your wish to be helpful and displaying nonverbal gestures may communicate "No big deal," but the stress of the moment is still "written" on your face.

Can we tell when people are intentionally or unintentionally communicating nonverbally? Ask ten people this question and compare their responses. You may be surprised. It is clearly a challenge to understand nonverbal communication in action. We often assign intentional motives to nonverbal communication when in fact their display is unintentional, and often hard to interpret.

Nonverbal Messages Communicate Feelings and Attitudes

Beebe, Beebe and RedmondBeebe, S., Beebe, S., & Redmond, M. (2002). *Interpersonal communication relating to others* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. offer us three additional principals of interpersonal nonverbal communication that serve our discussion. One is that you often react faster than you think. Your nonverbal responses communicate your initial reaction before you can process it through language or formulate an appropriate response. If your appropriate, spoken response doesn't match your nonverbal reaction, you may give away your true feelings and attitudes.

Albert MehrabianMehrabian, A. (1972). *Nonverbal communication*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Atherton. asserts that we rarely communicate emotional messages through the spoken word. According to Mehrabian, 93% of the time we communicate our emotions nonverbally, with at least 55% associated with facial gestures. Vocal cues, body position and movement, and normative space between group members can also be clues to feelings and attitudes.

Is your first emotional response always an accurate and true representation of your feelings and attitudes, or does your emotional response change across time? We are all changing all the time, and sometimes a moment of frustration or a flash of anger

can signal to the receiver a feeling or emotion that existed for a moment, but has since passed. Their response to your communication will be based on that perception, even though you might already be over the issue. This is where the spoken word serves us well. You may need to articulate clearly that you were frustrated, but not anymore. The words spoken out loud can serve to clarify and invite additional discussion.

We Believe Nonverbal Communication More Than Verbal

Building on the example of responding to a situation with facial gestures associated with frustration before you even have time to think of an appropriate verbal response, let's ask the question: What would you believe, someone's actions or their words? According to Seiler and Beall, Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. most people tend to believe the nonverbal message over the verbal message. People will often answer "actions speak louder than words" and place a disproportionate emphasis on the nonverbal response. Humans aren't logical all the time, and they do experience feelings and attitudes that change. Still, we place more confidence in nonverbal communication, particularly when it comes to lying behaviors. According to Zuckerman, DePaulo and Rosenthal, there are several behaviors people often display when they are being deceptive: Zuckerman, M., DePaulo, D., & Rosenthal, R. (1981). Verbal and nonverbal communication of deception. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 14, 1-59.

- reduction in eye contact while engaged in a conversation
- awkward pauses in conversation
- higher pitch in voice
- deliberate pronunciation and articulation of words
- increased delay in response time to a question
- increased body movements like changes in posture
- decreased smiling
- decreased rate of speech

If you notice one or more of the behaviors, you may want to take a closer look. Over time we learn people's patterns of speech and behavior, and form a set of expectations. Variation from their established patterns, combined with the clues above, can serve to alert you to the possibility that something deserves closer attention.

Our nonverbal responses have a connection to our physiological responses to stress, such as heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductivity. Polygraph machines (popularly referred to as "lie detectors") focus on these physiological responses and

demonstrate anomalies, or variations. While movies and TV crime shows may make polygraphs look foolproof, there is significant debate about whether they measure dishonesty with any degree of accuracy.

Can you train yourself to detect lies? It is unlikely. Our purpose in studying nonverbal communication is not to uncover dishonesty in others, but rather to help you understand how to use the nonverbal aspects of communication to increase understanding.

Nonverbal Communication Is Key in the Group Member Relationship

When we first see each other, before anyone says a word, we are already sizing each other up. Within the first few seconds we have made judgments about each other based on what we wear, our physical characteristics, even our posture. Are these judgments accurate? That is hard to know without context, but we can say that nonverbal communication certainly affects first impressions, for better or worse. When group members first meet, nonverbal communication in terms of space, dress and even personal characteristics can contribute to assumed expectations. The expectations might not be accurate or even fair, but it is important to recognize that they will be present. There is truth in the saying, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Since beginnings are fragile times, your attention to aspects you can control, both verbal and nonverbal, will help contribute to the first step of forming a relationship with your group. Your eye contact with group members, use of space, and degree of formality will continue to contribute to that relationship.

As a professional, your nonverbal communication is part of the message and can contribute to, or detract from, your overall goals. By being aware of them, you can learn to control them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nonverbal communication is the process of conveying a message without the use of words; it relates to the dynamic process of communication, the perception process and listening, and verbal communication.
- Nonverbal communication is fluid and fast, universal, confusing and contextual. It can add to or replace verbal communication, and can be intentional or unintentional.
- Nonverbal communication communicates feelings and attitudes, and people tend to believe nonverbal messages more than verbal ones.

EXERCISES

1. Does it limit or enhance our understanding of communication to view nonverbal communication as that which is not verbal communication? Explain your answer and discuss with the class.
2. Choose a television personality you admire. What do you like about this person? Watch several minutes of this person with the sound turned off, and make notes of the nonverbal expressions you observe. Turn the sound back on and make notes of their tone of voice, timing, and other audible expressions. Discuss your results with a classmate.
3. Find a program that focuses on micro-expressions and write a brief summary of how they play a role in the program. Share and compare with classmates.
4. Create a survey that addresses the issue of which people trust more, nonverbal or verbal messages. Ask an equal number of men and women, and compare your results with those of your classmates.
5. Search for information on the reliability and admissibility of results from polygraph (“lie detector”) tests. Share your findings with classmates.
6. See how long and how much you can get done during the day without the use of verbal messages.

6.5 Types of Nonverbal Communication

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe the similarities and differences among eight general types of nonverbal communication.

Now that we have discussed the general principles that apply to nonverbal communication, let's examine eight types of nonverbal communication to further understand this challenging aspect of communication:

1. space
2. time
3. physical characteristics
4. body movements
5. touch
6. paralanguage
7. artifacts
8. environment

Space

When we discuss space in a nonverbal context, we mean the space between objects and people. Space is often associated with social rank and is an important part of group communication. Who gets the corner office? Why is the head of the table important and who gets to sit there?

People from diverse cultures may have different normative space expectations. If you are from a large urban area, having people stand close to you may be normal. If you are from a rural area, or a culture where people expect more space, someone may be standing "too close" for comfort and not know it.

Edward T. Hall, Hall, E. T. (1963). Proxemics: the study of man's spacial relations and boundaries. In *Man's image in medicine and anthropology* (pp. 422–445). New York, NY: International Universities Press. serving in the European and South Pacific Regions in the Corps of Engineers during World War II, traveled around the globe. As he moved from one place to another, he noticed that people in different countries kept different distances from each other. In France, they stood closer to each other than they did in England. Hall wondered why that was and began to study what he called **proxemics**²³, or the study of the human use of space and distance in communication.

In *The Hidden Dimension*, he indicated there are two main aspects of space: territory and personal space. Hall drew on anthropology to address the concepts of dominance and submission, and noted that the more powerful person often claims more space. This plays an important role in modern society, from who gets the corner office to how we negotiate space between vehicles. Road rage is increasingly common where overcrowding occurs, and as more vehicles occupy the same roads, tensions over space are predictable.

Territory is related to control. As a way of establishing control over your own room, maybe you painted it your favorite color, or put up posters that represent your interests or things you consider unique about yourself. Families or households often mark their space by putting up fences or walls around their houses. This sense of a right to control your space is implicit in territory. **Territory**²⁴ means the space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.

The second aspect Hall highlight is **personal space**²⁵, or the “bubble” of space surrounding each individual. As you walk down a flight of stairs, which side do you choose? We may choose the right side because we've learned that is what is expected, and people coming up the same stair choose their right, or your left. The right choice insures that personal space is not compromised. But what happens when some comes up the wrong side? They violate the understood rules of movement and often self-correct. But what happens if they don't change lanes as people move up and down the stairs? They may get dirty looks or even get bumped as people in the crowd handle the invasion of “their” space. There are no lane markers, and bubbles of space around each person move with them, allowing for the possibility of collision.

- 23. The study of the human use of space and distance in communication.
- 24. The space you claim as your own, are responsible for, or are willing to defend.
- 25. The “bubble” of space surrounding each individual.

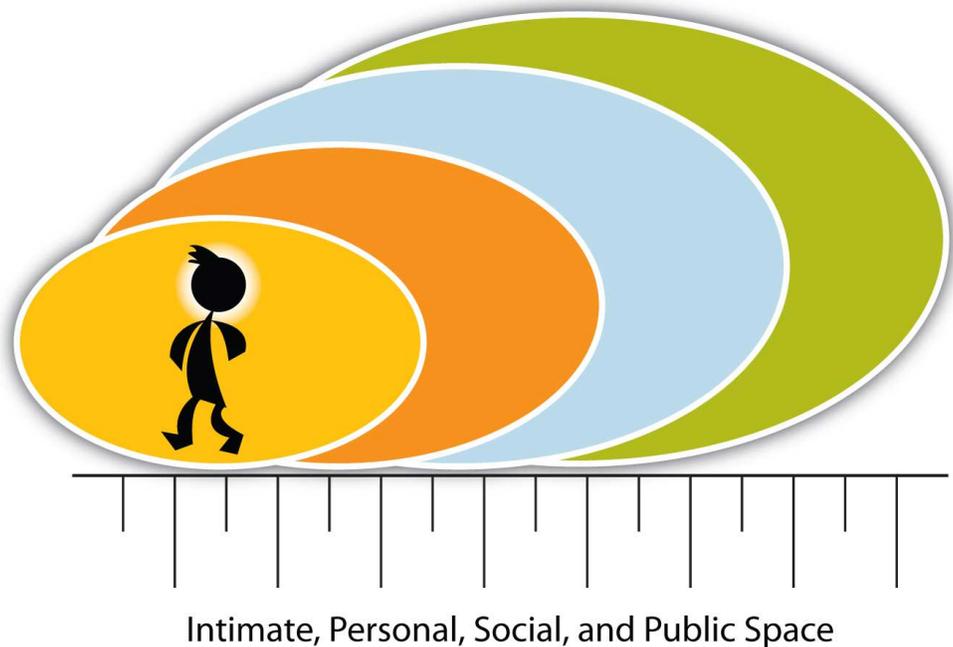
We recognize the basic need for personal space, but the normative expectations for space vary greatly by culture. You may perceive that in your home people sleep one to each bed, but in many cultures people sleep two or more to a bed and it is considered normal. If you were to share that bed you might feel uncomfortable, while someone raised with group sleeping norms might feel uncomfortable sleeping

alone. From where you stand in an aerobics class in relation to others, to where you place your book bag in class, your personal expectations of space are often at variance with others.

As the context of a staircase has norms for nonverbal behavior, so group interactions. In North America, eye contact is expected. Big movements and gestures are not generally expected and can be distracting. The speaking group member occupies a space on the “stage,” when they have the “floor” (or it is their turn to speak), even if there are co-workers on either side. When you occupy that space, the group will expect to behave in certain ways. If you talk to the laptop screen in front of you, the group may perceive that you are not really paying attention to them. They also might think you need to read your own report, a less than confident position. Group members are expected to pay attention to, and interact with, each other, even if in the feedback is primarily nonverbal. Your movements should coordinate to tone, rhythm, and content of your message. Tapping your pen, keeping your hands in your pockets or your arms crossed may communicate nervousness, or even defensiveness, and detract from your message.

As a general rule, try to act naturally, as if you were telling a friend a story, and your body will relax and your nonverbal gestures will come more naturally. Practice is key to your level of comfort, and the more practice you get, the more comfortable and less intimidating it will seem to you.

Figure 6.2 SPACE



Hall, E. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. N.Y., NY: Doubleday. articulated four main categories of distance used in communication.

Time

Do you know what time it is? How aware you are of time varies by culture and normative expectations of adherence (or ignorance) of time. Some people, and the communities and cultures they represent, are very time-oriented. The EuroRail Trains in Germany are famous for departing and arriving according to the schedule. In contrast, if you take the train in Argentina and you'll find that the schedule is more of an approximation of when the train will leave or arrive.

"Time is money" is a common saying across many cultures, and reveals a high value for time. In social contexts it often reveals social status and power. Who are you willing to wait for? A doctor for an office visit when you are sick? A potential employer for a job interview? Your significant other, or children? Sometimes we get impatient, and our impatience underscores our value for time.

When you give a presentation to your team or group, does your group have to wait for you? Time is a relevant factor of the communication process in your speech. The best way to show your group respect is to honor the time expectation associated with your speech. Always try to stop speaking before the group stops listening; if the members perceive that you have "gone over time," they will be less willing to listen. This in turn will have a negative impact on your ability to communicate your message.

Suppose you are presenting a speech to your team that has three main points. Your group will look to you to regulate the time and attention to each point, but if you spend all your time on the first two points and rush through the third, your presentation won't be balanced and will lose rhythm. The speaker occupies a position of some power, but it is the group that gives them that position. Your team is counting on you to make a difference, and to not waste their time. By displaying respect and maintaining balance, you will move through your points more effectively.

Chronemics²⁶ is the study of how we refer to and perceive time. Tom Bruneau at Radford University has spent a lifetime investigating how time interacts in communication and culture. Bruneau, T. (1974). Time and nonverbal communication. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 8, 658–666. Bruneau, T. (1990).

Chronemics: the study of time in human interaction. In J. DeVito, & M. Hecht (Eds.), *The nonverbal reader* (pp. 301–311). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland press. Bruneau, T., & Ishii, S. (1988). Communicative silence: east and west. *World Communication*, 17,

26. The study of how we refer to and perceive time.

1–33. As he notes, across western society, time is often considered the equivalent of money. The value of speed is highly prized in some societies. Schwartz, T. (1989, January/February). Acceleration syndrome: does everyone live in the fast lane? *Utne Reader*, 36–43. In others, there is a great respect for slowing down and taking a long-term view of time.

When you order a meal at a “fast food” restaurant, what are your expectations for how long you will have to wait? When you order a pizza online for delivery, when do you expect it will arrive? If you order cable service for your home, when do you expect it might be delivered? In the first case you might measure the delivery of a hamburger in a matter of seconds or minutes, and perhaps 30 minutes for pizza delivery, but you may measure the time from your order to working cable in days or even weeks. You may even have to be at your home from 8 A.M. to noon waiting for its installation. The expectations vary by context, and we often grow frustrated in a time-sensitive culture when the delivery does not match our expectations.

In the same way, how long should it take to respond to a customer’s request for assistance or information? If they call on the phone, how long should they wait on hold? How soon should they expect a response to an e-mail? As a skilled group communicator, you will know to anticipate normative expectations and do your best to meet those expectations more quickly than anticipated. Your prompt reply or offer of help in response to a request, even if you cannot solve the issue on the spot, is often regarded positively, contributing to the formation of positive communication interactions.

Across cultures the value of time may vary. Some Mexican-American friends may invite you to a barbecue at 8 P.M., but when you arrive you are the first guest, because it is understood that the gathering actually doesn’t start until after 9 P.M. In France, similarly, an 8 P.M. party invitation would be understood to indicate you should arrive around 8:30, but in Sweden 8 P.M. means 8 P.M., and latecomers may not be welcome. Some Native Americans, particularly elders, speak in well-measured phrases and take long pauses between phrases. They do not hurry their speech or compete for their turn, knowing no one will interrupt them. McLean, S. (1998). Turn-taking and the extended pause: a study of interpersonal communication styles across generations on the Warm Springs Indian reservation. In K. S. Sitaram, & M. Prosser (Eds.), *Civic discourse: Multiculturalism, cultural diversity, and global communication* (pp. 213–227). Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing Company. Some Orthodox Jews observe religious days when they do not work, cook, drive, or use electricity. People around the world have different ways of expressing value for time.

Physical Characteristics

You didn't choose your birth, your eye color, the natural color of your hair, or your height, but people spend millions every year trying to change their physical characteristics. You can get colored contacts, dye your hair, and, if you are shorter than you'd like to be, buy shoes to raise your stature a couple of inches. You won't be able to change your birth, and no matter how much you stoop to appear shorter, you won't change your height until time and age gradually makes itself apparent. If you are tall, you might find the correct shoe size, pant length, or even the length of mattress a challenge, but there are rewards. Have you ever heard that taller people get paid more? Burnham, T., & Phelan, J. (2000). *Mean genes: from sex to money to food: taming our primal instincts*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing. There is some truth to that idea. There is also some truth to the notion that people prefer symmetrical faces (where both sides are equal) over asymmetrical faces (with unequal sides; like a crooked nose or having one eye or ear slightly higher than the other). Burnham, T., & Phelan, J. (2000). *Mean genes: from sex to money to food: taming our primal instincts*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.

We often make judgments about a person's personality or behavior based on physical characteristics, and researchers are quick to note those judgments are often inaccurate. Wells, W., & Siegel, B. (1961). Stereotypes somatypes. *Psychological Reports*, 8, 77–78. Cash, T., & Kilcullen, R. (1985). The eye of the beholder: susceptibility to sexism and beautyism in the evaluation of managerial applicants. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 15, 591–605. Regardless of your eye or hair color, or even how tall you are, being comfortable with yourself is an important part of your presentation. Act naturally and consider aspects of your presentation you can control in order to maximize a positive image for the group or team.

Body Movements

The study of body movements, called **kinesics**²⁷, is key to understanding nonverbal communication. Since your actions will significantly contribute to the effectiveness of your group interactions, let's examine four distinct ways body movements that complement, repeat, regulate, or replace your verbal messages.

Body movements can complement the verbal message by reinforcing the main idea. For example, you may be providing an orientation presentation to a customer about a software program. As you say, "Click on this tab," you may also initiate that action. Your verbal and nonverbal messages reinforce, or complement, each other. You can also reinforce the message by repeating it. If you first say "Click on the tab," and then motion with your hand to the right, indicating that the customer should move the cursor arrow with the mouse to the tab, your repetition can help the listener understand the message.

27. The study of body movements.

In addition to repeating your message, body movements can also regulate conversations. Nodding your head to indicate that you are listening may encourage the customer to continue asking questions. Holding your hand up, palm out, may signal them to stop and provide a pause where you can start to answer.

Body movements also substitute or replace verbal messages. Ekman and Friesen (Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. (1967). Head and body cues in the judgment of emotions: a reformulation. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 24, 711–724. found facial features communicate to others our feelings, but our body movements often reveal how intensely we experience those feelings. For example, if the customer makes a face of frustration while trying to use the software program, they may need assistance. If they push away from the computer and separate themselves physically from interacting with it, they may be extremely frustrated. Learning to gauge feelings and their intensity as expressed by customers takes time and patience, and your attention to them will improve your ability to facilitate positive interactions.

Touch

Touch in communication interaction is called **haptics**²⁸, and Seiler and Beall (Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. identify five distinct types of touch, from impersonal to intimate, as listed in [Table 6.3 "Types of Touch"](#).

Table 6.3 Types of Touch

1. Functional-professional touch	Medical examination, physical therapy, sports coach, music teacher
2. Social-polite touch	Handshake
3. Friendship-warmth touch	Hug
4. Love-intimacy touch	Kiss between family members or romantic partners
5. Sexual-arousal touch	Sexual caressing and intercourse

Before giving your presentation, you may interact with people by shaking hands and making casual conversation. This interaction can help establish trust before you take the stage. While speaking in groups we do not often touch people on the team, but we do interact with visual aids, our note cards, and other objects. How we handle them can communicate our comfort level. It's always a good idea to practice using the technology, visual aids or note cards we'll use in a speech in a practice setting. Using the technology correctly by clicking the right button on the mouse or

28. Touch in communication interaction.

pressing the right switch on the overhead project can contribute to, or detract from, your credibility.

Paralanguage

Paralanguage is the exception to the definition of nonverbal communication. You may recall that we defined nonverbal communication as not involving words, but paralanguage exists when we are speaking, using words. **Paralanguage**²⁹ involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including tone, intensity, pausing, and even silence.

Perhaps you've also heard of a **pregnant pause**³⁰, a silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning. The meaning itself may be hard to understand or decipher, but it is there nonetheless. For example, your co-worker Jan comes back from a sales meeting speechless with a ghost-white complexion. You may ask if the meeting went all right. "Well, ahh..." may be the only response you get. The pause speaks volumes. Something happened, though you may not know what. It could be personal if Jan's report was not well received, or it could be more systemic, like the news that sales figures are off by 40% and pink slips may not be far behind.

Silence or vocal pauses can communicate hesitation, indicate the need to gather thought, or serve as a sign of respect. Keith Basso (1970). To give up on words: silence in western Apache culture. In *Cultural communication and intercultural contact* (pp. 301-318). Hillsdale, NJ: Laurence Erlbaum. quotes an anonymous source as stating, "it is not the case that a man who is silent says nothing." Sometimes we learn just as much, or even more, from what a person does not say as what they do say. In addition, both Basso and Susan Philips (1983). *The invisible culture: communication in the classroom and community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation*. Chicago, IL: Waveland Press. found that traditional speech among Native Americans places a special emphasis on silence.

Artifacts

Do you cover your tattoos when you are at work? Do you know someone who does? Or perhaps you know someone who has a tattoo and does not need to cover it up on their job? Expectations vary a great deal, but body art or tattoos are still controversial in the workplace. According to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*: Kinsman, M. (2001, August 20). Tattoos and nose rings. *San Diego Union-Tribune*, p. C1.

- 20% of workers indicated their body art had been held against them on the job.

29. Involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including tone, intensity, pausing, and silence.

30. A silence between verbal messages that is full of meaning.

- 42% of employers said the presence of visible body art lowered their opinion of workers.
- 44% of managers surveyed have body art.
- 52% of workers surveyed have body art.
- 67% of workers who have body art or piercings cover or remove them during work hours.

In your line of work, a tattoo might be an important visual aid, or might detract from your effectiveness. Piercings may express individuality, but you need to consider how they will be interpreted by employers and customers.

Artifacts³¹ are forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept. They can include rings and tattoos, but may also include brand names and logos. From clothes to cars, watches, briefcases, purses, and even eyeglasses, what we choose to surround ourselves with communicates something about our sense of self. They may project gender, role or position, class or status, personality and group membership or affiliation. Paying attention to a customer's artifacts can give you a sense of the self they want to communicate, and may allow you to more accurately adapt your message to meet their needs.

Environment

Environment³² involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context. More than the tables and chairs in an office, environment is an important part of the dynamic communication process. The perception of one's environment influences one's reaction to it. For example, Google is famous for its work environment, with spaces created for physical activity and even in-house food service around the clock. The expense is no doubt considerable, but Google's actions speak volumes. The results produced in the environment, designed to facilitate creativity, interaction, and collaboration, are worth the effort.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Nonverbal communication can be categorized into eight types: space, time, physical characteristics, body movements, touch, paralanguage, artifacts, and environment.

31. Forms of decorative ornamentation that are chosen to represent self-concept.

32. Involves the physical and psychological aspects of the communication context.

EXERCISES

1. Do a www.google.com search on space and culture. Share your findings with your classmates.
2. Note where people sit on the first day of class, and each class session thereafter. Do students return to the same seat? If they do not attend class, do the classmates leave their seat vacant? Compare your results.
3. What kind of value do you have for time? And what is truly important to you? Make a list of what you spend your time on, and what you value most. Do the lists match? Are you spending time on what is truly important to you? Relationships take time, and if you want them to succeed in a personal or business context you have to make them a priority.
4. To what degree is time a relevant factor in communication in the information age? Give some examples. Discuss your ideas with a classmate.
5. How many people do you know who have chosen tattoos or piercings as a representation of self and statement of individuality? Survey your friends and share your findings with your classmates.

6.6 Summary

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

In this chapter we have defined language as a code that has rules of syntax, semantics, and context. We have examined how language influences our perception of the world and the verbal principles of communication. We have seen that a message has several parts and can be interpreted on different levels. Building on each of these principles, we examined how cliché, jargon, slang, sexist and racist language, euphemisms, and doublespeak can all be impediments to successful communication. We discussed four strategies for giving emphasis to your message: visuals, signposts, internal summaries and foreshadowing, and repetition. Finally, we discussed six ways to improve communication: defining your terms, choosing precise words, considering your group, controlling your tone, checking for understanding, and focusing on results.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Interpretive Questions

- a. From your viewpoint, how do you think that thought influences the use of language?
- b. Is there ever a justifiable use for doublespeak? Why or why not? Explain your response and give some examples.
- c. What is meant by *conditioned* in the phrase “people in Western cultures do not realize the extent to which their racial attitudes have been conditioned since early childhood by the power of words to ennoble or condemn, augment or detract, glorify or demean?” Moore, R. (2003). *Racism in the English language*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

2. Application Questions

- a. How does language change over time? Interview someone older than you, and younger than you, and identify words that have changed. Pay special attention to jargon and slang words.
- b. How does language affect self-concept? Explore and research your answer, finding examples which serve can as case studies.
- c. Can people readily identify the barriers to communication? Survey ten individuals and see if they accurately identify at least one barrier, even if they use a different term or word.

Additional Resources

Benjamin Lee Whorf was one of the 20th century’s foremost linguists. Learn more about his theories of speech behavior by visiting this site.

<http://grail.cba.csuohio.edu/~somos/whorf.html>

Visit InfoPlease to learn more about the eminent linguist (and U.S. senator) S. I. Hayakawa. <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0880739.html>

Harvard psychology professor Steven Pinker is one of today’s most innovative authorities on language. Explore reviews of books about language Pinker has published. <http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/books/index.html>

Reference.com offers a wealth of definitions, synonym finders, and other guides to choosing the right words. <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

Visit Goodreads and learn about one of the best word usage guides, Bryan Garner's *Modern American Usage*. http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/344643.Garner_s_Modern_American_Usage

Visit Goodreads and learn about one of the most widely used style manuals, the *Chicago Manual of Style*. http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/103362.The_Chicago_Manual_of_Style

The "I Have a Dream" speech by Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the most famous speeches of all time. View it on video and read the text. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

The Religious Communication Association, an interfaith organization, seeks to promote honest, respectful dialogue reflecting diversity of religious beliefs. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/rca/index.html>

To learn more about being results oriented, visit the web site of Stephen Covey, author of the best seller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. <https://www.stephencovey.com/>

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.