

Overview of the Communication Model

Brief: Public speaking can be better understood by analyzing the elements of the transactional communication model, which include sender and receiver, message, channel, noise, and feedback.

Learning Objective: Identify and understand the elements of the transactional communication model.

Key Terms:

- **Channel:** The medium used to transmit the signal from the transmitter to the receiver.
- **Feedback:** A return message sent from the receiver back to the sender.
- **Linear communication:** The type of communication that occurs when a message flows from a source to the receiver without immediate feedback from the receiver.
- **Noise:** Anything that blocks the sending or receiving of a message.
- **Transactional communication:** The type of communication that takes place when one person talks to another person or a group of people in real time, and the sender of the message receives simultaneous feedback.

Transactional Model of Communication

Models of communication offer conceptual frameworks for understanding the human communication process. Much like a model of a building, a conceptual framework is never an exact replica of what it represents. And to complicate matters even more, there's more than one type of human communication process.

The type of communication you engage in when you watch television or stream video is “linear,” meaning the message flows from a source to you without immediate feedback from you.



Watching TV is a linear communication process.

When communication takes place with one person talking to another person in real time—or with one person talking to a group of people in real time, as is the case in public speaking—the sender of the message receives simultaneous feedback. Eye contact (or lack of eye contact), facial expressions, and other body language cues gives the sender a message that may cause them to adapt their speech midsentence. Therefore, this model of human communication is called “transactional,” meaning the communication is characterized by interaction.

Elements of the Transactional Model

The Sender and the Receiver

The sender begins the communication process when they encode their message so that the receiver will be able to understand it. When you're the speaker, you translate your ideas into symbols. These symbols include verbal symbols, such as words, and nonverbal symbols, such as eye contact and body language.

Your audience has to be able to decode your message. When the audience is able to decode your verbal and nonverbal symbols—to retrieve your original ideas from your message—then you are a successful communicator.

Message

When you develop your speech, you'll have many ideas to convey, emotions you want your audience to feel and understand, and actions you want your audience to take. The words you choose, the images you select, and the style of your delivery comprise your message.

Channel

Channel is the medium used to transmit the signal from the transmitter to the receiver. In a face-to-face in-person speaking situation, the channel will primarily be audio (using sound) and visual (using light waves). In a speaking situation conducted via videoconferencing with a remote audience, the channel will be computer-mediated audio and visual.

Noise

Noise blocks the sending or receiving of a message. Noise can be external, internal, or semantic.

External noise interrupts hearing. For example, external noise is created when your microphone feeds back through a speaker, causing that ear-splitting high pitch squeal.

Internal noise is generated from internal thoughts and feelings. When your internal monologue before you get up on stage to speak says, "I'm not good enough. I'm going to forget my speech," you'll likely be distracted and have difficulty performing. Internal noise can also be created by emotional and physical states. If you're worried, tired, or hungry, you're apt to experience internal noise that gets in the way of your listening.

Semantic noise occurs when a speaker uses language in a way that a receiver doesn't understand, or doesn't understand clearly. For example, semantic noise is created when

subject matter experts incorrectly assume their audiences understand the highly specific vocabularies used in their fields of study.

Feedback

Feedback is a return message, sent from the receiver back to the sender. In addition to in-the-moment feedback that leads to message adjustment, feedback can be received in formal ways, such as handing out a presentation evaluation following your speech or presentation.

From Concept to Action

Recall a time when you were engaged in a conversation that was disrupted by “noise” in the environment. What was the source of that noise? Was something creating overwhelming sounds, such as a nearby construction project or background music that was too loud? Or were you distracted because you were thinking about something else? Or did the other person use a word that you found offensive, triggering an emotional reaction in you that shut down your listening? Or, perhaps a combination of all of these? Reflect on what choices you might have made that could have reduced this noise.

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