

Interpersonal communication is like breathing; it is a requirement for life. And, like breathing, interpersonal communication is inescapable. Unless you live in isolation, you communicate interpersonally every day. Listening to your roommate, talking to a teacher, meeting for lunch with a friend, and talking to your parents or your spouse are all examples of interpersonal communication.

It is impossible *not* to communicate with others.¹ Even before we are born, we respond to movement and sound. With our first cry, we announce to others that we are here. Once we make contact with others, we communicate, and we continue to do so until we draw our last breath. Even though many of our messages are not verbalized, we nonetheless send messages to others—intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. Whatever our intentions, people draw conclusions from our behavior. Without interpersonal communication, a special form of human communication that occurs as we manage our relationships, people suffer and even die. Recluses, hermits, and people isolated in solitary confinement dream and hallucinate about talking with others face to face.



Chuck cuts his hand. In anger he throws several objects from the packages, including a Wilson Sporting Goods volleyball, leaving a bloody hand print on it. He draws a face into the smeared blood, names the ball Wilson, and begins talking to it. He continues to talk to it regularly during the rest of his time on the island.
-Cast Away is a 2000 American survival drama film directed and produced by Robert Zemeckis and starring Tom Hanks

Human communication is at the core of our existence. Think of the number of times you communicated with someone today, as you worked, ate, studied, shopped, or went about your other daily activities. Most people spend between 80 and 90 percent of their waking hours communicating with others.² It is through these interactions with others that we develop interpersonal relationships.³

Yet, not everyone is comfortable talking to others. In fact some people are quite anxious and nervous about communicating. The extent to which people exhibit anxiety about speaking to others is called **communication apprehension**. This course is about improving your ability to interact with other people. Improving your interpersonal communication skills will assist you in becoming more effective in your relationships with a variety of people (e.g. family members, friends, teachers, classmates, co-workers). As we address essential questions about how you relate to others, we will emphasize the importance of being **other-oriented**. Being other-oriented results in awareness of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners while still maintaining your own integrity. Becoming **other-oriented** is not a single skill, but a collection of skills and principles that are designed to increase your sensitivity to and understanding of others

For Practice:

Communication Assessment Test

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA)

Directions: This instrument is composed of twenty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you using the following five-point scale:

strongly agree = 1 agree = 2 am undecided = 3
disagree = 4 strongly disagree = 5

There are no right or wrong answers. Please mark your first impression and answer quickly. You can also take this test online under Student Resources for Chapter 1 at the Understanding Interpersonal Communication website. 🌐

- _____ 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- _____ 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- _____ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- _____ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
- _____ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- _____ 8. Usually, I am calm and relaxed while participating in a meeting.
- _____ 9. I am calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
- _____ 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- _____ 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me feel uncomfortable.
- _____ 12. I am relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- _____ 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- _____ 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- _____ 15. Ordinarily, I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- _____ 16. Ordinarily, I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- _____ 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
- _____ 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- _____ 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- _____ 20. Certain parts of my body feel tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- _____ 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- _____ 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- _____ 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.

- _____ 24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Scoring

There are four categories for scoring: group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. To compute your scores, add or subtract the numbers you marked for each item as indicated below:

- 1. Group discussions
18 + (plus) scores for items 2, 4, and 6 – (minus) scores for items 1, 3, and 5 = Subtotal _____
- 2. Meetings
18 + (plus) scores for items 8, 9, and 12 – (minus) scores for items 7, 10, and 11 = Subtotal _____
- 3. Interpersonal conversations
18 + (plus) scores for items 14, 16, and 17 – (minus) scores for items 13, 15, and 18 = Subtotal _____
- 4. Public speaking
18 + (plus) scores for items 19, 21, and 23 – (minus) for items 20, 22, and 24 scores = Subtotal _____

To obtain your score, add your four subscores together. Your score should range between 24 and 120. If your score is below 24 or above 120, you have made a mistake in computation. Scores can range, in each context, from a low of 6 to a high of 30. Any score above 18 indicates some degree of communication apprehension.

Questions to Focus On

- 1. What does your score say about you?
- 2. Do you have higher apprehension in some contexts than in others? If so, why do you think so?
- 3. Discuss how your scores can help you better understand your relationships with others.

Interpersonal Communication Defined

other-oriented To be aware of the thoughts, needs, experiences, personality, emotions, motives, desires, culture, and goals of your communication partners while still maintaining your own integrity.

communication Process of acting on information.

To understand interpersonal communication, we must begin by understanding how it relates to two broader categories: communication in general and human communication. Scholars have attempted to arrive at a general definition of communication for decades, yet experts cannot agree on a single one. One research team counted more than 126 published definitions.⁴ In the broadest sense, **communication** is the process of acting on information.⁵ Someone does or says something, and others think or do something in response to the action or the words as they understand them.

To refine our broad definition, we can say that **human communication** is the process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages.⁶ We learn about the world by listening, observing, tasting, touching, and smelling; then we share our conclusions with others. Human communication encompasses many media: speeches, e-mail, songs, radio and television broadcasts, online discussion groups, letters, books, articles, poems, and advertisements.

Interpersonal communication is a distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships. The three essential elements of this definition differentiate the unique nature of interpersonal communication from other forms of human communication.⁷

Interpersonal Communication Is a Distinctive Form of Communication

For years, many scholars defined interpersonal communication simply as communication that occurs when two people interact face to face. This limited definition suggests that if two people are interacting, they are engaging in interpersonal communication. Today, interpersonal communication is defined not just by the number of people who communicate, but also by the quality of the communication. Interpersonal communication occurs when you treat the other person as a unique human being.⁸

Increasingly, people are relating more and more via smartphones, Twitter, Facebook, and Skype. Research is confirming that many of us think of the various electronic means we use to connect to others as natural ways to establish and maintain relationships.⁹ With a smartphone in our pocket, we are within reach of our friends, family, and colleagues.

Interpersonal versus Impersonal Communication. Think of all human communication, whether mediated or face-to-face, as ranging on a continuum from impersonal to interpersonal communication. **Impersonal communication** occurs when you treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons. When you ask a server in a restaurant for a glass of water, you are interacting with the role, not necessarily with the individual. You're having an impersonal conversation rather than an interpersonal one.

I-It and I-Thou Relationships. Philosopher Martin Buber influenced our thinking about the distinctiveness of interpersonal communication when he described communication as consisting of two different qualities of relationships: an “I-It” relationship or an “I-Thou” relationship.¹⁰ He described an “I-It” relationship as an impersonal one, in which the other person is viewed as an “It” rather than as an authentic, genuine person. For every communication transaction to be a personal, intimate dialogue would be unrealistic and inappropriate. It’s possible to go through an entire day communicating with others but not be involved in interpersonal communication.

An “I-Thou” relationship, on the other hand, occurs when you interact with another person as a unique, authentic individual rather than as an object or an “It.” In this kind of relationship, true, honest dialogue results in authentic communication. An “I-Thou” relationship is not self-centered. The communicators are patient, kind, and forgiving. They have developed an attitude toward each other that is honest, open, spontaneous, nonjudgmental, and based on equality rather than superiority.¹¹ However, although interpersonal communication is more intimate and reveals more about the people involved than does impersonal communication, not all interpersonal communication involves sharing closely guarded personal information.

human communication

Process of making sense out of the world and sharing that sense with others by creating meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal messages.

interpersonal communication

A distinctive, transactional form of human communication involving mutual influence, usually for the purpose of managing relationships.

impersonal communication

Process that occurs when we treat others as objects or respond to their roles rather than to who they are as unique persons.

Interpersonal versus Other Forms of Communication: Interpersonal communication is defined as a unique form of human communication. There are other forms of communication, as well.

- **Mass communication** occurs when one person communicates the same message to many people at once, but the creator of the message is usually not physically present, and listeners have virtually no opportunity to respond immediately to the speaker. Messages communicated via radio and TV are examples of mass communication.
- **Public communication** occurs when a speaker addresses an audience in person.
- **Small group communication** occurs when a group of from three to fifteen people meet to interact with a common purpose and mutually influence one another. The purpose of the gathering can be to solve a problem, make a decision, learn, or just have fun. While communicating with others in a small group, it is also possible to communicate interpersonally with one or more individuals in the group.
- **Intrapersonal communication** is communication with yourself. Thinking is perhaps the best example of intrapersonal communication. In our discussion of self and communication in Chapter 2, we discuss the relationships between your thoughts and your interpersonal communication with others.

RECAP The Continuum Between Interpersonal Communication and Impersonal Communication

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are treated as unique individuals. • People communicate in an “I-Thou” relationship. Each person is treated as special, and there is true dialogue and honest sharing of self with others. • Interpersonal communication often involves communicating with someone you care about, such as a good friend or cherished family member. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are treated as objects. • People communicate in an “I-It” relationship. Each person has a role to perform. • There is mechanical, stilted interaction, rather than honest sharing of feelings. • Impersonal communication involves communicating with people such as sales clerks and servers—you have no history with them, and you expect no future with them.
---	--