

# Making Conflict Suck Less: The Basics



# Making Conflict Suck Less: The Basics

---

ashleyorme

**Boise State University eCampus**

**Boise, Idaho**



Making Conflict Suck Less: The Basics by ashleyorme is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0  
International License, except where otherwise noted.



# Contents

Introduction	1
CHAPTER 1 - WHY ARE WE EVEN FIGHTING? DEFINING AND ANALYZING CONFLICT	
Types of Goals	11
SCARF Model	17
Conflict Management Styles	21
Using These Tools	35
CHAPTER 2 - WHY DON'T THEY JUST GET IT? DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING OUR DIFFERENCES	
Personality and Conflict	45
Gender and Conflict	55
Values and Conflict	64
Perceptions and Attributions in Conflict	68
Improving Your Perceptions	85

Using These Tools	103
-------------------	-----

### CHAPTER 3 - WHY AREN'T THEY LISTENING TO ME? LISTENING AS A SUPERPOWER AND OTHER IMPORTANT SKILLS

The Listening Process	115
Listening Types	127
Listening Styles	133
Barriers to Effective Listening	140
Improving Listening Competence	155
Active Listening	160
I-Statements - Owning your Voice	169
Asking Great Questions	172
Framing and Reframing	176
Nonverbal Communication	182
Using These Tools	191

### CHAPTER 4 - WHY DON'T PEOPLE READ BETWEEN THE LINES? ASSERTING YOURSELF AND SPEAKING UP FOR YOUR BELIEFS AND VALUES

The Passive - Assertive - Aggressive Continuum	201
Drawing Boundaries - Developing Assertive Messages	205
Asserting your Emotions	209
Different Types of Assertions	221

When to NOT Assert	225
6 Step Assertion Process	227
Using These Tools	230
CHAPTER 5 - WHY ARE THEY (AM I) SO DEFENSIVE? GETTING YOUR BRAIN UNDER CONTROL	
Your Brain on Conflict	241
Getting Your Brain Under Control	251
Getting Their Brain Under Control	261
Using These Tools	267
CHAPTER 6 - WHY DON'T PEOPLE CHANGE? DELIVERING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE	
Creating Messages that Get Heard	273
Giving Formal Feedback to Others	278
Receiving Formal Feedback	283
Using These Tools	288
Key Terms	293
Resource List	300
Afterward	315



# Introduction



**“To solve the most difficult problems we must radically**

## **change our thinking.” Stephen Covey**

Who do you have the most conflict with right now? Your answer to this question probably depends on the various contexts in your life. If you still live at home with a parent or parents, you may have daily conflicts with your family as you try to balance your autonomy, or desire for independence, with the practicalities of living under your family's roof. If you've recently moved away to go to college, you may be negotiating roommate conflicts as you adjust to living with someone you may not know at all. You probably also have experiences managing conflict in romantic relationships, friendships, and in the workplace. So think back and ask yourself, "How well do I handle conflict?"

**Conflict** occurs in interactions in which there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Interpersonal conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout. Interpersonal conflict is, however, distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse.

Conflict is an inevitable part of close relationships and can take a negative emotional toll. It takes effort to ignore

someone or be passive aggressive, and the anger or guilt we may feel after blowing up at someone are valid negative feelings. However, conflict isn't always negative or unproductive. In fact, numerous research studies have shown that quantity of conflict in a relationship is not as important as how the conflict is handled (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). Additionally, when conflict is well managed, it has the potential to lead to more rewarding and satisfactory relationships (Canary & Messman, 2000).

Improving your competence in dealing with conflict can yield positive effects on your personal and professional relationships. Since conflict is present in our personal and professional lives, the ability to manage conflict and negotiate desirable outcomes can help us be more successful at both. Whether you and your partner are trying to decide what brand of flat-screen television to buy or discussing the upcoming political election with your mother, the potential for conflict is present. In professional settings, the ability to engage in conflict management is a necessary and valued skill. However, many professionals do not receive training in conflict management even though they are expected to do it as part of their job. A lack of training and a lack of competence could be a recipe for disaster. Many colleges and universities now offer undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or certificates in conflict resolution, such as this one at Boise State University, Conflict Management Certificates. Being able to manage conflict situations can make life more productive and less stressful. Conflict can be an opportunity

to learn more about yourself and others, as well as deepen your relationships and connections with the people in your life. The negative effects of poorly handled conflict, which can range from an awkward last few weeks of the semester with a college roommate to anger, divorce, illness, or violence, can be minimized by improving our ability and capacity to manage the normal and naturally occurring conflict in our lives. The ideas, tools, and strategies we explore in this book will seem simple but they won't always be easy to implement into your daily life.

In this book, you will be putting language and frameworks to the conflict experiences you have had in your life. We will be approaching the concepts and frameworks from two angles:

**Mindset** – Examining our beliefs and ideas about conflict, communication, and people. Developing our awareness and understanding of how our mindset impacts our approach to conflict. The TedTalk below from Chip Huth provides an interesting look at how mindset changed his team's approach to policing.





A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=4>

**Skillset** – Examining what skills you currently have and what skills you need to improve in order to more effectively manage conflict.

I hope you find new strategies for creating stronger relationships through conflict and turning conflict into an opportunity in your life. By the end of this book you have a new mindset towards conflict and a skillset that supports you in managing the conflict in your life. Below is a TedTalk by Amy E. Gallo about The Gift of Conflict.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=4>

Adaptation: Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

# Chapter 1 - Why are we even fighting? Defining and Analyzing Conflict

## Learning Objectives

- Understand and define what conflict is and where it comes from
- Develop multiple strategies for analyzing conflict
- Define and recognize the 4 types of goal interference people experience in conflict
- Define and recognize the 5 domains of human social experiences in the SCARF model

- Define and recognize the 5 conflict styles
- Develop self awareness around your triggers and default styles in conflict

**“Conflict can have a positive side, one that build relationships, creates coalitions, fosters communications, strengthens institutions, and creates new ideas, rules and laws. These are the functions of conflict.”**  
**United Nations**



**Conflict** occurs in interactions in which there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. Interpersonal conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally along a continuum ranging from a nearly imperceptible cold shoulder to a very obvious blowout. Interpersonal conflict is, however, distinct from interpersonal violence, which goes beyond communication to include abuse.

### **FRAMEWORKS FOR ANALYZING CONFLICT**

Consider the conflicts you have experienced in your life. How many conflicts in your life seem to never get resolved? Maybe you think some of these conflicts have been resolved, because you have apologized (or gotten an apology) or done what someone has asked you to do (or someone has done what you asked) but yet there are still tensions, issues, overt or covert indicators that the conflict is still alive and well.

Often this happens because discussions around and about conflict take place at a surface level and don't address the underlying issues that really need to be resolved. One of the most important parts of managing conflict productively and constructively is addressing the underlying issues. In this chapter, we will explore three frameworks for analyzing conflict. These frameworks support us in identifying the underlying issues commonly involved in the conflicts we experience in our daily lives.

Adaptation: Material in this chapter has been adapted from "A Primer on Communication Studies" is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

## Types of Goals



**“The trouble with not having  
a goal is that you can spend  
your life running up and down**

## **the field and never score.” Bill Copeland**

### **UNDERSTANDING GOALS IN CONFLICT**

As we see in its definition, conflict includes “real or perceived incompatible goals.” McCorkle and Reese (2009) provide us with a very simple framework for analyzing what is happening with conflict in relation to goal incompatibility and interference. The types of goals they identify are:

**Substantive Goals** – our ability to secure tangible resources and/or something measurable and visible that we desire. *Example* – in a living situation with multiple roommates, I could have a substantive goal that our home is clean.

**Process Goals** – how events or processes unfold, how decisions are made, and how communication takes place. Continuing with the above *example* – in a living situation with multiple roommates, I could have a *substantive goal* that our home is clean, as well as a *process goal* that all the roommates clean up the kitchen as soon as they are done using it (cleaning is an event/process that is taking place).

**Relationship Goals** – How people relate to one another. Continuing with the above *example* – in a



living situation with multiple roommates, I could have a *substantive goal* that our home is clean. A *process goal* that all the roommates clean up the kitchen as soon as they are done using it. As well as a *relationship goal* that sharing the responsibility of cleaning is what makes a good roommate relationship.

**Face Goals** – How one's self-image is perceived in a social setting. Continuing with the above *example* – in a living situation with multiple roommates, I could have a *substantive goal* that our home is clean. A *process goal* that all the roommates clean up the kitchen as soon as they are done using it. A *relationship goal* that sharing the responsibility of cleaning is what makes a good roommate relationship. And a *face goal* that my house is clean when I invite my friends and family over so they don't think I am a slob.

<b>Types of Goals</b>	
	<b>Definition of Goal</b>
<b>Substantive</b>	Ability to secure tangible resources and/or something measurable/visible
<b>Process</b>	Desire to have events and processes unfold in a certain way, these processes include how decision are made and how/when communication happens
<b>Relationship</b>	How we relate to one another, in any relationship setting
<b>Face</b>	Ability to uphold one's self-image as it is perceived in a social setting

As you can see in the above example of a living situation with multiple roommates, there could be disagreement or differing views with any one of the goals I listed. Having a clean house isn't important to everyone. Having a set process for how shared kitchen cleaning happens isn't important to everyone. Having a "clean" roommate isn't important to

everyone. And caring about what friends and family think about your house isn't important to everyone. These are the points where conflict happens, when we have seemingly incompatible goals OR someone is interfering with one of my goals.

This framework allows us, first, to start understanding ourselves in a conflict situation. Think about a conflict you are currently experiencing. Ask yourself, which type of goals do you have? Which goals do you perceive some type of incompatibility or interference with? If you have more than one goal, which goal is most important? Once you understand what goals you really have in a conflict, you can start addressing the real issue and move towards resolving the conflict you are experiencing.

Once you start thinking about the conflict you have experienced in your lifetime, you will likely notice that you have a pattern in conflict situations. For me, a lot of my conflicts are Process Goal Interference. Is there a type of goal interference that leads to most of your conflicts? It is important to note here that Substantive Goals often times mask other goals when we bring up a conflict with others. It is much easier to talk about "dirty dishes" (something tangible and visible) than it is to admit that you care about what your friends and family think about your home (face goal – self-image in relation to others). One way to recognize this is happening, if someone does what you ask them to \*(like clean the dishes) but you still find yourself upset, there is likely something else going on. So when you think about the

conflicts that you have experienced in your life, consider if you have masked the “real” conflict with something that is seemingly easier and less vulnerable to talk about.

## SCARF Model



**“When things are not working for us, instead of fighting and struggling, we need to say,**

## **Whats happening here? How am I not being true to who I am?” – June Singer**

### **THE SCARF MODEL IN CONFLICT**

The second framework we will examine, The SCARF model, comes from David Rock out the Neuroscience Leadership Institute (2008). The SCARF model provides a framework to understand **the five domains of human social experiences**. David Rock and his team found that there are 5 areas of our brains that light up (via brain scan technology) during our social experiences.

**Status** – Sense of respect and importance in relation to others. “I am respected by my family, friends, and colleagues.”

**Certainty** – Sense of clarity to predict future outcomes. “I am confident I know what is coming next in my life.”

**Autonomy** – Sense of control over events that impact the future. “I am the master of my own destiny.”

**Relatedness** – Sense of connection with others in your groups. “I am connected to those around me.”

**Fairness** – Sense of non-biased and just treatment between people. “I am treated justly.”

These five areas can either be interpreted by us as a *reward* or *threat* based on the type of social experience we are having. Conflict is, by its very nature, a social experience. When we experience conflict we are experiencing the threat response side of the SCARF model. The different ways our brain interprets social experiences in the SCARF model is summarized in the graphic below.

<b>SCARF MODEL – Domains of Human Social Experiences</b>			
	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Reward Response</b>	<b>Threat Response</b>
<b>S STATUS</b>	Sense of respect and importance in relation to others.	Recognition for work, Opportunity for input, Reassurance of importance	Embarrassment, Getting unsolicited advice, Public critique
<b>C CERTAINTY</b>	Sense of clarity to predict future outcomes.	Clear expectations, Specific plans or next steps, Making the implicit explicit	No expectations, Unpredictability, Prospect of change
<b>A AUTONOMY</b>	Sense of control over events that impact the future.	Giving choice, Offering any flexibility, Options for self-organizing	Loss of choice, No way to make change or impact their situation
<b>R RELATEDNESS</b>	Sense of connection with others in your groups.	Inclusion, Chance to belong, Taking time to get to know someone	Exclusion, Isolation, Not involving certain people in groups or decisions
<b>F FAIRNESS</b>	Sense of non-biased and just treatment between people.	Transparency, Creating group or relational norms, Treating people equally and equitably	Unfair processes, Inconsistent application of rules/policy

Like with the types of goals framework above, many of us will have one of two areas in this SCARF model that will be regular conflict triggers for us. For me, they are Autonomy and Certainty. A lot of my conflicts surround these topics. We will explore how to use the Types of Goals and the SCARF Model to analyze conflicts below.

To learn more about the SCARF Model check out this article from the NeuroLeadership Journal [SCARF A Brain-based Model for Collaborating with and Influencing Others](#). These two frameworks give us the ability to look past surface level issues and start analyzing the conflicts in our lives for their real causes, so that we have a chance of truly resolving the issues we are facing with our friends, family, co-workers, and in our communities.



## Conflict Management Styles



**“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to**

## **cope with it.” Dorothy Thomas**

### **THOMAS KILMANN CONFLICT STYLES INVENTORY**

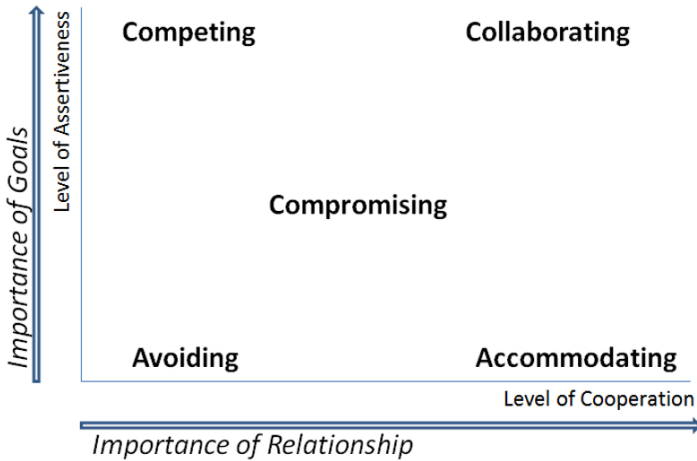
Would you describe yourself as someone who prefers to avoid conflict? Do you like to get your way? Are you good at working with someone to reach a solution that is mutually beneficial? Odds are that you have been in situations where you could answer yes to each of these questions, which underscores the important role context plays in conflict and conflict management styles in particular. The way we view and deal with conflict is learned and contextual. Is the way you handle conflicts similar to the way your parents handle conflict? If you're of a certain age, you are likely predisposed to answer this question with a certain "No!" It wasn't until my late twenties and early thirties that I began to see how similar I am to my parents, even though I, like many, spent years trying to distinguish myself from

them. Research does show that there is intergenerational transmission of traits related to conflict management. As children, we test out different conflict resolution styles we observe in our families with our parents and siblings. Later, as we enter adolescence and begin developing platonic and romantic relationships outside the family, we begin testing what we've learned from our parents in other settings. If a child has observed and used negative conflict management styles with siblings or parents, he or she is likely to exhibit those behaviors with non-family members (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998).

There has been much research done on different types of conflict management styles, which are communication strategies that attempt to avoid, address, or resolve a conflict. Keep in mind that we don't always consciously choose a style. We may instead be caught up in emotion and become reactionary. The strategies we explore in future chapter for more effectively managing conflict that may allow you to slow down the reaction process, become more aware of it, and to turn your reaction into a full thoughtful response.

The five strategies for managing conflict we will discuss are competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. Each of these conflict styles accounts for the

importance we place on our goals, and the importance we place on our relationships.



In order to better understand the elements of the five styles of conflict management, we will apply each to the following scenario. Rosa and D'Shaun have been partners for seventeen years. Rosa is growing frustrated because D'Shaun continues to give money to their teenage daughter, Casey, even though they decided to keep the teen on a fixed allowance to try to teach her more responsibility. While conflicts regarding money and child rearing are very common, we will see the numerous ways that Rosa and D'Shaun could address this problem.

### COMPETING

The **competing** style of conflict management that indicates high importance for your goals and low importance for your relationship, in which one party attempts to win by gaining

concessions or consent from another style indicates a high concern for self and a low concern for other. When we compete, we are striving to “win” the conflict, potentially at the expense or “loss” of the relationship. One way we may gauge our win is by being granted or taking concessions from the other person. For example, if D’Shaun gives Casey extra money behind Rosa’s back, he is taking an indirect competitive route resulting in a “win” for him because he got his way. The competing style also involves the use of power, which can be noncoercive or coercive (Sillars, 1980).

*Noncoercive* strategies include requesting and persuading. When requesting, we suggest the conflict partner change a behavior. Requesting doesn’t require a high level of information exchange. When we persuade, however, we give our conflict partner reasons to support our request or suggestion, meaning there is more information exchange, which may make persuading more effective than requesting. Rosa could try to persuade D’Shaun to stop giving Casey extra allowance money by bringing up their fixed budget or reminding him that they are saving for a summer vacation.

*Coercive* strategies violate standard guidelines for ethical communication and may include aggressive communication directed at rousing your partner’s emotions through insults, profanity, and yelling, or through threats of punishment if you do not get your way. If Rosa is the primary income earner in the family, she could use that power to threaten to take D’Shaun’s ATM card away if he continues giving Casey money.

In all these scenarios, the “win” that could result is only short term and can lead to conflict escalation. Interpersonal conflict is rarely isolated, meaning there can be ripple effects that connect the current conflict to previous and future conflicts. D’Shaun’s behind-the-scenes money giving or Rosa’s confiscation of the ATM card could lead to built-up negative emotions that could further test their relationship. It is important to note that there is a pattern of verbal escalation: requests, persuade, demands, complaints, angry statements, threats, harassment, and verbal abuse (Johnson & Roloff, 2000).

The competing style of conflict management is not the same thing as having a competitive personality. Competition in relationships isn’t always negative, and people who enjoy engaging in competition may not always do so at the expense of another person’s goals. In fact, research has shown that some couples engage in competitive shared activities like sports or games to maintain and enrich their relationship (Dindia & Baxter, 1987).

## AVOIDING

The **avoiding** style of conflict management often indicates low importance of your goals and your relationship, and no direct communication about the conflict takes place. Of note, in some cultures that emphasize group harmony over individual interests, and even in some situations in the United States, avoiding a conflict can indicate high importance of

your relationship. In general, avoiding doesn't mean that there is no communication about the conflict. *You cannot not communicate.* Even when we try to avoid conflict, we may intentionally or unintentionally give our feelings away through our verbal and nonverbal communication. Rosa's sarcastic tone as she tells D'Shaun that he's "Soooo good with money!" and his subsequent eye roll both bring the conflict to the surface without specifically addressing it. The avoiding style is either passive or indirect, meaning there is little information exchange, which may make this strategy less effective than others. We may decide to avoid conflict for many different reasons, some of which are better than others. If you view the conflict as having little importance to you, it may be better to ignore it. If the person you're having conflict with will only be working in your office for a week, you may perceive a conflict to be temporary and choose to avoid it and hope that it will solve itself. If you are not emotionally invested in the conflict, you may be able to reframe your perspective and see the situation in a different way, therefore resolving the issue. In all these cases, avoiding doesn't really require an investment of time, emotion, or communication skill, so there is not much at stake to lose.

Avoidance is not always an easy conflict management choice, because sometimes the person we have conflict with isn't a temp in our office or a weekend houseguest. While it may be easy to tolerate a problem when you're not personally invested in it or view it as temporary, when faced with a situation like Rosa and D'Shaun's, avoidance would just

make the problem worse. For example, avoidance could first manifest as changing the subject, then progress from avoiding the issue to avoiding the person altogether, intense resentment, and even ending the relationship.

Indirect strategies of hinting and joking also fall under the avoiding style. While these indirect avoidance strategies may lead to a buildup of frustration or even anger, they allow us to vent a little of our built-up steam and may make a conflict situation more bearable. When we hint and hope people “read between the lines”, we drop clues that we hope our partner will find and piece together to see the problem and hopefully change, thereby solving the problem without any direct communication. In almost all the cases of hinting that I have experienced or heard about, the person dropping the hints overestimates their partner’s detective abilities. For example, when Rosa leaves the bank statement on the kitchen table in hopes that D’Shaun will realize how much extra money he is giving Casey, D’Shaun may simply ignore it or even get irritated with Rosa for not putting the statement with all the other mail. We also overestimate our partner’s ability to decode the jokes we make about a conflict situation. It is more likely that the receiver of the jokes will think you’re genuinely trying to be funny or feel provoked or insulted than realize the conflict situation that you are referencing. So more frustration may develop when they don’t “read between the lines”, which often leads to a more extreme form of hinting/joking.

## ACCOMMODATING



The **accommodating** style of conflict management that may indicate low importance of your goals and high importance of your relationship, is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input. The context for and motivation behind accommodating play an important role in whether or not it is an appropriate strategy. Generally, we accommodate because we are being generous, we are obeying, or we are yielding (Bobot, 2010). If we are being generous, we accommodate because we genuinely want to; if we are obeying, we don't have a choice but to accommodate (perhaps due to the potential for negative consequences or punishment); and if we yield, we may have our own views or goals but give up on them due to fatigue, time constraints, or because a better solution has been offered. Accommodating can be appropriate when there is little chance that our own goals can be achieved, when we don't have much to lose by accommodating, when we feel we are wrong, or when advocating for our own needs could negatively affect the relationship. (Warren & Spangle, 2000). The occasional accommodation can be useful in maintaining a relationship—remember earlier we discussed putting another's needs before your own as a way to achieve relational goals. For example, Rosa may say, "It's OK that you gave Casey some extra money; she did have to spend more on gas this week since the prices went up." However, being a team player can slip into being a pushover, which people generally do not appreciate. If Rosa keeps telling D'Shaun,

“It’s OK this time,” they may find themselves short on spending money at the end of the month. At that point, Rosa and D’Shaun’s conflict may escalate as they question each other’s motives, or the conflict may spread if they direct their frustration at Casey and blame it on her irresponsibility.

Research has shown that the accommodating style is more likely to occur when there are time restraints and less likely to occur when someone does not want to appear weak (Cai & Fink, 2002). If you’re standing outside the movie theatre and two movies are starting, you may say, “Let’s just have it your way,” so you don’t miss the beginning. If you’re a new manager at an electronics store and an employee wants to take Sunday off to watch a football game, you may say no to set an example for the other employees.

## COMPROMISING

The **compromising** style of conflict management that shows moderate importance of your goals and your relationship and may indicate there is a low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship. Even though we often hear that the best way to handle a conflict is to compromise, the compromising style isn’t a win/win solution; it is a partial win/lose. In essence, when we compromise, we give up some or most of what we want. It’s true that the conflict gets resolved temporarily, but lingering thoughts of what you gave up could lead to a future conflict. Compromising may be a good strategy when there are time limitations or when prolonging a conflict may lead to relationship deterioration. Compromise may also be good

when both parties have equal power or when other resolution strategies have not worked (Macintosh & Stevens, 2008).

A negative of compromising is that it may be used as an easy way out of a conflict. The compromising style is most effective when both parties find the solution agreeable. Rosa and D'Shaun could decide that Casey's allowance does need to be increased and could each give ten more dollars a week by committing to taking their lunch to work twice a week instead of eating out. They are both giving up something, and if neither of them have a problem with taking their lunch to work, then the compromise was equitable. If the couple agrees that the twenty extra dollars a week should come out of D'Shaun's golf budget, the compromise isn't as equitable, and D'Shaun, although he agreed to the compromise, may end up with feelings of resentment.

### COLLABORATING

The **collaborating** styles of conflict management that shows high importance of your goal and your relationship and usually indicates investment in the conflict and/or relationship. Although the collaborating style takes the most work in terms of communication competence, it ultimately leads to a win/win situation in which neither party has to make concessions because a mutually beneficial solution is discovered or created. The obvious advantage is that both parties are satisfied, which could lead to positive problem solving in the future and strengthen the overall relationship. For example, Rosa and D'Shaun may agree that Casey's

allowance needs to be increased and may decide to give her twenty more dollars a week in exchange for her babysitting her little brother one night a week. In this case, they didn't make the conflict personal but focused on the situation and came up with a solution that may end up saving them money. The disadvantage is that this style is often time consuming, and only one person may be willing to use this approach while the other person is eager to compete to meet their goals or willing to accommodate.

Here are some tips for collaborating and achieving a win/win outcome (Hargie, 2011)

- Do not view the conflict as a contest you are trying to win.
- Remain flexible and realize there are solutions yet to be discovered.
- Distinguish the people from the problem (don't make it personal).
- Determine what the underlying needs are that are driving the other person's demands (needs can still be met through different demands).
- Identify areas of common ground or shared interests that you can work from to develop solutions.
- Ask questions to allow them to clarify and to help you understand their perspective.
- Listen carefully and provide verbal and nonverbal

feedback.

The Conflict Styles framework supplies us with a way to analyze ours, and others, behavior in a conflict situation. Sometimes, a difference in conflict style *is* the conflict (someone with a competing style and someone with an avoiding style could be in conflict about the way the approach conflicts), or at the very least different conflict styles add a second layer to the actual conflict. For example, If you are experiencing a *process goal interference* with a roommate about cleaning, that conflict could escalate based on a difference in conflict style if you are more compromising and the other person is more competitive. We will discuss how to handle this in more specifics in future chapters, but if you currently find yourself in a conflict that is caused by or escalated by a difference in conflict styles, you can try highlighting those differences and discussing *how* you want to talk about the conflict you are experiencing, not the specifics of *what* conflict you are experiencing.

Another interesting part of the Conflict Styles framework is that there isn't a "right" or "best" style. This isn't about collaborating all the time, it is about learning when to use which style. Utilizing this tool, you can ask yourself, how important are my goals? And how important are my relationships? If you have low importance of goals and low importance relationships in a conflict situations you should avoid it, if you have high importance of goals and high important of relationships you should collaborate.

Adaptation: Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

## Using These Tools



**“It’s not as much about who  
you used to be, as it is about**

## **who you choose to be.” Sanhita Barauh**

### **CHAPTER 1 USING THESE TOOLS**

#### **USING THESE TOOLS FOR SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING**

Analyzing conflicts, using the types of goals, SCARF model, and conflict styles are perfect places to start understanding yourself in conflict and building your self-awareness. Self-awareness is a core competency in becoming a great conflict manager.

Understanding your patterns in conflict situations, what your triggers typically are, and understanding your styles and behaviors in conflict is key to start managing conflict productively. If you don't know what is really going on for you, you might find yourself unable to identify what is causing the conflict you are experiencing and therefore you are unable to get conflict resolved. If you don't know what is going on for you, it is hard to get your needs, wants, and desires met.

Ask yourself the following questions to develop your own self-awareness. This is a personal reflective activity, being open and honest with yourself leads to the most benefit.

- First, think of a conflict you are experiencing or



have experienced.

- What am I thinking and feeling about this conflict? Why?
- What am I seeing or experiencing that lead me to this conflict?
- What types of goals do I have in this conflict?
- What SCARF Model triggers am I experiencing?
- How have I behaved in this conflict? Which conflict style is that related to? Is this behavior helping or hurting the situation?
- What could I be doing (or have done differently) in addressing this conflict?

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR OTHER AWARENESS BUILDING

Understanding others is also a core competency in becoming a great conflict manager. Once you understand what is going on for you, you can move onto the next question, “what could be going on for them?”

Not just “putting yourself in someone else’s shoes” but thinking about what it is like for them to live in their own shoes. Ask yourself the following questions to develop your other-awareness.

- First, think of a conflict you are experiencing or have experienced with them.

- What might they be thinking of feeling about this conflict?
- What are they seeing from you that lead to this conflict?
- What types of goals might they have in this conflict?
- What SCARF Model triggers might they be experiencing?
- How have they behaved in this conflict? Which conflict style is that related to? How is it different than your style? Do these styles clash?

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

As we continue in this book we will look at many strategies to build relationships through conflict. With the tools in this chapter, you can start changing the way conversations about conflict take place.

If you recognize that you have been trying to solve the wrong problem, and a conflict has only been presented as a substantive goal instead of addressing the relationship goal that is the bigger issue, you could try talking about the relationship you have with someone. “Hey, I’m reading this book/taking this class and realize that we have been trying to fix the wrong thing. Would you like to hear about what I learned? If so, I would love to talk about our relationship and

what it means to be good roommate because I think maybe we have differing ideas.”

If you recognize that you need something from someone in relation to the SCARF model, such as more autonomy, then you can share why that is important to you and ask for it directly. Relationships are built on understanding one another, so sharing what you understand about yourself with someone else is a great start. “Hey, I just realized how important autonomy is for me, so I need a little bit more freedom in this project to explore all the ideas I have. What do you need from me to feel comfortable with that?”

If you recognize where you have been triggering someone in relation to the SCARF model, such as certainty, then share that you recognize that. “Hey, I just realized that I haven’t been as clear as I could be. Here is what I know.... I don’t have all the answers, but once I know more I will let you know. Please feel free to ask for clarity if you aren’t getting it from me.”

And finally, if you notice stylistic difference in how conflict is handled. Name it. Call it out, in a kind way. “Hey, I think maybe we are approaching this situation differently. Do you want to talk about how we would like to handle this? We get to decide what this looks like going forward.”



# Chapter 2 - Why don't they just get it? Defining and understanding our differences

## Learning Objectives

- Consider how personality, values, and gender impact conflict
- Identify and define personal values and how values impact conflict
- Understand how perception and attribution impact and/or drive conflict
- Examine how to improve your perceptions

**“Differences simply act as a  
yarn of curiosity unraveling  
until we get to the other side.”  
Ciore Taylor**



Most of our lives we have known that we are in some ways like other people and in some ways different. Some of these differences are visual and obvious, such as different styles in how we dress to differences in our skin color. Other differences are more covert and hard to pinpoint, such as differences in our personalities, our values, and even our genders. So often differences get in the way of creating strong and lasting relationships because we don't know how to identify them or how to manage them. Differences *can*

and *should* be a beautiful part of our lives. If it wasn't for differences in peoples opinions, ideas, experiences, and approaches to problems, the world would be a more bland and boring place. In this chapter we are going to explore just a few of the ways in which people are different, how we can identify those differences, and how our perceptions of our selves and others lead to conflict. At the end of the chapter we will look at ways to use these tools to help understand yourself and other and build strong relationships though our differences.





## Personality and Conflict



**“Every human is like all other humans, some other humans,**

## **and no other human.” Clyde Kluckhohn**

### **PERSONALITY AND CONFLICT**

Personality encompasses a person’s *relatively stable* feelings, thoughts, and behavioral patterns. Each of us has a unique personality that differentiates us from other people, and understanding someone’s personality gives us clues (not hard and fast rules!) about how that person is likely to act and feel in a variety of situations. If personality is stable, does this mean that it does not change? You probably recognize how you have changed and evolved as a result of your own life experiences, parenting style and attention you have received in early childhood, successes and failures you experienced over the course of your life, and other life events. In fact, personality does change over long periods of time. For example, we tend to become more socially dominant, more conscientious (organized and dependable), and more emotionally stable between the ages of 20 and 40, whereas openness to new experiences tends to decline as we age (Roberts, 2006). In other words, even though we treat personality as relatively stable, change occurs. To manage conflict effectively, it is helpful to understand the different personalities types.

To get an understanding of your personality type, take the quiz at [www.16personalities.com](http://www.16personalities.com) e.g [new tab].

While we will discuss the effects of personality on conflict, please remember that this information gives us *clues* into what might be important to someone, it *does not* give us a magic formula to fully understand another person. Personality is just one piece of a 1,000 piece puzzle that makes someone who they are. Said another way, don't use someones personality type to stereotype them.

---

Personality Types

---

**Extrovert (E)**

Outer world of action and interaction

**Introvert (I)**

Inner world of thought and impressions

---

**Intuitive (N)**

Imagination—patterns, ideas, curiosities

**Observant (S)**

Pragmatic—facts and practical realities

---

**Feeling (F)**

Subjective, personal, empathetic

**Thinking (T)**

Objective, impersonal, logical

---

**Judging (J)**

Planned, orderly, decisive, control events

**Prospecting (P)**

Flexible, spontaneous, open-ended, experience events

---

**Assertive (A)**

Self-assured, even-tempered, stress-resistant

**Turbulent (T)**

Self-conscious, stress-sensitive, and success-driven

---

These continuums provide interesting insight into where personality *could* be the cause of conflict in our relationships. It's important to note that just because someone has the opposite letter than you on any of these continuums, it doesn't mean there *will* be conflict, it means there *could* be conflict.

Think about the following example of conflict between introverts and extroverts.

Your partner, an introvert, comes home after work a full day of work. You, an extrovert, asks how their day was. Their response begins and ends with “Good.” Then they go and sit on the couch without asking you how your day was.

You, the extrovert, become hurt by their short answer and seeming lack of interest in your day. Your partner, the introvert, could be annoyed at you asking about their day as soon as they get home.

This is a pretty standard situation that causes conflict in romantic partnerships, but it doesn’t have to be. In this scenario, understanding our personalities gives us the chance to understand ourselves and our partners needs, which in this case are very different. Introverts gain and gather energy through alone time, so after a long day at work, they will likely need some time to themselves. Extroverts on the other hand gain and gather energy through interactions with other people. These difference in how we gain and gather energy could very well be the cause of the above conflict. Instead of taking each other behaviors, one wanting some alone time and one wanting to talk, personally (being hurt or annoyed with each other, we can use this understand to set up clear expectations for how conversations look at the end of the work day.

Each dimension of personality can lead to these kinds of conflict.

Think about the following example of conflict between **observant** and **intuitive**.

You, the observant one, are having a conversation about a project at work with your boss, the intuitive one. Your boss starts describing what they expect from the project. “We want to create an amazing employee experience. We want people to want to come to work, for the space to be inviting, and for people to have the support they need to do their work.” You think that sounds good, but aren’t exactly sure how that should really look. So you ask “How do you think we should go about doing that? What do you think the next steps are?” Your boss continues to talk about the employee experience they want to create, but don’t get into the practicality of how the experience should be developed or what the next step is. You leave the meeting annoyed and confused. Your boss isn’t sure what else they could have said to be more clear.

This is a typical example of the differences between someone who is Observant (S) and someone who is Intuitive (N). Observant ways of processing information is to look for the practicality, the facts, and the reality of implementing new ideas. Intuitive ways of processing information is to explore new ideas, imagining how concepts connect, and dreaming up as many ideas as possible. These are really different ways of processing information, and often lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings. This continuum

is all about the old adage about “being on the same page.” Folks on the different ends of this continuum will often think they are on the same page, but what they see on that page is very different.

Think about the following example of conflict between **feeling** and **thinking**.

You, the feeling one, are in a meeting. Your team is looking to decide how to proceed with changes to your work processes. You feel like these changes should be based on what the team says. You coworker, the thinking one, thinks the changes should be based on what the data analysis says (which is different than what the team has indicated needs to change). You feel frustrated that you coworker doesn’t seem to care about the teams ideas. Your coworker thinks you are analyzing the situation wrong and doesn’t understand why you are ignoring what the data says.

This is a common example in the differences in priorities for thinkers vs feelings. This is not to say that feelers don’t care about data OR that thinkers don’t care about people, it is simply an example of how these difference styles priorities information for decision making. Thinkers prioritize making decisions objectively based on data and logic. Feelers prioritize making decision subjectively and based on people and empathy.

Think about the following example of conflict between **judging** and **prospecting**.

You, the prospector, propose a friends trip for the

end of the school year, sometime in June, it is currently January. You mention this to your best friend, a judger. In one week your best friend has an entire trip planned and they are asking you if you want to make reservations at hotels or camp grounds. You, the prospector, have no interest in planning this far in advance and would greatly prefer to just go on the trip and see how things go. Your friend gets annoyed that you don't appreciate all their hard work and that you don't want to plan ahead of time. You are shocked that there is even a plan and feel stressed out that the whole trip is planned out.

This is a common experience between judgers and prospectors. Judgers feel safe and confident with a plan and once a plan is set they want to simply follow the plan. Prospectors are most comfortable exploring new ideas and information and recomputing plans.

Think about the following example of conflict between **assertive** and **turbulent**.

You, the assertive one, it's Friday and you tell your good friend or coworker that you want to talk to them on Monday. Your friend or coworker, the turbulent one, feels very nervous and stressed out all weekend. They are frustrated that you didn't give them more information. You don't see what the big deal is.

This is a regular challenge between assertive and turbulent folks. Assertive folks feel confident in their decisions, are stress resistant and even tempered. They sometimes don't consider



the stress other people might experience when making decisions. Turbulent folks less confident in their decision making and more stress-sensitive.

## MANAGING PERSONALITY IN CONFLICT

These different personality dimensions require us to *assume* differences with our friends, families, and co-workers. Instead of assuming that people think, understand, and want things to work like you, we need to assume we are all different. Only then can we start leveraging these differences to improve our relationship. Understanding these differences allows us to approach managing and resolving conflicts in a much more productive way.

Below is a great TedTalk from Susan Cain on The Power of Introverts. It provides interesting insights for Introverts and Extroverts in work *with* their differences in productive ways.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=21>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Principles of management” by the University of Minnesota is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Gender and Conflict



**“Let’s stop ‘tolerating’ or  
‘accepting’ difference, as if  
we were so much better for being**

**different in the first place.  
Instead let's celebrate  
difference, because in this  
world it takes a lot of guts to  
be different.” Kate Bernstein**

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES AND CONFLICT**

Before we discuss gender in detail, it is important to understand what gender actually is. The terms sex and gender are frequently used interchangeably, though they have different meanings. In this context, **sex** refers to the biological category of male or female, as defined by physical differences in genetic composition and in reproductive anatomy and function. On the other hand, **gender** refers to the cultural, social, and psychological meanings that are associated with masculinity and femininity (Woods & Eagly, 2002). You can think of “male” and “female” as distinct categories of sex (a person is typically born a male or a female), but “masculine” and “feminine” as continuums associated with gender (everyone has a certain degree of masculine and feminine traits and qualities).

Beyond sex and gender, there are a number of related terms that are also often misunderstood. **Gender roles** are the behaviors, attitudes, and personality traits that are designated

as either masculine or feminine in a given culture. It is common to think of gender roles in terms of **gender stereotypes**, or the beliefs and expectations people hold about the typical characteristics, preferences, and behaviors of men and women. A person's **gender identity** refers to their psychological sense of being male or female. In contrast, a person's **sexual orientation** is the direction of their emotional and erotic attraction toward members of the opposite sex, the same sex, or both sexes. These are important distinctions, and though we will not discuss each of these terms in detail, it is important to recognize that sex, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation do not always correspond with one another. A person can be biologically male but have a female gender identity while being attracted to women, or any other combination of identities and orientations.

## DEFINING GENDER

Historically, the terms gender and sex have been used interchangeably. Because of this, gender is often viewed as a **binary** – a person is either male *or* female – and it is assumed that a person's gender matches their biological sex. This is not always the case, however, and more recent research has separated these two terms. While the majority of people do identify with the gender that matches their biological sex (**cisgender**), an estimated 0.6% of the population identify with a gender that does not match their biological sex (**transgender**; Flories, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). For

example, an individual who is biologically female may identify as male, or vice versa.

In addition to separating gender and sex, recent research has also begun to conceptualize gender in ways beyond the gender binary. **Genderqueer** or **gender nonbinary** are umbrella terms used to describe a wide range of individuals who do not identify with and/or conform to the gender binary. These terms encompass a variety of more specific labels individuals may use to describe themselves. Some common labels are **genderfluid**, **agender**, and **bigender**. An individual who is genderfluid may identify as male, female, both, or neither at different times and in different circumstances. An individual who is agender may have no gender or describe themselves as having a neutral gender, while bigender individuals identify as two genders.

It is important to remember that sex and gender do not always match and that gender is not always binary; however, a large majority of prior research examining gender has not made these distinctions. As such, the following sections will discuss gender as a binary.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES

Differences between males and females can be based on (a) actual gender differences (i.e., men and women are actually different in some abilities), (b) gender roles (i.e., differences in how men and women are supposed to act), or (c) gender stereotypes (i.e., differences in how we *think* men and women

are). Sometimes gender stereotypes and gender roles reflect actual gender differences, but sometimes they do not.

What are actual gender differences? In terms of language and language skills, girls develop language skills earlier and know more words than boys; this does not, however, translate into long-term differences. Girls are also more likely than boys to offer praise, to agree with the person they're talking to, and to elaborate on the other person's comments; boys, in contrast, are more likely than girls to assert their opinion and offer criticisms (Leaper & Smith, 2004). In terms of temperament, boys are slightly less able to suppress inappropriate responses and slightly more likely to blurt things out than girls (Else-Quest, Hyde, Goldsmith, & Van Hulle, 2006).

With respect to aggression, boys exhibit higher rates of unprovoked physical aggression than girls, but no difference in provoked aggression (Hyde, 2005). Some of the biggest differences involve the play styles of children. Boys frequently play organized rough-and-tumble games in large groups, while girls often play less physical activities in much smaller groups (Maccoby, 1998). There are also differences in the rates of depression, with girls much more likely than boys to be depressed after puberty. After puberty, girls are also more likely to be unhappy with their bodies than boys.

However, there is considerable variability between individual males and individual females. Also, even when there are mean level differences, the actual size of most of these differences is quite small. This means, *knowing someone's*

*gender does not help much in predicting his or her actual traits.* For example, in terms of activity level, boys are considered more active than girls. However, 42% of girls are more active than the average boy (but so are 50% of boys). Furthermore, *many gender differences do not reflect innate differences, but instead reflect differences in specific experiences and socialization.* For example, one presumed gender difference is that boys show better spatial abilities than girls. However, Tzuriel and Egozi (2010) gave girls the chance to practice their spatial skills (by imagining a line drawing was different shapes) and discovered that, with practice, this gender difference completely disappeared.

Many domains we assume differ across genders are really based on gender stereotypes and not actual differences. Based on large meta-analyses, the analyses of thousands of studies across more than one million people, research has shown: Girls are not more fearful, shy, or scared of new things than boys; boys are not more angry than girls and girls are not more emotional than boys; boys do not perform better at math than girls; and girls are not more talkative than boys (Hyde, 2005).

In the following sections, we'll investigate gender roles, the part they play in creating these stereotypes, and how they can affect the development of real gender differences.

## GENDER ROLES

As mentioned earlier, gender roles are well-established social constructions that may change from culture to culture and



over time. In American culture, we commonly think of gender roles in terms of gender stereotypes, or the beliefs and expectations people hold about the typical characteristics, preferences, and behaviors of men and women.

How do our gender roles and gender stereotypes develop and become so strong? Many of our gender stereotypes are so strong because we emphasize gender so much in culture (Bigler & Liben, 2007). For example, males and females are treated differently before they are even born. When someone learns of a new pregnancy, the first question asked is “Is it a boy or a girl?” Immediately upon hearing the answer, judgments are made about the child: Boys will be rough and like blue, while girls will be delicate and like pink. **Developmental intergroup theory** postulates that adults’ heavy focus on gender leads children to pay attention to gender as a key source of information about themselves and others, to seek out any possible gender differences, and to form rigid stereotypes based on gender that are subsequently difficult to change.

## GENDER AND CONFLICT

As noted above, most things we consider gender differences are really differences in our culturally constructed gender roles and gender stereotypes, not *real* differences based in gender or sex. This is true in communication and conflict styles as well. There are gender stereotypes that have us believe that women are more likely to avoid and men are more likely to compete in conflict situations (Davis,

Capobianco, & Kraus, 2010). But the way people respond to conflict is based on individual variability, not on gender or sex. It is important to watch out for how these gender stereotypes play out in our own lives, especially in conflict situations. Do you find yourself attributing someones behavior to their gender identity? Do you find yourself behaving in ways that feel uncomfortable because you think that is how you “should” behave based on gender roles and gender stereotypes?

The TedTalk below from Audrey Mason-Hyde, Toilets, Bowties, Gender and Me is a wonderful look at Audrey’s personal experience gender. Audrey asks us to consider “Why does it matter to you if I am a girl or a boy?”



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version

of the text. You can view it online here:  
[https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/  
makingconflictsuckless/?p=319](https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=319)

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Psychology as a Social Science: Gender” by Christia Spears Brown, Jennifer A. Jewel, and Michelle J. Tam is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Values and Conflict



**“Values are like finger prints.  
No ones are the same, but**

**you leave them all over  
everything you do.” Elvis**

## **VALUES AND CONFLICT**

Values refer to people’s stable life goals, reflecting what is most important to them. Values are established throughout one’s life as a result of accumulating life experiences, and values tend to be relatively stable (Lusk & Oliver, 1974; Rokeach, 1973). The values that are important to a person tend to affect the types of decisions they make, how they perceive their environment, their actual behaviors, and what conflicts they engage in. For example, a person is more likely to accept a job offer when the company possesses the values he or she cares about (Judge & Bretz, 1972; Ravlin & Meglino, 1987). Value attainment is one reason people stay in a job. When a job does not help them attain their values, they are likely to decide to leave if they are dissatisfied with the job (George & Jones, 1996).

For example, my top 4 core values are Family, Connection, Curiosity, and Adventure. When something gets in the way of me living my values (think of living your values as a goal) conflict likely occurs. If I have a boss that expects me to work overtime at the last minute, when I have already made plans with my family, I will need to manage the potential conflict with my boss. Since I know my top values, which in my

case do not have anything to do with Success in terms of my career, I can express to my boss that my Family is my number one value in life, and that I can't work the overtime right now because of family commitments. I would then explore other ways to help my boss and my team that didn't impact my family. It's important to note that for some people, the way they live Family as a value would be different than my example. Some folks might go work the overtime so that they can provide more income for their family.

Understanding your values is an important step in understanding the conflict you experience in your life. Often, conflicts that are directly connected to your core values are the conflicts that are the most intense and cause us the most stress. Below is a short list of potential core values. Consider which ones you find to be the most important.

Results Competition Teamwork Compassion Determination Commitment Initiative Creative Irreverent Longevity	Adventure Capable Learning Organization Awareness Structure Change Excellence Safety Accuracy	Customer Focus Friendly Integrity Sincerity Rational Spontaneous Fun Composure Freedom Family
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Principles of management” by the University of Minnesota is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

# Perceptions and Attributions in Conflict





## **“Your perception may not be my reality.” Aporva Kala**

### **PERCEPTION AND ATTRIBUTION IN CONFLICT**

We interpret our environment, formulate responses, and act accordingly. Perception may be defined as the process by which individuals detect and interpret environmental stimuli. What makes human perception so interesting is that we do not solely respond to the stimuli in our environment. We go beyond the information that is present in our environment, pay selective attention to some aspects of the environment, and ignore other elements that may be immediately apparent to other people.

Our perception of the environment is not entirely rational. For example, have you ever noticed that while glancing at a newspaper or a news web site, information that is especially interesting or important to you jumps out of the page and catches your eye? If you are a sports fan, while scrolling down the pages, you may immediately see a news item describing the latest success of your team. If you are the mother of a picky eater, an advice column on toddler feeding may be the first thing you see when looking at the page. If you were recently turned down for a loan, an item of financial news may jump out at you. Therefore, what we see in the environment is a function of what we value, our needs, our

fears, and our emotions (Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Keltner, et. al., 1993). In fact, what we see in the environment may be objectively flat out wrong because of such mental tendencies. For example, one experiment showed that when people who were afraid of spiders were shown spiders, they inaccurately thought that the spider was moving toward them (Riskind, et. al., 1995).

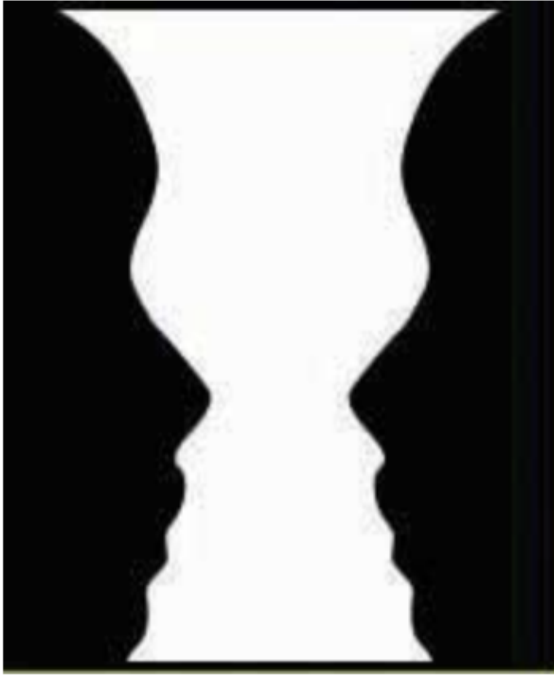
In this section, we will describe some common perceptual tendencies we engage in when perceiving objects or other people and the consequences of such perceptions. Our coverage of these perceptual biases is not exhaustive—there are many other biases and tendencies that can be found in the way people perceive stimuli.

#### VISUAL PERCEPTION – WHAT DO YOU SEE?

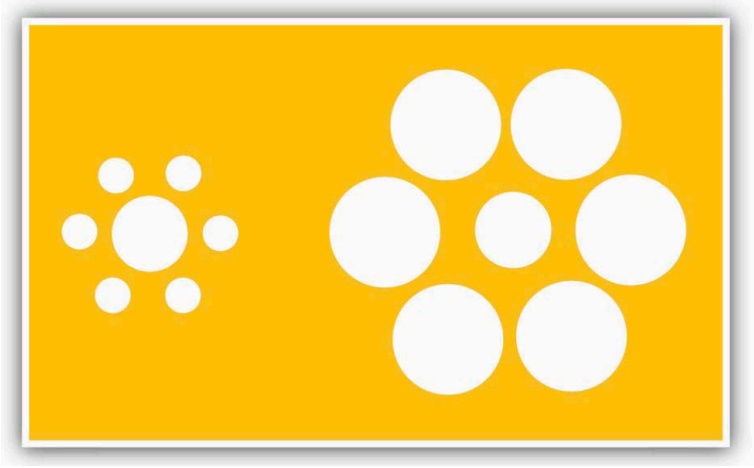
Our visual perception definitely goes beyond the physical information available to us; this phenomenon is commonly referred to as “optical illusions.” Artists and designers of everything from apparel to cars to home interiors make use of optical illusions to enhance the look of the product. Humans rely on their visual perception to form their opinions about people and objects around them and to make sense of data presented in graphical form. Therefore, understanding how our visual perception may be biased is important.

First, we extrapolate from the information available to us. Take a look at the first figure. The white triangle you see in the middle is not really there, but we extrapolate from the information available to us and see it there. Similarly, when

we look at objects that are partially blocked, we see the whole (Kellman & Shipley, 1991).



Now, look at the image above. What do you see? Most people look at this figure and see two faces *or* a goblet, depending on which color—*black or white*—they focus upon. Our visual perception is often biased because we do not perceive objects in isolation. The contrast between our focus of attention and the remainder of the environment may make an object appear bigger or smaller.



This principle is shown here in the above image. At first glance, the circle on the left may appear bigger, but they are the same size. This is due to the visual comparison of the middle circle on the left with its surrounding circles, whereas the middle circle on the right is compared with the bigger circles surrounding it.

How do these tendencies influence behavior? The fact that our visual perception is faulty means that we should not always take what they see at face value. Let's say that you do not like one of your peers and you think that you saw this person surfing the web during work hours. Are you absolutely sure, or are you simply filling the gaps? Have you really seen this person surf unrelated web sites, or is it possible that the person was searching for work-related purposes? The tendency to fill in the gaps also causes our memory to be faulty. Imagine that you had a conversation with a group where several people made comments that you did not agree with. After the meeting, you may attribute most of these

comments to people you did not like. In other words, you may twist the reality to make your memories more consistent with your opinions of people in the group.

The tendency to compare and contrast objects and people to each other also causes problems. For example, if you are a manager who has been given an office much smaller than the other offices on the floor, you may feel that your workspace is crowded and uncomfortable. If the same office is surrounded by smaller offices, you may actually feel that your office is comfortable and roomy. In short, our biased visual perception may lead to the wrong inferences about the people and objects around us.

#### SELF-PERCEPTION

Human beings are prone to errors and biases when perceiving themselves. Moreover, the type of bias people have depends on their personality. Many people suffer from **self-enhancement bias**. This is the tendency to overestimate our performance and capabilities and see ourselves in a more positive light than others see us. People who have a narcissistic personality are particularly subject to this bias, but many others also have this bias to varying degrees (John & Robins, 1994). At the same time, other people have the opposing extreme, which may be labeled as **self-effacement bias (or modesty bias)**. This is the tendency to underestimate our performance and capabilities and to see events in a way that puts ourselves in a more negative light. We may expect that people with low self-

esteem may be particularly prone to making this error. For example, people in the workplace who suffer from extreme levels of self-enhancement tendencies may not understand why they are not getting promoted or rewarded, while those who have a tendency to self-efface may project low confidence and take more blame for their failures than necessary.

When human beings perceive themselves, they are also subject to the **false consensus error**. Simply put, we overestimate how similar we are to other people (Fields & Schuman, 1976; Ross, et. al., 1977). We assume that whatever quirks we have are shared by a larger number of people than in reality. People who take office supplies home, tell white lies to their boss or colleagues, or take credit for other people's work to get ahead may genuinely feel that these behaviors are more common than they really are. The problem is that, when people believe that a behavior is common and normal, they may repeat the behavior more freely. Under some circumstances, this may lead to a high level of unethical, illegal, or just annoying behaviors.

## SOCIAL PERCEPTION

How we perceive other people in our environment is also shaped by our biases. Moreover, how we perceive others will shape our behavior, which in turn will shape the behavior of the person we are interacting with.

One of the factors biasing our perception is **stereotypes**. Stereotypes are generalizations based on a group

characteristic. Stereotypes may be positive, negative, or neutral. In the abstract, stereotyping is an adaptive function—we have a natural tendency to categorize the information around us to make sense of our environment. Just imagine how complicated life would be if we continually had to start from scratch to understand each new situation and each new person we encountered! What makes stereotypes potentially discriminatory and a perceptual bias is the tendency to generalize from a group to a particular individual.

Stereotypes often create a situation called **self-fulfilling prophecy**. This happens when an established stereotype causes one to behave in a certain way, which leads the other party to behave in a way that confirms the stereotype (Snyder, et. al., 1977). If you have a stereotype such as “Asians are friendly,” you are more likely to be friendly toward an Asian person. Because you are treating the other person more nicely, the response you get may also be nicer, which confirms your original belief that Asians are friendly. Of course, just the opposite is also true. Suppose you believe that “young employees are slackers.” You are less likely to give a young employee high levels of responsibility or interesting and challenging assignments. The result may be that the young employee reporting to you may become increasingly bored at work and start goofing off, confirming your suspicions that young people are slackers!

Stereotypes persist because of a process called **selective perception**. Selective perception simply means that we pay



selective attention to parts of the environment while ignoring other parts. Our background, expectations, and beliefs will shape which events we notice and which events we ignore. Selective perception may also perpetuate stereotypes because we are less likely to notice events that go against our beliefs. A person who believes that men drive better than women may be more likely to notice women driving poorly than men driving poorly. As a result, a stereotype is maintained because information to the contrary may not even reach our brain!

Let's say we noticed information that goes against our beliefs. What then? Unfortunately, this is no guarantee that we will modify our beliefs and prejudices. First, when we see examples that go against our stereotypes, we tend to come up with subcategories. For example, people who believe that women are more cooperative when they see a female who is assertive may classify her as a "career woman." Therefore, the example to the contrary does not violate the stereotype and is explained as an exception to the rule (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Or, we may simply discount the information. In one study, people in favor of and against the death penalty were shown two studies, one showing benefits for the death penalty while the other disconfirming any benefits. People rejected the study that went against their belief as methodologically inferior and ended up believing in their original position even more (Lord, et. al., 1979)! In other words, using data to debunk people's beliefs or previously established opinions may not necessarily work.

## ATTRIBUTION AND INTERPRETATION

I'm sure you have a family member, friend, or coworker with whom you have ideological or political differences. When conversations and inevitable disagreements occur, you may view this person as "pushing your buttons" if you are invested in the issue being debated, or you may view the person as "on their soapbox" if you aren't invested. In either case, your existing perceptions of the other person are probably reinforced after your conversation and you may leave the conversation thinking, "She is never going to wake up and see how ignorant she is! I don't know why I even bother trying to talk to her!" Similar situations occur regularly, and there are some key psychological processes that play into how we perceive others' behaviors. By examining these processes, attribution in particular, we can see how our communication with others is affected by the explanations we create for others' behavior. In addition, we will learn some common errors that we make in the attribution process that regularly lead to conflict and misunderstanding.

## ATTRIBUTION

In most interactions, we are constantly running an attribution script in our minds, which essentially tries to come up with explanations for what is happening. Why did my neighbor slam the door when she saw me walking down the hall? Why is my partner being extra nice to me today? Why did my officemate miss our project team meeting this morning? In general, we seek to attribute the cause of others' behaviors

to internal or external factors. **Internal attributions** connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits. **External attributions** connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors. Attributions are important to consider because our reactions to others' behaviors are strongly influenced by the explanations we reach.

Imagine that Gloria and Jerry are dating. One day, Jerry gets frustrated and raises his voice to Gloria. She may find that behavior more offensive and even consider breaking up with him if she attributes the cause of the blow up to his personality, since personality traits are usually fairly stable and difficult to control or change. Conversely, Gloria may be more forgiving if she attributes the cause of his behavior to situational factors beyond Jerry's control, since external factors are usually temporary. If she makes an internal attribution, Gloria may think, "Wow, this person is really a loose cannon. Who knows when he will lose it again?" If she makes an external attribution, she may think, "Jerry has been under a lot of pressure to meet deadlines at work and hasn't been getting much sleep. Once this project is over, I'm sure he'll be more relaxed." This process of attribution is ongoing, and, as with many aspects of perception, we are sometimes aware of the attributions we make, and sometimes they are automatic and/or unconscious. *Attribution has received much scholarly attention because it is in this part of the perception process that some of the most common perceptual errors or biases occur.*

One of the most common perceptual errors is the **fundamental attribution error**, which refers to our

tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions (Sillars, 1980). For example, I often have students come into class irritated, saying, "I got a parking ticket! I can't believe those people. Why don't they get a real job and stop ruining my life!" In this case, illegally parked students attribute the cause of their situation to the malevolence of the parking officer, essentially saying they got a ticket because the officer was a mean/bad person, which is an internal attribution. Students were much less likely to acknowledge that the officer was just doing his or her job (an external attribution) and the ticket was a result of the student's decision to park illegally.

Perceptual errors can also be biased, and in the case of the **self-serving bias**, the error works out in our favor. Just as we tend to attribute others' behaviors to internal rather than external causes, we do the same for ourselves, especially when our behaviors have led to something successful or positive. When our behaviors lead to failure or something negative, we tend to attribute the cause to external factors. Thus the self-serving bias is a perceptual error through which we attribute the cause of our successes to internal personal factors while attributing our failures to external factors beyond our control. *When we look at the fundamental attribution error and the self-serving bias together, we can see that we are likely to judge ourselves more favorably than another person, or at least less personally.*

The professor-student relationship offers a good case example of how these concepts can play out. I have often

heard students who earned an unsatisfactory grade on an assignment attribute that grade to the strictness, unfairness, or incompetence of their professor. I have also heard professors attribute a poor grade to the student's laziness, attitude, or intelligence. In both cases, the behavior is explained using an internal attribution and is an example of the fundamental attribution error. Students may further attribute their poor grade to their busy schedule or other external, situational factors rather than their lack of motivation, interest, or preparation (internal attributions). On the other hand, when students gets a good grade on a paper, they will likely attribute that cause to their intelligence or hard work rather than an easy assignment or an "easy grading" professor. Both of these examples illustrate the self-serving bias. These psychological processes have implications for our communication because when we attribute causality to another person's personality, we tend to have a stronger emotional reaction and tend to assume that this personality characteristic is stable, which may lead us to avoid communication with the person or to react negatively. Now that you aware of these common errors, you can monitor them more and engage in perception checking, which we will learn more about later, to verify your attributions.

#### THE HALO AND HORN EFFECTS

We have a tendency to adapt information that conflicts with our earlier impressions in order to make it fit within the frame we have established. This is known as **selective distortion**,

and it manifests in the halo and horn effects. The angelic halo and devilish horn are useful metaphors for the lasting effects of positive and negative impressions.

**The halo effect** occurs when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive. **The horn effect** occurs when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative (Hargie, 2011). Since impressions are especially important when a person is navigating the job market, let's imagine how the horn and halo effects could play out for a recent college graduate looking to land her first real job. Nell has recently graduated with her degree in communication studies and is looking to start her career as a corporate trainer. If one of Nell's professors has a relationship with an executive at an area business, his positive verbal recommendation will likely result in a halo effect for Nell. Since the executive thinks highly of his friend the professor, and the professor thinks highly of Nell, then the executive will start his interaction with Nell with a positive impression and interpret her behaviors more positively than he would otherwise. The halo effect initiated by the professor's recommendation may even lead the executive to dismiss or overlook some negative behaviors. Let's say Nell doesn't have a third party to help make a connection and arrives late for her interview. That negative impression may create a horn effect that carries through the interview. Even if Nell presents as competent and friendly, the negative first impression could lead the executive to minimize or ignore those positive characteristics, and the company may not hire her.

## PERCEPTIONS AND ATTRIBUTIONS IN CONFLICT

As we've already learned, our brain processes information by putting it into categories and looking for predictability and patterns. The previous examples have covered how we do this with sensory information and with more abstract concepts like marriage and politics, but we also do this with people. When we categorize people, we generally view them as "like us" or "not like us." This simple us/them split affects subsequent interaction, including impressions and attributions. For example, we tend to view people we perceive to be like us as more trustworthy, friendly, and honest than people we perceive to be not like us (Brewer, 1999). We are also more likely to use internal attribution to explain negative behavior of people we perceive to be different from us. If a person of a different race cuts another driver off in traffic, the driver is even more likely to attribute that action to the other driver's internal qualities (thinking, for example, "He or she is inconsiderate and reckless!") than they would someone of their own race. Having such inflexible categories can have negative consequences and lead to conflict.

Our perceptions and attributions play key roles in our thinking about ourselves and others. Often times we find ourselves in conflict with people simply based on our perceptions of them, or the characteristics we have attributed to them. When you are experiencing a conflict with a friend, roommate, family member, boss, or colleague it is important

to check what perceptions and beliefs you have about that person. Ask yourself, what kinds of attributions am I making towards the other person and myself? Are they based on fact, or are they based on a fallacy?

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Principles of management” by the University of Minnesota is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0



## Improving Your Perceptions



**“Human beings love to be**

**right. When a person is willing to give up being right, a whole world of possibilities opens up.” Pete Salmansohn**

### IMPROVING YOUR PERCEPTIONS

Our self-perceptions can and do change. Context-specific self-perceptions vary depending on the person with whom we are interacting, our emotional state, and the subject matter being discussed. Becoming aware of the process of self-perception and the various components of our self-concept will help you understand and improve your self-perceptions.

We can also identify common patterns that people experience that interfere with their ability to monitor, understand, and change their self-perceptions. Changing your overall self-concept or self-esteem is not an easy task given that these are overall reflections on who we are and how we judge ourselves that are constructed over many interactions. A variety of life-changing events can relatively quickly alter our self-perceptions. Think of how your view of self changed when you moved from high school to college. Similarly, other people’s self-perceptions likely change when they enter into a committed relationship, have a child, make a geographic move, or start a new job.

Aside from experiencing life-changing events, we can

make slower changes to our self-perceptions with concerted efforts aimed at becoming more competent communicators through self-monitoring and reflection. As you actively try to change your self-perceptions, do not be surprised if you encounter some resistance from significant others. When you change or improve your self-concept, your communication will also change, which may prompt other people to respond to you differently. Although you may have good reasons for changing certain aspects of your self-perception, others may become unsettled or confused by your changing behaviors and communication. Remember, people try to increase predictability and decrease uncertainty within human social experiences. For example, many students begin to take their college education more seriously during their junior and senior years. As these students begin to change their self-concept to include the role of “serious student preparing to graduate and enter the professional world,” they likely have friends that want to maintain the “semiserious student who doesn’t exert much consistent effort and prefers partying to studying” role that used to be a shared characteristic of both students’ self-concepts. As the first student’s behavior changes to accommodate this new aspect of his or her self-concept, it may upset the friend who was used to weeknights spent hanging out rather than studying. Let’s now discuss some suggestions to help avoid common barriers to accurate and positive self-perceptions and patterns of behavior that perpetuate negative self-perception cycles.

## AVOID RELIANCE ON RIGID SCHEMA

**Schemata** are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction. We rely on schemata almost constantly to help us make sense of the world around us. Sometimes schemata become so familiar that we use them as scripts, which prompts mindless communication and can lead us to overlook new information that may need to be incorporated into the schema. So it's important to remain mindful of new or contradictory information that may warrant revision of a schema. Being mindful is difficult, however, especially since we often unconsciously rely on schemata. Think about how when you're driving a familiar route you sometimes fall under "highway hypnosis." Despite all the advanced psychomotor skills needed to drive, such as braking, turning, and adjusting to other drivers, we can pull into a familiar driveway or parking lot having driven the whole way on autopilot. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing. But have you slipped into autopilot on a familiar route only to remember that you are actually going somewhere else after you've already missed your turn? This example illustrates the importance of keeping our schemata flexible and avoiding mindless communication.

## BE CRITICAL OF SOCIALIZING FORCES

Family, friends, sociocultural norms, and the media are just some of the socializing forces that influence our thinking and therefore influence our self-perception. These powerful forces serve positive functions but can also set into motion

negative patterns of self-perception. Two examples can illustrate the possibility for people to critique and resist socializing forces in order to improve their self-perception. The first deals with physical appearance and notions of health, and the second deals with cultural identities and discrimination.

We have already discussed how the media presents us with narrow and often unrealistic standards for attractiveness. Even though most of us know that these standards don't represent what is normal or natural for the human body, we internalize these ideals, which results in various problems ranging from eating disorders, to depression, to poor self-esteem. A relatively overlooked, sometimes controversial and interesting movement that has emerged partially in response to these narrow representations of the body is the body acceptance movement. The body acceptance movement (which started out as the fat acceptance movement) has been around for more than thirty years, but it gained public attention due to celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Kirstie Alley, who after years of publicly struggling with weight issues have embraced a view that weight does not necessarily correspond to health. Many people have found inspiration in that message and have decided that being healthy and strong is more important than being thin (Katz, 2012). The "Healthy at Every Size" movement and the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance have challenged the narrative put out by the thirty-billion-dollar-a-year weight-loss industry that fat equals lazy, ugly, and unhealthy

(NAAFA, 2012). Conflicting scientific studies make it difficult to say conclusively how strong the correlation is between weight and health, but it seems clear that a view that promotes healthy living and positive self-esteem over unconditional dieting and a cult of thinness is worth exploring more given the potential public health implications of distorted body image and obesity.

Cultural influences related to identities and difference can also lead to distorted self-perceptions, especially for people who occupy marginalized or oppressed identities. While perception research has often been used to support the notion that individuals who are subjected to discrimination, like racial and ethnic minorities, are likely to have low self-esteem because they internalize negative societal views, this is not always the case (Armenta & Hunt, 2009). In fact, even some early perception research showed that minorities do not just passively accept the negative views society places on them. Instead, they actively try to maintain favorable self-perceptions in the face of discriminatory attitudes. Numerous studies have shown that people in groups that are the targets of discrimination may identify with their in-group more because of this threat, which may actually help them maintain psychological well-being. In short, they reject the negative evaluations of the out-group and find refuge and support in their identification with others who share their marginalized status.

## CREATE AND MAINTAIN SUPPORTING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Aside from giving yourself affirming messages to help with self-perception, it is important to find interpersonal support. Although most people have at least some supportive relationships, many people also have people in their lives who range from negative to toxic. When people find themselves in negative relational cycles, whether it is with friends, family, or romantic partners, it is difficult to break out of those cycles. But we can all make choices to be around people that will help us be who we want to be and not be around people who hinder our self-progress. This notion can also be taken to the extreme, however. It would not be wise to surround yourself with people who only validate you and do not constructively challenge you, because this too could lead to distorted self-perceptions.

## BEWARE OF SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

**Self-fulfilling prophecies** are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true (Guyll, Madon, Prieto & Scherr, 2010). For example, let's say a student's biology lab instructor is a Chinese person who speaks English as a second language. The student falsely believes that the instructor will not be a good teacher because he speaks English with an accent. Because of this belief, the student doesn't attend class regularly and doesn't listen actively when she does attend. Because of these behaviors,

the student fails the biology lab, which then reinforces her original belief that the instructor wasn't a good teacher.

Although the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies was originally developed to be applied to social inequality and discrimination, it has since been applied in many other contexts, including interpersonal communication. This research has found that some people are chronically insecure, meaning they are very concerned about being accepted by others but constantly feel that other people will dislike them. This can manifest in relational insecurity, which is again based on feelings of inferiority resulting from social comparison with others perceived to be more secure and superior. Such people often end up reinforcing their belief that others will dislike them because of the behaviors triggered by their irrational belief. Take the following scenario as an example: An insecure person assumes that his date will not like him. During the date he doesn't engage in much conversation, discloses negative information about himself, and exhibits anxious behaviors. Because of these behaviors, his date forms a negative impression and suggests they not see each other again, reinforcing his original belief that the date wouldn't like him. The example shows how a pattern of thinking can lead to a pattern of behavior that reinforces the thinking, and so on. Luckily, experimental research shows that self-affirmation techniques can be successfully used to intervene in such self-fulfilling prophecies. Thinking positive thoughts and focusing on personality strengths can stop this negative cycle of thinking



and has been shown to have positive effects on academic performance, weight loss, and interpersonal relationships (Stinson, Shepherd, Logel & Zanna, 2011).

### BEWARE OF DISTORTED PATTERNS OF THINKING AND ACTING

You already know from our discussion of attribution errors that we all have perceptual biases that distort our thinking. Many of these are common, and we often engage in distorted thinking without being conscious of it. Learning about some of the typical negative patterns of thinking and acting may help us acknowledge and intervene in them. One such pattern involves self-esteem and overcompensation.

People with low self-esteem may act in ways that overcompensate for their feelings of low self-worth and other insecurities. Whether it's the businessman buying his midlife crisis Corvette, the "country boy" adding monster tires to his truck, or the community leader who wears several carats of diamonds everywhere she goes, people often turn to material possessions to try to boost self-esteem. While these purchases may make people feel better in the short term, they may have negative financial effects that can exacerbate negative self-perceptions and lead to interpersonal conflict. People also compensate for self-esteem with their relational choices. A person who is anxious about his career success may surround himself with people who he deems less successful than himself. In this case, being a big fish in a small pond helps

some people feel better about themselves when they engage in social comparison.

People can also get into a negative thought and action cycle by setting unrealistic goals and consistently not meeting them. Similar to a self-fulfilling prophecy, people who set unrealistic goals can end up with negative feelings of self-efficacy, which as we learned earlier, can negatively affect self-esteem and self-concept. The goals we set should be challenging but progressive, meaning we work to meet a realistic goal, then increase our expectations and set another goal, and so on.

Some people develop low self-esteem because they lack accurate information about themselves, which may be intentional or unintentional. A person can intentionally try to maintain high self-esteem by ignoring or downplaying negative comments and beliefs and focusing on positive evaluations. While this can be a good thing, it can also lead to a distorted self-concept. There is a middle ground between beating yourself up or dwelling on the negative and ignoring potentially constructive feedback about weaknesses and missing opportunities to grow as a person. Conversely, people who have low self-esteem or negative self-concepts may discount or ignore positive feedback. To wrap up this section, I'd like to turn to one of my favorite shows and a great source for examples relevant to the perception process: *American Idol*.

I've always enjoyed showing clips from *American Idol* auditions in my class when I teach about self-perception.

As you probably know, the season always starts with audition footage shot in various cities. The range of singing abilities, not to mention personalities, of those who show up for a chance to sing in front of the judges leads millions of viewers to keep tuning in. While it's obvious that the producers let some people through who they know don't have a chance at making it on the show, they also know that certain personalities make for good reality television viewing. I've often found myself wondering, "Do these people really think they can sing?" The answer is sometimes a very clear "Yes!" Sure, some are there just to make a spectacle and hopefully make it on TV, but there are many who actually believe they have singing abilities—even to the point that they challenge and discount the judges' comments.

During the contestant's tearful and/or angry post-rejection interview, they are often shown standing with their family and friends, who are also surprised at the judges' decision. These contestants could potentially avoid this emotional ending by following some of the previous tips. It's good that they have supportive interpersonal relationships, but people's parents and friends are a little biased in their feedback, which can lead to a skewed self-concept. These contestants could also set incremental goals. Singing at a local event or even at a karaoke bar might have helped them gain more accurate information about their abilities and led them to realize they didn't have what it takes to be an "American idol."

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PERCEIVING OTHERS

There are many barriers that prevent us from competently perceiving others. While some are more difficult to overcome than others, they can all be addressed by raising our awareness of the influences around us and committing to monitoring, reflecting on, and changing some of our communication habits. Whether it is our lazy listening skills, lack of empathy, or stereotypes and prejudice, various filters and blinders influence how we perceive and respond to others.

### DEVELOP ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

As we will learn in Chapter 3 effective listening is not easy, and most of us do not make a concerted effort to overcome common barriers to listening. Our fast-paced lives and cultural values that emphasize speaking over listening sometimes make listening feel like a chore. But we shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Active listening can also help us expand our self- and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and taking on different perspectives. Active listening is challenging because it requires cognitive and emotional investment that goes beyond the learning of a skill set.

Everyone's reality is his or her reality, and when you can concede that someone's reality isn't like yours and you are

OK with that, then you have overcome a significant barrier to becoming more aware of the perception process.

An example from a fellow faculty member, “I recently had a good student inform me that he was leaving school to pursue other things. He had given speeches about wildfire firefighting and beer brewing and was passionate about both of those things, but not school. As an academic and lover of and advocate for higher education, I wouldn’t have made that choice for myself or for him. But I am not him, and I can’t assume his perceptions are consistent with mine. I think he was surprised when I said, “I think you are a smart and capable adult, and this is your decision to make, and I respect that. School is not going anywhere, so it’ll be here when you’re ready to come back. In the meantime, I’d be happy to be a reference for any jobs you’re applying for. Just let me know.” I wanted to make it clear that I didn’t perceive him as irresponsible, immature, misguided, or uncommitted. He later told me that he appreciated my reaction that day.”

## BEWARE OF STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE

Stereotypes are sets of beliefs that we develop about groups, which we then apply to individuals from that group. Stereotypes are schemata that are taken too far, as they reduce and ignore a person’s individuality and the diversity present within a larger group of people. Stereotypes can be based on cultural identities, physical appearance, behavior, speech, beliefs, and values, among other things, and are often caused by a lack of information about the target person or group

(Guyll, Madon, Prieto & Scherr, 2010). Stereotypes can be positive, negative, or neutral, but all run the risk of lowering the quality of our communication.

While the negative effects of stereotypes are pretty straightforward in that they devalue people and prevent us from adapting and revising our schemata, positive stereotypes also have negative consequences.

Since stereotypes are generally based on a lack of information, we must take it upon ourselves to gain exposure to new kinds of information and people, which will likely require us to get out of our comfort zones. When we do meet people, we should base the impressions we make on describable behavior rather than inferred or secondhand information. When stereotypes negatively influence our overall feelings and attitudes about a person or group, prejudiced thinking results.

Prejudice is negative feelings or attitudes toward people based on their identity or identities. Prejudice can have individual or widespread negative effects. At the individual level, a hiring manager may not hire a young man with a physical disability (even though that would be illegal if it were the only reason), which negatively affects that one man. However, if pervasive cultural thinking that people with physical disabilities are mentally deficient leads hiring managers all over the country to make similar decisions, then the prejudice has become a social injustice. In another example, when the disease we know today as AIDS started killing large numbers of people in the early 1980s, response

by some health and government officials was influenced by prejudice. Since the disease was primarily affecting gay men, Haitian immigrants, and drug users, the disease was prejudged to be a disease that affected only “deviants” and therefore didn’t get the same level of attention it would have otherwise. It took many years, investment of much money, and education campaigns to help people realize that HIV and AIDS do not prejudice based on race or sexual orientation and can affect any human.

### ENGAGE IN SELF-REFLECTION

A good way to improve your perceptions and increase your communication competence in general is to engage in self-reflection. If a communication encounter doesn’t go well and you want to know why, your self-reflection will be much more useful if you are aware of and can recount your thoughts and actions.

Self-reflection can also help us increase our cultural awareness. Our thought process regarding culture is often “other focused,” meaning that the culture of the other person or group is what stands out in our perception. However, the old adage “know thyself” is appropriate, as we become more aware of our own culture by better understanding other cultures and perspectives. Developing cultural self-awareness often requires us to get out of our comfort zones. Listening to people who are different from us is a key component of developing self-knowledge. This may be uncomfortable, because our taken-for-granted or deeply held beliefs and

values may become less certain when we see the multiple perspectives that exist.

We can also become more aware of how our self-concepts influence how we perceive others. We often hold other people to the standards we hold for ourselves or assume that their self-concept should be consistent with our own. For example, if you consider yourself a neat person and think that sloppiness in your personal appearance would show that you are unmotivated, rude, and lazy, then you are likely to think the same of a person you judge to have a sloppy appearance. So asking questions like “Is my impression based on how this person wants to be, or how I think this person should want to be?” can lead to enlightening moments of self-reflection. Asking questions in general about the perceptions you are making is an integral part of perception checking, which we will discuss next.

### CHECKING PERCEPTION

Perception checking is a strategy to help us monitor our reactions to and perceptions about people and communication. There are some internal and external strategies we can use to engage in perception checking. In terms of internal strategies, review the various influences on perception that we have learned about in this chapter and always be willing to ask yourself, “What is influencing the perceptions I am making right now?” Even being aware of what influences are acting on our perceptions makes us more aware of what is happening in the perception process. In



terms of external strategies, we can use other people to help verify our perceptions.

The cautionary adage “Things aren’t always as they appear” is useful when evaluating your own perceptions. Sometimes it’s a good idea to bounce your thoughts off someone, especially if the perceptions relate to some high-stakes situation. But not all situations allow us the chance to verify our perceptions.

Helpful steps for perception checking – The DIVE Method:

- D- Describe
  - Describe the behavior or situation without evaluating or judging it.
- I – Interpret
  - Think of some possible interpretations of the behavior, being aware of attributions and other influences on the perception process.
- V -Verify
  - Verify what happened and ask for clarification from the other person’s perspective. Be aware of punctuation, since the other person likely experienced the event differently than you.
- E – Evaluate

- Evaluate what you think happened based on your interpretations and verifications steps.

For more ideas on how to improve your self-perceptions check out this TedTalk from Verna Myers on how to overcome our biases.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=332>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

## Using These Tools



**“Communication works for  
those that work at it.” John  
Powell**

## CHAPTER 2 USING THE TOOLS

### USING THESE TOOLS FOR SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING

The concepts and tools in this chapter are wonderful tools to prompt personal reflection that moves us one step closer to understanding who we are and what is important to us. We looked at how we:

- gain energy
- process information
- make decision
- plan projects and processes
- prioritize our values
- perceive the world and people around us
- attribute characteristics and ideas to people and situations

All these little pieces of ourselves give us insight into what could potentially cause conflict in our lives. Starting from a place of understanding yourself and what causes conflict for you allows you to intentionally choose where you have room to improve your capacity to manage conflict productively. As we will see in future chapters, understanding yourself is the foundation to being assertive and drawing boundaries in your life, listening to others and being empathetic, and even giving good feedback.

## USING THESE TOOLS FOR OTHER AWARENESS BUILDING

Just as much as these tools can be used for self reflection and understanding yourself, they can also be used for understanding other people and how they:

- gain energy
- process information
- make decision
- plan projects and processes
- prioritize our values
- perceive the world and people around us
- attribute characteristics and ideas to people and situations

These tools and frameworks are a first step on the path to understanding others. As we saw in this chapter, we can all fall under the *false consensus error*, where we overestimate our similarity with others and miss out on really amazing part of who people are without ever knowing it.

## USING THESE TOOLS FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Leveraging these tools and frameworks allow us to look for and identify our similarities and to embrace our differences as natural and normal. Once we understand and recognize who we are and how we may differ from others, we can work

to embrace our differences and have them be benefits in our relationships.

Recognizing and embracing differences *with a future focus* in how we:

- gain energy
- process information
- make decision
- plan projects and processes
- prioritize our values
- perceive the world and people around us
- attribute characteristics and ideas to people and situations

Now we understand what conversations to have with our family, friends, and coworkers about how to manage our differences and therefore truly *manage* conflict before it starts. If I know that I have a friend that is different than me in how we gain energy, or how we make decisions, we can address that difference up front by simply starting the conversation with a question, “what do you need in this moment to be the best version of yourself?” and sharing what you need in return. So instead of differences being the *cause* of conflict, they become the *foundation* of lasting and meaningful relationships.

# Chapter 3 - Why aren't they listening to me? Listening as a superpower and other important skills

## Learning Objectives

- Understand key conflict management skills including active listening, I-statements, asking productive questions, framing and reframing
- Identify personal listening filters that get in the

way of active listening

- Developing strategies for Active Listening
- Understand how to frame and reframe in conflict situations
- Express yourself utilizing I-statements
- Identify and delivery different types of questions
- Understanding non-verbal communication and how it impacts conflict



**“When someone really hears you, without passing judgement on you, without trying to take responsibility for you, it feels damn good... When I have been listened to and what I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in new ways and go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble become soluble when someone listens. How confusions that seem irremediable turn into relatively clear flowing streams when one is heard.”**  
**Carl Rodgers**



# The Importance of Listening

---

In terms of academics, poor listening skills were shown to contribute significantly to failure in a person's first year of college (Zabava & Wolvin, 1993).<sup>1</sup> In general, students with high scores for listening ability have greater academic achievement. Interpersonal communication skills including

1.

listening are also highly sought after by potential employers, consistently ranking in the top ten in national surveys (<sup>2</sup>

Poor listening skills, lack of conciseness, and inability to give constructive feedback have been identified as potential communication challenges in professional contexts. Even though listening education is lacking in our society, research has shown that introductory communication courses provide important skills necessary for functioning in entry-level jobs, including listening, writing, motivating/persuading, interpersonal skills, informational interviewing, and small-group problem solving ( DiSalvo, 1980). Training and improvements in listening will continue to pay off, as employers desire employees with good communication skills, and employees who have good listening skills are more likely to get promoted.

Listening also has implications for our personal lives and relationships. We shouldn't underestimate the power of listening to make someone else feel better and to open our perceptual field to new sources of information. Listening can help us expand our self and social awareness by learning from other people's experiences and by helping us take on different perspectives. Emotional support in the form of listening and validation during times of conflict can help relational partners manage common stressors of relationships that may otherwise lead a partnership to deteriorate (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). The following list reviews some of the main functions of listening that are relevant in multiple contexts.

2. National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2010).

**The main purposes of listening are** (Hargie, 2011)

- to focus on messages sent by other people or noises coming from our surroundings;
- to better our understanding of other people's communication;
- to critically evaluate other people's messages;
- to monitor nonverbal signals;
- to indicate that we are interested or paying attention;
- to empathize with others and show we care for them (relational maintenance); and
- to engage in negotiation, dialogue, or other exchanges that result in shared understanding of or agreement on an issue.

William Ury gives us a lot to think about when it comes to Listening. Take a listen to his Ted Talk the Power of Listening for insights on how to become a better listener.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=214>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Stand Up, Speak Out: The Practice and Ethics of Public Speaking” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



## The Listening Process





**“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.” Byrant McHill**

## THE LISTENING PROCESS

We begin to engage with the listening process long before we engage in any recognizable verbal or nonverbal communication. It is only after listening for months as infants that we begin to consciously practice our own forms of expression. In this section we will learn more about each stage of the listening process, the main types of listening, and the main listening styles.

Listening is a process and as such doesn't have a defined start and finish. Like the communication process, listening has cognitive, behavioral, and relational elements and doesn't unfold in a linear, step-by-step fashion. Models of processes are informative in that they help us visualize specific components, but keep in mind that they do not capture the speed, overlapping nature, or overall complexity of the actual process in action. The stages of the listening process are receiving, interpreting, recalling, evaluating, and responding.

## RECEIVING

Before we can engage other steps in the listening process,

we must take in stimuli through our senses. In any given communication encounter, it is likely that we will return to the receiving stage many times as we process incoming feedback and new messages. This part of the listening process is more physiological than other parts, which include cognitive and relational elements. We primarily take in information needed for listening through auditory and visual channels. Although we don't often think about visual cues as a part of listening, they influence how we interpret messages. For example, seeing a person's face when we hear their voice allows us to take in nonverbal cues from facial expressions and eye contact. The fact that these visual cues are missing in e-mail, text, and phone interactions presents some difficulties for reading contextual clues into meaning received through only auditory channels.

It is important to consider noise as a factor that influences how we receive messages. Some noise interferes primarily with hearing, which is the physical process of receiving stimuli through internal and external components of the ears and eyes, and some interferes with listening, which is the cognitive process of processing the stimuli taken in during hearing. While hearing leads to listening, they are not the same thing. Environmental noise such as other people talking, the sounds of traffic, and music interfere with the physiological aspects of hearing. Psychological noise like stress and anger interfere primarily with the cognitive processes of listening. We can enhance our ability to receive, and in turn listen, by trying to minimize noise.

Julian Treasure gives us 5 Ways to Listen Better in his TedTalk below.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=22>

## INTERPRETING

During the interpreting stage of listening, we combine the visual and auditory information we receive and try to make meaning out of that information. The interpreting stage engages cognitive and relational processing as we take in informational, contextual, and relational cues and try to connect them in meaningful ways to previous experiences.

It is through the interpreting stage that we may begin to understand the stimuli we have received. When we understand something, we are able to attach meaning by connecting information to previous experiences. If we have difficulty interpreting information, meaning we don't have previous experiences or information to make sense of it, then it is difficult to transfer the information into our long-term memory for later recall. In situations where understanding the information we receive isn't important or isn't a goal, this stage may be fairly short or even skipped. After all, we can move something to our long-term memory by repetition and then later recall it without ever having understood it. I remember earning perfect scores on exams in my anatomy class in college because I was able to memorize and recall, for example, all the organs in the digestive system. In fact, I might still be able to do that now over a decade later. But neither then nor now could I tell you the significance or function of most of those organs, meaning I didn't really get to a level of understanding but simply stored the information for later recall.

## RECALLING

Our ability to recall information is dependent on some of the physiological limits of how memory works. Overall, our memories are known to be fallible. We forget about half of what we hear immediately after hearing it, recall 35 percent after eight hours, and recall 20 percent after a day. Our memory consists of multiple "storage units," including

sensory storage, short-term memory, working memory, and long-term memory (Hargie, 2011).

Our sensory storage is very large in terms of capacity but limited in terms of length of storage. We can hold large amounts of unsorted visual information but only for about a tenth of a second. By comparison, we can hold large amounts of unsorted auditory information for longer—up to four seconds. This initial memory storage unit doesn't provide much use for our study of communication, as these large but quickly expiring chunks of sensory data are primarily used in reactionary and instinctual ways.

As stimuli are organized and interpreted, they make their way to short-term memory where they either expire and are forgotten or are transferred to long-term memory. Short-term memory a mental storage capability that can retain stimuli for twenty seconds to one minute. Long-term memory a mental storage capability to which stimuli in short-term memory can be transferred if they are connected to existing information. Once there, they can be stored indefinitely (Hargie, 2011). Working memory is a temporarily accessed memory storage space that is activated during times of high cognitive demand. When using working memory, we can temporarily store information and process and use it at the same time. This is different from our typical memory function in that information usually has to make it to long-term memory before we can call it back up to apply to a current situation. People with good working memories are able to keep recent information in mind and

process it and apply it to other incoming information. This can be very useful during high-stress situations. A person in control of a command center like the White House Situation Room should have a good working memory in order to take in, organize, evaluate, and then immediately use new information instead of having to wait for that information to make it to long-term memory and then be retrieved and used.

Although recall is an important part of the listening process, there isn't a direct correlation between being good at recalling information and being a good listener. Some people have excellent memories and recall abilities and can tell you a very accurate story from many years earlier during a situation in which they should actually be listening and not showing off their recall abilities. Recall is an important part of the listening process because it is most often used to assess listening abilities and effectiveness. Many quizzes and tests in school are based on recall and are often used to assess how well students comprehended information presented in class, which is seen as an indication of how well they listened. When recall is our only goal, we excel at it. Experiments have found that people can memorize and later recall a set of faces and names with near 100 percent recall when sitting in a quiet lab and asked to do so. But throw in external noise, more visual stimuli, and multiple contextual influences, and we can't remember the name of the person we were just introduced to one minute earlier. Even in interpersonal encounters, we rely on recall to test whether or not someone was listening. Imagine that Azam is talking to his friend Belle,

who is sitting across from him in a restaurant booth. Azam, annoyed that Belle keeps checking her phone, stops and asks, “Are you listening?” Belle inevitably replies, “Yes,” since we rarely fess up to our poor listening habits, and Azam replies, “Well, what did I just say?”

## EVALUATING

When we evaluate something, we make judgments about its credibility, completeness, and worth. In terms of credibility, we try to determine the degree to which we believe a speaker’s statements are correct and/or true. In terms of completeness, we try to “read between the lines” and evaluate the message in relation to what we know about the topic or situation being discussed. We evaluate the worth of a message by making a value judgment about whether we think the message or idea is good/bad, right/wrong, or desirable/undesirable. All these aspects of evaluating require critical thinking skills, which we aren’t born with but must develop over time through our own personal and intellectual development.

Studying communication is a great way to build your critical thinking skills, because you learn much more about the taken-for-granted aspects of how communication works, which gives you tools to analyze and critique messages, senders, and contexts. Critical thinking and listening skills also help you take a more proactive role in the communication process rather than being a passive receiver of messages that may not be credible, complete, or

worthwhile. One danger within the evaluation stage of listening is to focus your evaluative lenses more on the speaker than the message. This can quickly become a barrier to effective listening if we begin to prejudge a speaker based on his or her identity or characteristics rather than on the content of his or her message.

## RESPONDING

Responding entails sending verbal and nonverbal messages that indicate attentiveness and understanding or a lack thereof. From our earlier discussion of the communication model, you may be able to connect this part of the listening process to feedback. Later, we will learn more specifics about how to encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal cues sent during the responding stage, but we all know from experience some signs that indicate whether a person is paying attention and understanding a message or not.

We send verbal and nonverbal feedback while another person is talking and after they are done. Verbal and nonverbal signals we send while someone is talking, which can consist of verbal cues like “uh-huh,” “oh,” and “right,” and/or nonverbal cues like direct eye contact, head nods, and leaning forward. Back-channel cues are generally a form of positive feedback that indicates others are actively listening. People also send cues intentionally and unintentionally that indicate they aren’t listening. If another person is looking away, fidgeting, texting, or turned away, we will likely interpret those responses negatively.





Reflection is a responding behavior that can also show that you understand what was communicated. When you reflect a message, you state back what you heard the speakers say in your own words. For example, you might say the following to start off a reflective response: “What I heard you say was...” or “It seems like you’re saying...” You can also ask clarifying questions to get more information. It is often a good idea to pair a paraphrase with a question to keep a conversation flowing. For example, you might pose the following reflection and question pair: “It seems like you believe you were treated unfairly. Is that right?” Or you might ask a standalone question like “What did your boss do that made you think he was ‘playing favorites?’” Make sure to reflect and/or ask questions once a person’s turn is over, because interrupting can also be interpreted as a sign of not listening. Reflection is also a good tool to use in

computer-mediated communication, especially since miscommunication can occur due to a lack of nonverbal and other contextual cues.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

## Listening Types



**“When you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are**

**listening not only to the  
words, but also to the feeling  
of what is being conveyed, to  
the whole of it, not part of it.”  
Jiddu Krishnamurti**

## LISTENING TYPES

Listening serves many purposes, and different situations require different types of listening. The type of listening we engage in affects our communication and how others respond to us. For example, when we listen to empathize with others, our communication will likely be supportive and open, which will then lead the other person to feel “heard” and supported and hopefully view the interaction positively (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). The main types of listening we will discuss are discriminative, informational, critical, and empathetic (Watson, Barker & Weaver, 1995).

### DISCRIMINATIVE LISTENING

**Discriminative listening** a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process. Here we engage in listening to scan and monitor our surroundings in order to isolate particular auditory or visual

stimuli. For example, we may focus our listening on a dark part of the yard while walking the dog at night to determine if the noise we just heard presents us with any danger. Or we may look for a particular nonverbal cue to let us know our conversational partner received our message (Hargie, 2011). In the absence of a hearing impairment, we have an innate and physiological ability to engage in discriminative listening. Although this is the most basic form of listening, it provides the foundation on which more intentional listening skills are built. This type of listening can be refined and honed. Think of how musicians, singers, and mechanics exercise specialized discriminative listening to isolate specific aural stimuli and how actors, detectives, and sculptors discriminate visual cues that allow them to analyze, make meaning from, or recreate nuanced behavior (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993).

## INFORMATIONAL LISTENING

**Informational listening** is listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining information. This type of listening is not evaluative and is common in teaching and learning contexts ranging from a student listening to an informative speech to an out-of-towner listening to directions to the nearest gas station. We also use informational listening when we listen to news reports, voice mail, and briefings at work. Since retention and recall are important components of informational listening, good concentration and memory skills are key. These also happen

to be skills that many college students struggle with, at least in the first years of college, but will be expected to have mastered once they get into professional contexts. In many professional contexts, informational listening is important, especially when receiving instructions. I caution my students that they will be expected to process verbal instructions more frequently in their profession than they are in college. Most college professors provide detailed instructions and handouts with assignments so students can review them as needed, but many supervisors and managers will expect you to take the initiative to remember or record vital information. Additionally, many bosses are not as open to questions or requests to repeat themselves as professors are.

### CRITICAL LISTENING

**Critical listening** entails listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context. A critical listener evaluates a message and accepts it, rejects it, or decides to withhold judgment and seek more information. As constant consumers of messages, we need to be able to assess the credibility of speakers and their messages and identify various persuasive appeals and faulty logic. Critical listening is important during persuasive exchanges, but I recommend always employing some degree of critical listening, because you may find yourself in a persuasive interaction that you thought was informative. Critical-listening skills are useful when listening to a persuasive speech

and when processing any of the persuasive media messages we receive daily. You can see judges employ critical listening, with varying degrees of competence, on talent competition shows like *Rupaul's Drag Race*, *America's Got Talent*, and *The Voice*. While the exchanges between judge and contestant on these shows is expected to be subjective and critical, critical listening is also important when listening to speakers that have stated or implied objectivity, such as parents, teachers, political leaders, doctors, and religious leaders.

### EMPATHETIC LISTENING

**Empathetic listening** is the most challenging form of listening and occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling. Empathetic listening is distinct from sympathetic listening. While the word *empathy* means to “feel into” or “feel with” another person, *sympathy* means to “feel for” someone. Sympathy is generally more self-oriented and distant than empathy (Bruneau, Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). Empathetic listening is other oriented and should be genuine. Because of our own centrality in our perceptual world, empathetic listening can be difficult. It's often much easier for us to tell our own story or to give advice than it is to really listen to and empathize with someone else. We should keep

in mind that sometimes others just need to be heard and our feedback isn't actually desired.

Dylan Marron discusses key components of empathy in his Ted Talk Empathy is Not Endorsement.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=282>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0



## Listening Styles



**“We have two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice**

**as much as we speak.”  
Epictetus**

**LISTENING STYLES**

Just as there are different types of listening, there are also different styles of listening. People may be categorized as one or more of the following listeners: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented listeners. Research finds that 40 percent of people have more than one preferred listening style, and that they choose a style based on the listening situation (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). Other research finds that people often still revert back to a single preferred style in times of emotional or cognitive stress, even if they know a different style of listening would be better (Worthington, 2003). Following a brief overview of each listening style, we will explore some of their applications, strengths, and weaknesses.

- **People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.
- **Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information. They can become frustrated when they perceive

communication to be unorganized or inconsistent, or a speaker to be “long-winded.”

- **Content-oriented listeners** are analytic and enjoy processing complex messages. They like in-depth information and like to learn about multiple sides of a topic or hear multiple perspectives on an issue. Their thoroughness can be difficult to manage if there are time constraints.
- **Time-oriented listeners** are concerned with completing tasks and achieving goals. They do not like information perceived as irrelevant and like to stick to a timeline. They may cut people off and make quick decisions (taking short cuts or cutting corners) when they think they have enough information.

### PEOPLE-ORIENTED LISTENERS

People-oriented listeners are concerned about the emotional states of others and listen with the purpose of offering support in interpersonal relationships. People-oriented listeners can be characterized as “supporters” who are caring and understanding. These listeners are sought out because they are known as people who will “lend an ear.” They may or may not be valued for the advice they give, but all people often want is a good listener. This type of listening may be especially valuable in interpersonal communication involving emotional exchanges, as a person-oriented listener can create

a space where people can make themselves vulnerable without fear of being cut off or judged. People-oriented listeners are likely skilled empathetic listeners and may find success in supportive fields like counseling, social work, or nursing.

### ACTION-ORIENTED LISTENERS

Action-oriented listeners focus on what action needs to take place in regards to a received message and try to formulate an organized way to initiate that action. These listeners are frustrated by disorganization, because it detracts from the possibility of actually doing something. Action-oriented listeners can be thought of as “builders”—like an engineer, a construction site foreperson, or a skilled project manager. This style of listening can be very effective when a task needs to be completed under time, budgetary, or other logistical constraints. One research study found that people prefer an action-oriented style of listening in instructional contexts (Imhof, 2004). In other situations, such as interpersonal communication, action-oriented listeners may not actually be very interested in listening, instead taking a “What do you want me to do?” approach. A friend and colleague of mine who exhibits some qualities of an action-oriented listener once told me about an encounter she had with a close friend who had a stillborn baby. My friend said she immediately went into “action mode.” Although it was difficult for her to connect with her friend at an emotional/empathetic level, she was able to use her action-oriented approach to help

out in other ways as she helped make funeral arrangements, coordinated with other family and friends, and handled the details that accompanied this tragic emotional experience. As you can see from this example, the action-oriented listening style often contrasts with the people-oriented listening style.

### CONTENT-ORIENTED LISTENERS

Content-oriented listeners like to listen to complex information and evaluate the content of a message, often from multiple perspectives, before drawing conclusions. These listeners can be thought of as “learners,” and they also ask questions to solicit more information to fill out their understanding of an issue. Content-oriented listeners often enjoy high perceived credibility because of their thorough, balanced, and objective approach to engaging with information. Content-oriented listeners are likely skilled informational and critical listeners and may find success in academic careers in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences. Ideally, judges and politicians would also possess these characteristics.

### TIME-ORIENTED LISTENERS

Time-oriented listeners are more concerned about time limits and timelines than they are with the content or senders of a message. These listeners can be thought of as “executives,” and they tend to actually verbalize the time constraints under which they are operating.

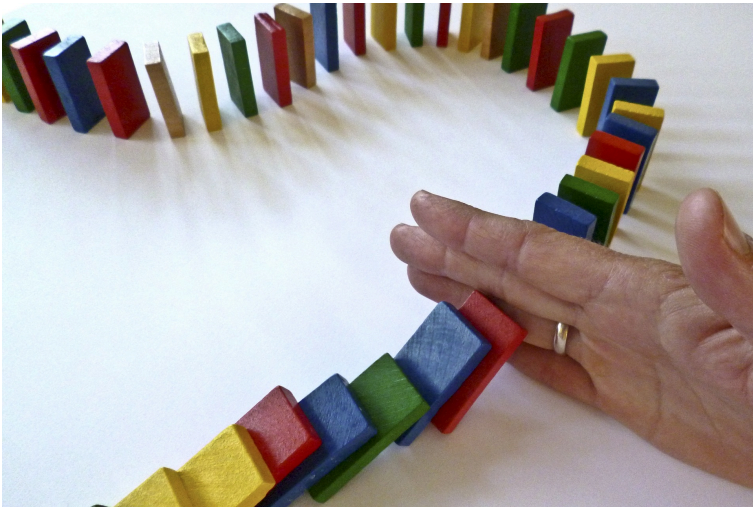


For example, a time-oriented supervisor may say the following to an employee who has just entered his office and asked to talk: “Sure, I can talk, but I only have about five minutes.” These listeners may also exhibit nonverbal cues that indicate time and/or attention shortages, such as looking at a clock, avoiding eye contact, or nonverbally trying to close down an interaction. Time-oriented listeners are also more likely to interrupt others, which may make them seem insensitive to emotional/personal needs. People often get action-oriented and time-oriented listeners confused. Action-oriented listeners would be happy to get to a

conclusion or decision quickly if they perceive that they are acting on well-organized and accurate information. They would, however, not mind taking longer to reach a conclusion when dealing with a complex topic, and they would delay making a decision if the information presented to them didn't meet their standards of organization. Unlike time-oriented listeners, action-oriented listeners are not as likely to cut people off (especially if people are presenting relevant information) and are not as likely to take short cuts.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from "A Primer on Communication Studies" is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

## Barriers to Effective Listening



**“When people respond too quickly, they often respond to the wrong issue. Listening**



**helps us focus on the the heart of the conflict. When we listen, understand, and respect each others ideas, we can then find a solution in which both of us are winners.” Gary Chapman**

#### **BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING**

Barriers to effective listening are present at every stage of the listening process (Hargie, 2011). At the receiving stage, noise can block or distort incoming stimuli. At the interpreting stage, complex or abstract information may be difficult to relate to previous experiences, making it difficult to reach understanding. At the recalling stage, natural limits to our memory and challenges to concentration can interfere with remembering. At the evaluating stage, personal biases and prejudices can lead us to block people out or assume we know what they are going to say. At the responding stage, a lack of paraphrasing and questioning skills can lead to misunderstanding. In the

following section, we will explore how environmental and physical factors, cognitive and personal factors, and bad listening practices present barriers to effective listening.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL, PHYSICAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO LISTENING

Environmental noise, such as lighting, temperature, and furniture affect our ability to listen. A room that is too dark can make us sleepy, just as a room that is too warm or cool can raise awareness of our physical discomfort to a point that it is distracting. Some seating arrangements facilitate listening, while others separate people. In general, listening is easier when listeners can make direct eye contact with and are in close physical proximity to a speaker. The ability to effectively see and hear a person increases people's confidence in their abilities to receive and process information. Eye contact and physical proximity can still be affected by noise. Environmental noises such as a whirring air conditioner, barking dogs, or a ringing fire alarm can obviously interfere with listening despite direct lines of sight and well-placed furniture.

Physiological noise, like environmental noise, can interfere with our ability to process incoming information. This is considered a physical barrier to effective listening because it emanates from our physical body. Physiological noise is noise stemming from a physical illness, injury, or bodily

stress. Ailments such as a cold, a broken leg, a headache, or a poison ivy outbreak can range from annoying to unbearably painful and impact our listening relative to their intensity. Another type of noise, psychological noise, bridges physical and cognitive barriers to effective listening.

Psychological noise, or noise stemming from our psychological states including moods and level of arousal, can facilitate or impede listening. Any mood or state of arousal, positive or negative, that is too far above or below our regular baseline creates a barrier to message reception and processing. The generally positive emotional state of being in love can be just as much of a barrier as feeling hatred. Excited arousal can also distract as much as anxious arousal. Stress about an upcoming events ranging from losing a job, to having surgery, to wondering about what to eat for lunch can overshadow incoming messages. Cognitive limits, a lack of listening preparation, difficult or disorganized messages, and prejudices can also interfere with listening. Whether you call it multitasking, daydreaming, glazing over, or drifting off, we all cognitively process other things while receiving messages.

#### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPEECH AND THOUGHT RATE

Our ability to process more information than what comes from one speaker or source creates a barrier to effective listening. While people speak at a rate of 125 to 175 words per minute, we can process between 400 and 800 words

per minute (Hargie, 2011).<sup>1</sup> This gap between speech rate and thought rate gives us an opportunity to side-process any number of thoughts that can be distracting from a more important message. Because of this gap, it is impossible to give one message our “undivided attention,” but we can occupy other channels in our minds with thoughts related to the central message. For example, using some of your extra cognitive processing abilities to repeat, rephrase, or reorganize messages coming from one source allows you to use that extra capacity in a way that reinforces the primary message.

The difference between speech and thought rate connects to personal barriers to listening, as personal concerns are often the focus of competing thoughts that can take us away from listening and challenge our ability to concentrate on others’ messages. Two common barriers to concentration are self-centeredness and lack of motivation (Brownell, Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). For example, when our self-consciousness is raised, we may be too busy thinking about how we look, how we’re sitting, or what others think of us to be attentive to an incoming message. Additionally, we are often challenged when presented with messages that we do not find personally relevant. In general, we employ selective attention, which refers to our tendency to pay attention to the messages that benefit us in some way and filter others out. So the student who is checking his or her Twitter feed during class may suddenly switch his or her attention back to the previously

1.

ignored professor when the following words are spoken:  
“This will be important for the exam.”



Another common barrier to effective listening that stems from the speech and thought rate divide is response preparation. Response preparation refers to our tendency to rehearse what we are going to say next while a speaker is still talking. Rehearsal of what we will say once a speaker's turn is over is an important part of the listening process that takes place between the recalling and evaluation and/or the evaluation and responding stage. Rehearsal becomes problematic when response preparation begins as someone is receiving a message and hasn't had time to engage in interpretation or recall. In this sense, we are listening with the goal of responding instead of with the goal of understanding, which can lead us to miss important information that could influence our response.

## MORE BARRIERS

Another barrier to effective listening is a general lack of listening preparation. Unfortunately, most people have never received any formal training or instruction related to listening. Although some people think listening skills just develop over time, competent listening is difficult, and enhancing listening skills takes concerted effort. Even when listening education is available, people do not embrace it as readily as they do opportunities to enhance their speaking skills. Listening is often viewed as an annoyance or a chore, or just ignored or minimized as part of the communication process. In addition, our individualistic society values speaking more than listening, as it's the speakers who are sometimes literally in the spotlight. Although listening competence is a crucial part of social interaction and many of us value others we perceive to be "good listeners," listening just doesn't get the same kind of praise, attention, instruction, or credibility as speaking. Teachers, parents, and relational partners explicitly convey the importance of listening through statements like "You better listen to me," "Listen closely," and "Listen up," but these demands are rarely paired with concrete instruction. So unless you plan on taking more communication courses in the future (and I hope you do), this chapter may be the only instruction you receive on the basics of the listening process, some barriers to effective listening, and how we can increase our listening competence.

Bad messages and/or speakers also present a barrier to

effective listening. Sometimes our trouble listening originates in the sender. In terms of message construction, poorly structured messages or messages that are too vague, too jargon filled, or too simple can present listening difficulties. In terms of speakers' delivery, verbal fillers, monotone voices, distracting movements, or a disheveled appearance can inhibit our ability to cognitively process a message (Hargie, 2011). Listening also becomes difficult when a speaker tries to present too much information. Information overload is a common barrier to effective listening that good speakers can help mitigate by building redundancy into their speeches and providing concrete examples of new information to help audience members interpret and understand the key ideas.

#### PREJUDICE AS A BARRIER TO LISTENING

Oscar Wilde said, "Listening is a very dangerous thing. If one listens one may be convinced." Unfortunately, some of our default ways of processing information and perceiving others lead us to rigid ways of thinking. When we engage in prejudiced listening, we are usually trying to preserve our ways of thinking and avoid being convinced of something different. This type of prejudice is a barrier to effective listening, because when we prejudge a person based on his or her identity or ideas, we usually stop listening in an active and/or ethical way.

We exhibit prejudice in our listening in several ways, some of which are more obvious than others. For example, we may claim to be in a hurry and only selectively address the parts

of a message that we agree with or that aren't controversial. We can also operate from a state of denial where we avoid a subject or person altogether so that our views are not challenged. Prejudices that are based on a person's identity, such as race, age, occupation, or appearance, may lead us to assume that we know what he or she will say, essentially closing down the listening process. Keeping an open mind and engaging in perception checking can help us identify prejudiced listening and hopefully shift into more competent listening practices.

#### INATTENTIONAL BLINDNESS AS A BARRIER TO LISTENING

Do you regularly spot editing errors in movies? Can you multitask effectively, texting while talking with your friends or watching television? Are you fully aware of your surroundings? If you answered yes to any of those questions, you're not alone. And, you're most likely wrong.

More than 50 years ago, experimental psychologists began documenting the many ways that our perception of the world is limited, not by our eyes and ears, but by our minds. We appear able to process only one stream of information at a time, effectively filtering other information from awareness. To a large extent, we perceive only that which receives the focus of our cognitive efforts: our attention.

Imagine the following task, known as dichotic listening (e.g., Cherry, 1953; Moray, 1959; Treisman, 1960): You put on a set of headphones that play two completely different



speech streams, one to your left ear and one to your right ear. Your task is to repeat each syllable spoken into your left ear as quickly and accurately as possible, mimicking each sound as you hear it. When performing this attention-demanding task, you won't notice if the speaker in your right ear switches to a different language or is replaced by a different speaker with a similar voice. You won't notice if the content of their speech becomes nonsensical. In effect, you are deaf to the substance of the ignored speech. But, that is not because of the limits of your auditory senses. It is a form of cognitive deafness, due to the nature of focused, selective attention. Even if the speaker on your right headphone says your name, you will notice it only about one-third of the time (Conway, Cowan, Bunting, 2001). And, at least by some accounts, you only notice it that often because you still devote some of your limited attention to the ignored speech stream (Cherry, 1953). In this task, you will tend to notice only large physical changes (e.g., a switch from a male to a female speaker), but not substantive ones, except in rare cases.

This selective listening task highlights the power of attention to filter extraneous information from awareness while letting in only those elements of our world that we want to hear. Focused attention is crucial to our powers of observation, making it possible for us to zero in on what we want to see or hear while filtering out irrelevant distractions. But, it has consequences as well: We can miss what would otherwise be obvious and important signals.

The same pattern holds for vision. In a groundbreaking

series of studies in the 1970s and early 1980s, Neisser and his colleagues devised a visual analogue of the dichotic listening task (Neisser & Becklen, 1975). Their subjects viewed a video of two distinct, but partially transparent and overlapping, events. For example, one event might involve two people playing a hand-clapping game and the other might show people passing a ball. Because the two events were partially transparent and overlapping, both produced sensory signals on the retina regardless of which event received the participant's attention. When participants were asked to monitor one of the events by counting the number of times the actors performed an action (e.g., hand clapping or completed passes), they often failed to notice unexpected events in the ignored video stream (e.g., the hand-clapping players stopping their game and shaking hands). As for dichotic listening, the participants were unaware of events happening outside the focus of their attention, even when looking right at them. They could tell that other "stuff" was happening on the screen, but many were unaware of the meaning or substance of that stuff.

Have you ever been paying attention to something so closely you missed another event in the background? Or have you ever been so used to seeing something a certain way that when it changed, you didn't even notice it had?

To test the power of selective attention to induce failures of awareness, Neisser and colleagues (Neisser, 1979) designed a variant of this task in which participants watched a video of two teams of players, one wearing white shirts and one

wearing black shirts. Subjects were asked to press a key whenever the players in white successfully passed a ball, but to ignore the players in black. As for the other videos, the teams were filmed separately and then superimposed so that they literally occupied the same space (they were partially transparent). Partway through the video, a person wearing a raincoat and carrying an umbrella strolled through the scene. People were so intently focused on spotting passes that they often missed the “umbrella woman.” (Pro tip: If you look closely at the video, you’ll see that Ulric Neisser plays on both the black and white teams.)

These surprising findings were well known in the field, but for decades, researchers dismissed their implications because the displays had such an odd, ghostly appearance. Of course, we would notice if the displays were fully opaque and vivid rather than partly transparent and grainy. Surprisingly, no studies were built on Neisser’s method for nearly 20 years. Inspired by these counterintuitive findings and after discussing them with Neisser himself, Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons revisited them in the late 1990s (Simons & Chabris, 1999). They replicated Neisser’s work, again finding that many people missed the umbrella woman when all of the actors in the video were partially transparent and occupying the same space. But, we added another wrinkle: a version of the video in which all of the actions of both teams of players were choreographed and filmed with a single camera. The players moved in and around each other and were fully visible. In the most dramatic version, we had a woman in

a gorilla suit walk into the scene, stop to face the camera, thump her chest, and then walk off the other side after nine seconds on screen. Fully half the observers missed the gorilla when counting passes by the team in white.

This phenomenon is now known as inattentional blindness, the surprising failure to notice an unexpected object or event when attention is focused on something else (Mack & Rock, 1998). The past 15 years has seen a surge of interest in such failures of awareness, and we now have a better handle on the factors that cause people to miss unexpected events as well as the range of situations in which inattentional blindness occurs. People are much more likely to notice unexpected objects that share features with the attended items in a display (Most, Simons, Scholl, Jimenez, Clifford, & Chabris, 2001). For example, if you count passes by the players wearing black, you are more likely to notice the gorilla than if you count passes by the players wearing white because the color of the gorilla more closely matches that of the black-shirted players (Simons & Chabris, 1999). However, even unique items can go unnoticed. In one task, people monitored black shapes and ignored white shapes that moved around a computer window ((Most, Simons, Scholl, Jimenez, Clifford, & Chabris, 2001). Approximately 30 percent of them failed to detect the bright red cross traversing the display, even though it was the only colored item and was visible for five seconds. The more effort a cognitive task requires the more likely it becomes that you'll miss noticing something significant.

Inattentional blindness is not just a laboratory curiosity—it also occurs in the real world and under more natural conditions. In a dramatic illustration of cell phone–induced inattentional blindness, Ira Hymen observed that people talking on a cell phone as they walked across a college campus were less likely than other pedestrians to notice a unicycling clown who rode across their path.

Recently, the study of this sort of awareness failure has returned to its roots in studies of listening, with studies documenting inattentional deafness: When listening to a set of spatially localized conversations over headphones, people often fail to notice the voice of a person walking through the scene repeatedly stating “I am a gorilla” (Dalton & Fraenkel, 2012). Under conditions of focused attention, we see and hear far less of the unattended information than we might expect (Macdonald & Lavie, 2011; Wayand, Levin, & Varakin, 2005).

What makes these findings interesting and important is that they run counter to our intuitions. Most people are confident they would notice the chest-thumping gorilla. In fact, nearly 90% believe they would spot the gorilla (Levin & Angelone, 2008), and in a national survey, 78% agreed with the statement, “People generally notice when something unexpected enters their field of view, even when they’re paying attention to something else” (Simons & Chabris, 2010). Similarly, people are convinced that they would spot errors in movies or changes to a conversation partner (Levin & Angelone, 2008). We think we see and remember far

more of our surroundings than we actually do. Most of the time, we are happily unaware of what we have missed, but we are fully aware of those elements of a scene that we have noticed. Consequently, if we assume our experiences are representative of the state of the world, we will conclude that we notice unexpected events. We don't easily think about what we're missing.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from "A Primer on Communication Studies" is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

Material in this chapter has been adapted from "Psychology As A Social Science: Failure of Awareness" by Daniel Simons is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Improving Listening Competence



**“It’s a common delusion that  
you can make things better**

## **by talking about them.” Rose MacAulay**

### **LISTENING COMPETENCE AT EACH STAGE OF THE LISTENING PROCESS**

Many people admit that they could stand to improve their listening skills. This section will help us do that. In this section, we will learn strategies for developing and improving competence at each stage of the listening process. We will also define active listening and the behaviors that go along with it.

We can develop competence within each stage of the listening process, as the following list indicates: (Ridge, 1993)

- To improve listening at the receiving stage,
  - prepare yourself to listen,
  - discern between intentional messages and noise,
  - concentrate on stimuli most relevant to your listening purpose(s) or goal(s),
  - be mindful of the selection and attention process as much as possible,



- avoid interrupting someone while they are speaking in order to maintain your ability to receive stimuli and listen, and,
- pay attention so you can follow the conversational flow.
  - For more on the important of paying attention and being present check out this HBR article, [If you aspire to be a great leader, be present](#)
- To improve listening at the interpreting stage,
  - identify main points and supporting points;
  - use contextual clues from the person or environment to discern additional meaning;
  - be aware of how a relational, cultural, or situational context can influence meaning;
  - be aware of the different meanings of silence; and
  - note differences in tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues that influence meaning.
- To improve listening at the recalling stage,

- use multiple sensory channels to decode messages and make more complete memories;
- repeat, rephrase, and reorganize information to fit your cognitive preferences; and
- use mnemonic devices as a gimmick to help with recall.
- To improve listening at the evaluating stage,
  - separate facts, inferences, and judgments;
  - be familiar with and able to identify persuasive strategies and fallacies of reasoning;
  - assess the credibility of the speaker and the message; and
  - be aware of your own biases and how your perceptual filters can create barriers to effective listening.
- To improve listening at the responding stage,
  - reflect information to check understanding,
  - ask appropriate clarifying and follow-up questions,
  - give feedback that is relevant to the speaker's purpose/motivation for

speaking,

- adapt your response to the speaker and the context, and
- do not let the preparation and rehearsal of your response diminish earlier stages of listening.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA3.0

## Active Listening



**“When someone really hears from you, without passing judgement on you, without**

**trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mold you, it feels damn good... When I have been listened to and why I have been heard, I am able to reperceive my world in a new way and go on.” Carl Rodgers**

## ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening refers to the process of pairing outwardly visible positive listening behaviors with positive cognitive listening practices. Active listening can help address many of the environmental, physical, cognitive, and personal barriers to effective listening that we discussed earlier. The behaviors associated with active listening can also enhance informational, critical, and empathetic listening.

### ACTIVE LISTENING CAN HELP OVERCOME BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Being an active listener starts before you actually start receiving a message. Active listeners make strategic choices and take action in order to set up ideal listening conditions. Physical and environmental noises can often be managed

by moving locations or by manipulating the lighting, temperature, or furniture. When possible, avoid important listening activities during times of distracting psychological or physiological noise. For example, we often know when we're going to be hungry, full, more awake, less awake, more anxious, or less anxious, and advance planning can alleviate the presence of these barriers. For college students, who often have some flexibility in their class schedules, knowing when you best listen can help you make strategic choices regarding what class to take when. And student options are increasing, as some colleges are offering classes in the overnight hours to accommodate working students and students who are just "night owls" (Toppo, 2011). Of course, we don't always have control over our schedule, in which case we will need to utilize other effective listening strategies that we will learn more about later in this chapter.

In terms of cognitive barriers to effective listening, we can prime ourselves to listen by analyzing a listening situation before it begins. For example, you could ask yourself the following questions:

1. "What are my goals for listening to this message?"
2. "How does this message relate to me / affect my life?"
3. "What listening type and style are most appropriate for this message?"

As we learned earlier, the difference between speech and

thought processing rate means listeners' level of attention varies while receiving a message. Effective listeners must work to maintain focus as much as possible and refocus when attention shifts or fades (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). One way to do this is to find the motivation to listen. If you can identify intrinsic and or extrinsic motivations for listening to a particular message, then you will be more likely to remember the information presented. Ask yourself how a message could impact your life, your career, your intellect, or your relationships. This can help overcome our tendency toward selective attention. As senders of messages, we can help listeners by making the relevance of what we're saying clear and offering well-organized messages that are tailored for our listeners.

### ACTIVE LISTENING BEHAVIORS

From the suggestions discussed previously, you can see that we can prepare for active listening in advance and engage in certain cognitive strategies to help us listen better. We also engage in active listening behaviors as we receive and process messages.

Paying attention is a key sign of active listening. Speakers usually interpret a listener's eye contact and body language as a signal of attentiveness. While a lack of eye contact may indicate inattentiveness, it can also signal cognitive processing.

When we look away to process new information, we usually do it unconsciously. Be aware, however, that your

conversational partner may interpret this as not listening. If you really do need to take a moment to think about something, you could indicate that to the other person by saying, “That’s new information to me. Give me just a second to think through it.” We already learned the role that back-channel cues play in listening. An occasional head nod and “uh-huh” signal that you are paying attention. However, when we give these cues as a form of “autopilot” listening, others can usually tell that we are pseudo-listening, and whether they call us on it or not, that impression could lead to negative judgments.

A more direct way to indicate active listening is to reflect previous statements made by the speaker. Norms of politeness usually call on us to reflect a past statement or connect to the speaker’s current thought before starting a conversational turn. Being able to summarize what someone said to ensure that the topic has been satisfactorily covered and understood or being able to segue in such a way that validates what the previous speaker said helps regulate conversational flow. Asking probing questions is another way to directly indicate listening and to keep a conversation going, since they encourage and invite a person to speak more. You can also ask questions that seek clarification and not just elaboration. Speakers should present complex information at a slower speaking rate than familiar information, but many will not. Remember that your nonverbal feedback can be useful for a speaker, as it signals that you are listening but also whether or



not you understand. If a speaker fails to read your nonverbal feedback, you may need to follow up with verbal communication in the form of paraphrased messages and clarifying questions.

As active listeners, we want to be excited and engaged, but don't let excitement manifest itself in interruptions. Being an active listener means knowing when to maintain our role as listener and resist the urge to take a conversational turn. Research shows that people with higher social status are more likely to interrupt others, so keep this in mind and be prepared for it if you are speaking to a high-status person, or try to resist it if you are the high-status person in an interaction (Hargie, 2001).

Note-taking can also indicate active listening. Translating information through writing into our own cognitive structures and schemata allows us to better interpret and assimilate information. Of course, note-taking isn't always a viable option. It would be fairly awkward to take notes during a first date or a casual exchange between new coworkers. But in some situations where we wouldn't normally consider taking notes, a little awkwardness might be worth it for the sake of understanding and recalling the information. For example, many people don't think about taking notes when getting information from their doctor or banker. I actually invite students to take notes during informal meetings because I think they sometimes don't think about it or don't think it's appropriate. But many people would rather someone jot down notes instead of having to

respond to follow-up questions on information that was already clearly conveyed. To help facilitate your note-taking, you might say something like “Do you mind if I jot down some notes? This seems important.”

In summary, active listening is exhibited through verbal and nonverbal cues, including steady eye contact with the speaker; smiling; slightly raised eyebrows; upright posture; body position that is leaned in toward the speaker; nonverbal back-channel cues such as head nods; verbal back-channel cues such as “OK,” “mmhum,” or “oh”; and a lack of distracting mannerisms like doodling or fidgeting (Hargie, 2011).

## ACTIVE LISTENING AND CONFLICT

Active listening is challenging in calm everyday setting as we have seen. And I’m sad to report, it’s even harder in times of conflict. When your brain is under the stress of conflict, it is extremely challenging to actively listen to what someone else is saying, because in a conflict situation you likely disagree with everything that is coming out of their mouth. In conflict is where the barriers to listening we saw in a previous chapter happen the most.

Think back to the idea of inattentional blindness. How do you think that impacts you in a conflict? Have you ever thought back to a high conflict situation and realized that you *missed* a key piece of information that was shared? Likely because in the heat of the moment you were too focused on either getting your point across, making your case, or

figuring out how to make this conflict end. Inattentional blindness in conflict means that we are likely to miss key pieces of information, verbal or nonverbal. The more effort a cognitive task requires the more likely it becomes that you'll miss noticing something significant. This in and of itself can lead to more conflict.

Or what about the difference between the speech and thought rate? You can process information at significantly higher rate than someone can share with you. In a conflict situation, you can process *every* previous conversation or conflict you have had with this person and still "hear" what they said. But you aren't really listening when that is happening.

So what can you do about these challenges in a conflict situation? First, recognize that we are all wired to be distracted AND that you will likely miss something. Second, maximize the attention you do have available by avoiding distractions. The ring of a new call or the ding of a new text are hard to resist, so make it impossible to succumb to the temptation by turning your phone off or putting it somewhere out of reach when you are driving. If you know that you will be tempted and you know that using your phone will increase inattentional blindness, you must be proactive. Third, don't be afraid to slow down and pause a conversation because you were *actively listening* to someone. You build stronger relationships by showing people that you are truly listening to them and will give the hard conversations the time they deserve.

Material in this chapter has been adapted fromMaterial in  
this chapter has been adapted from



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version  
of the text. You can view it online here:  
[https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/  
makingconflictsuckless/?p=290](https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=290)

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “A Primer  
on Communication Studies” is licensed under CC BY-NC-  
SA3.0

## I-Statements - Owning your Voice



**“Daring leaders who live into  
their values are never silent**

## about hard things.” Brene Brown

### I-STATEMENTS – OWNING YOUR STORY

One way to effectively manage conflict is to own your story and your voice by using **I-statements**. Statements that directly express your thoughts, needs, feelings, and experiences to the people around you. I-statements allow us to take responsibilities for our experiences and places the power of our lives in our hands. I-statements look like this:

- I feel...
- I think...
- I experienced it like this...
- I want...
- I need...

I-statements are contrasted with **You-statements**. Statements that imply the other person is responsible for something. You-statements typically blame on the other person. You statements look like this:

- You made me feel...
- You don't care about me.

- You never think about how that would impact us.
- You didn't...

I-Statements vs You-Statements	
I felt unappreciated.	You don't care about me.
I need some help.	You are a freeloader and never help.
I felt...	You made me feel....
It makes me sad to be left out.	You never invite me out with your friends.

Watch out for those *fake* I-Statements that so regularly sneak into our conversations. “I feel you...”, “I think you”, “I want you to...” are hidden You-Statements.

## Asking Great Questions



**“The ability to ask questions  
is the greatest resource in  
learning the truth.” Carl Jung**



## QUESTIONS – THE KEY TO LEARNING

The key to asking really great questions is being a really great listener. If you are listening, actively, you will recognize what information you are missing, or what you need clarification on. Below is a look at some basic types of questions to understand and master.

There is a general distinction made between **Open Ended Question**, questions that likely require some thought and/or more than a yes/no answer, and **Close Ended Questions**, questions that only require a specific answer and/or a yes/no answer. This is an important distinction to understand and remember. In the context of managing conflict open ended questions are utilized for Information Gathering and close ended questions are used for Clarifying concepts or ideas you have heard. Here are examples of these types of questions.

### CLARIFYING QUESTIONS (CLOSE ENDED QUESTION)

- Is this what you said...?
- Did I hear you say...?
- Did I understand you when you said...?
- Did I hear you correctly when you said...?
- Did I paraphrase what you said correctly?
- So this took place on....?
- So you would like to see...?

INFORMATION GATHERING QUESTIONS (OPEN  
ENDED QUESTIONS)

- If there was one small way that things could be better starting today, what would that be?
- How did you feel when...?
- How could you have handled it differently?
- When did it began?
- When did you first notice...?
- When did that happen?
- Where did it happen?
- What was that all about?
- What happened then?
- What would you like to do about it?
- I want to understand from your perspective, would you please tell me again?
- What do you think would make this better going forward?
- What criteria did you use to...?
- What's another way you might...?
- What resources were used for the project?
- Tell me more about... (not a question, but an open ended prompt)

A type of question to watch out for is **Leading Questions**, which provides a direction or answer for someone to agree or disagree with. An example would be, “So you are going to vote for\_\_\_\_ for president, aren’t you?” or “What they did is unbelievably, don’t you agree?” These questions can easily be turned into information gathering questions, “Who are you going to vote for this year?” or “What do you think about their behavior?”

## Framing and Reframing



**“Our key to transforming anything lies in our ability to reframe it.” Marianne Williamson**

### FRAMING AND REFRAMING

**Framing**, in communication, is essentially the act of intentionally setting the stage for the conversation you want to have. In framing a conversation you express why you want to engage in this topic, what your intent is, and what you hope the outcome can be for resolving the conflict, as well as the impact/importance of your relationship. When you frame a conversation, you take out the need for the other person to assume what your intentions and motives are or why you are bringing this topic up right now.

There are many ways to frame a conversations, here are a few ideas for how to frame a conversation effectively.

#### ASK IF THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO TALK

“I have been wanting to connect with you to discuss\_\_\_\_. Would now be a good time?” (If the answer is no, take a minute to schedule a good time)

## CONSIDER SHARING YOUR “WHY”, CONCERNS, AND INTENTIONS

“This is important to me because....”

“I’m only bringing this up because I want us and this project to be successful and I’m worried that we are missing something.”

“My intention is....”

“My intention is to share my thoughts with you, but I don’t have any expectations that you do anything with them.”

“I care about our relationships and want to make sure we are addressing challenges as they come up.” “I’m not sure how this will go.”

“I’m pretty stressed about this because I’m not sure how this conversation is going to go.”

“I have been thinking about this a lot and figured it was time to ask for help.”

## ASSERTIVE FRAMING – FRAMING A BOUNDARY

“I know this is important to you and I’m just too busy to go to that concert right now. “

“I can see this isn’t a good time to talk, so I’d like to set up a time that works better.”

“I’m sorry, I already have too much on my plate.”

“I appreciate you thinking of me for this project. I’m currently working on X, which means unfortunately, I can’t do both and have to say no to your request.”

Framing sets the stage for the rest of the conversation to

unfold. A little bit of framing goes a long way in helping conversations be more productive, and help manage some of the conflict that can happen when people have to make assumptions about “why” and conversation or conflict is happening.

For more ideas around framing, The Gottman institute has a really great infographic that shares their version of framing, Harsh Start Ups vs Soft Start Ups.

### REFRAMING

Framing happens at the beginning of a conversation, **Reframing** happens when things get off track and you need to bring a conversation back on topic. Consider this picture.



In the center of the picture is a Frame, that is only covering part of the ocean and cliff. If we expanded that frame to surround the entire picture, that would be reframing. Reframing, in a conversation, helps us see more of what is



going on, helps us focus on the larger picture or our end goals, and helps defuse tense situations. Reframing can be used for many things when managing conflict.

- Defusing inflammatory language
- Recasting negatives into neutral or positive statements
- Refocusing attention
- Acknowledging strong emotions in a productive manner
- Translating communication so that it is more likely to be heard and acknowledged by other parties
- Recontextualizing the dispute, providing a broader perspective

Reframing Examples	
Original Statement	Reframed Statement
"You misinterpret everything."	"We must be misunderstanding each other. Can you help me understand what you meant"
"I am fed up with your negative response to everything that is proposed."	"I agree. Let's focus on finding a solution and move away from negativity."
"Can we just keep talking about this one detail?"	"If you are okay with it, can we make sure we have the big picture figured out before focusing on details? Maybe the details will become more clear then."
"That seems really petty! Can you believe that keeps happening?"	"That sounds irritating. What do you need to move past this moment and look for a solution."

## Nonverbal Communication



**“Nonverbal communication forms a social language that in many ways is richer and**

**more fundamental than our words.” Leonard Mlodinow**

## **NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

How do you know when your friends, family, bosses, or instructors are pleased with your progress (or not)? You might know from the smiles on their faces; from the time and attention they give you; or perhaps in other nonverbal ways, like a raise, a bonus, or a good grade. Whether the interaction takes place face-to-face or at a distance you can still experience and interpret nonverbal responses.

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** 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.

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. 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, 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.

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. 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 acts of verbal and nonverbal communication, and *you can't take it back*. You need to be conscious of this aspect of your nonverbal behavior, in the case of nonverbal communication actions really do 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 others.

Carlos Budding provides insights into non-verbal communication in his Ted Talk “Eye” Understand: The power of non-verbal communication.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=267>

## 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 a

complex task. The e-mail is from a coworker and you click on it. The subject line reads “let go.” You could interpret this to mean a suggestion there is a joke about Disney’s Frozen in the email or a challenge to release some stress but letting go, but in the context of the workplace you may assume it means getting fired. 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.

Your nonverbal communication happens like this 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.

For example, suppose you are working as a salesclerk in a retail store, and a customer just communicated their frustration to you, about something you don’t think is a big deal. 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. Your nonverbals 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.

As you can see, 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 MESSAGES COMMUNICATE FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES

Steven Beebe, Susan Beebe, and Mark Redmond (2002) offer us three additional principals of interpersonal nonverbal communication that serve our discussion.

1. You often react faster than you think

2. Your nonverbal responses communicate your initial reaction before you can process it through language or formulate an appropriate response
3. If your appropriate, spoken response doesn't match your nonverbal reaction, you may give away your true feelings and attitudes

Albert Mehrabian asserts that we rarely communicate emotional messages through the spoken word. According to Mehrabian, 93 percent of the time we communicate our emotions nonverbally, with at least 55 percent associated with facial gestures. Vocal cues, body position and movement, and normative space between speaker and receiver can also be clues to feelings and attitudes (Mehrabain, 1972).

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. According to William Seiler and Melissa Beall, most people tend to believe the nonverbal message over the verbal message. People will often answer that “actions speak louder than words” and place a disproportionate emphasis on the nonverbal response (Seiler & Beall, 2000). This is why it is important for us to be aware of our own nonverbal communication and ensure



we are communicating what we mean. Some common ways we communicate our emotions through nonverbal communication that we may or may not recognize include:

- 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

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.

For more information on non-verbal communication check out the Ted Talk from Lynne Franklin, *Reading Minds Through Body Language*, and article by Abhimanyu Das, *7 ways to be a better communicator – tweak your body language* e.g. [new tab]



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=267>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Human Relations” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Using These Tools



**“Communication is a skill that you can learn. It’s like learning to ride a bicycle or**

**typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life." Brian Tracy**

### CHAPTER 3 USING THE TOOLS

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING

One of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is reflecting upon our strengths and weaknesses when it comes to how our communication and conflict management skills and how they impact the relationships in our lives. Understanding our capability to actively listen, how we express ourselves and our ideas, how we frame our intent and purposes, and how we present ourselves non-verbally can provide insight into the success and failure of friendships or romantic relationships, as well as the depth of connection we have with our family or coworkers.

The frameworks and tools in this chapter allow for us to consider and understand:

- what type of listener you are
- what style of listening do you use most regularly
- what barriers to listening do you experience

- how you express yourself and your story (i-statements or you-statements)
- how effective you are at asking questions
- how you frame your conversations and your ability to reframe a conversation when necessary
- how you communicate nonverbally and it's impact on your relationships

Once we understand ourselves in these ways we can ask ourselves the hard questions, where am I successful in utilizing these tools and where can I improve? Taking an honest inventory of our communication and conflict management skills allows us to accurately identify what we should keep doing and what we should stop doing. Things to consider in this reflection process:

- ask for feedback about your skills from someone you trust
- think about successful relationships you have and consider what makes them so great – do more of that
- think about unsuccessful relationships you have and consider what makes them not so great – do less of that
- consider your role models, or people that have positively impacted you in your life, how do they communicate and manage conflict, this could

provide interesting insight into areas to improve yourself

From these reflections, pick 1 or 2 small things that you want to work on to either continue doing, potentially with more frequency or that you want to improve. As the saying goes, you can't boil the ocean. You also can't change everything about your communication and conflict management styles at one time. Often 1 or 2 changes is plenty for the brain to work on. Commit to yourself when and where you will try to improve and set a time to check back in with yourself to reflect on how the change is going.

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR OTHER AWARENESS BUILDING

Once we understand ourself, we can move into the utilization of these skills to understand others. You can consider:

- what type of listener are they
- what style of listening do you think they have
- what barriers to listening do you see or experience when talking to them
- how you they express themselves and their story (i-statements or you-statements)
- do they ask you questions and are they effective
- do they frame or reframe a conversation when

necessary

- what they communicate nonverbally and it's impact on you

You can combine your question asking and your listening skills to really dig into understanding others and their skills. You can watch for nonverbal cues and work towards utilizing the empathetic listening style to understand the perspective of another person.

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

After you understand yourself and others in these frameworks, you can start analyzing where some of these ideas can cause conflict and move towards managing these differences in a productive manner. For example –

You are a time-oriented listener and your best friend is a people-oriented listener. Your friend wants to focus on your feelings and needs and you are just looking to get to the point as quickly as possible. This is a very common difference.

The strange and interesting thing here is that in this dynamic, you could have a *primary conflict* (lets say you and your best friend are in a conflict about how to spend the up coming weekend) and now you also have a *secondary conflict*, that comes from the difference in the way you want to address the primary conflict. Often times the primary conflict and secondary conflict become inseparable.

Listening for these kinds of differences helps us disentangle the primary conflict from the secondary conflicts. Once we recognize them we can use our framing and reframing skills to manage these differences directly. For example:

Reframe – “I think we are approaching this conversation differently. (*I-Statement*) It sounds like focusing on the task and solving this problem quickly is important to you (*Reflection*) and for me I want to make sure we address our feelings and the impact of this situation on our friendship (*Frame*). Are you okay with addressing both side of this situation knowing we both want a positive solution in this situation?” (*Clarifying question*)

We build relationships by putting these tools together. Listening is the foundation, expressing ourselves through I-Statements, asking questions to understand and clarify, and framing and reframing the conflict and why it is important allows us to really connect with the people around us, through empathy and understanding, and build relationships with mutual respect and purpose.



Chapter 4 - Why  
don't people read  
between the lines?  
Asserting yourself  
and speaking up for  
your beliefs and  
values

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe the three ways of relating – aggressive, assertive, passive
- Understand how develop assertive messages to

draw boundaries for what you want and need

- Recognize and expand your emotional vocabulary
- Understand how to develop different types assertive messages
- Understand when to NOT assert yourself
- Utilize a 6 step assertion process for delivering your assertions

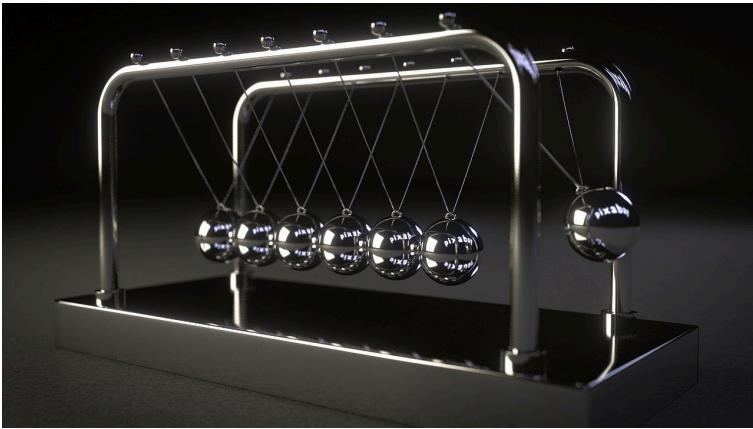
**“Courage is to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart.” Brene Brown**



Learning to speak up for our wants and needs, in an assertive way, can be challenging. Being assertive requires us to do two things simultaneously, 1) understand and then share what is important to us, what we want, what we need, and to share our values and perspective with others and 2) do all of this *without* taking away respect and dignity from another person. For some of you, it will be hard to speak up and share your needs with other people, for others it will be hard to allow other people their need and wants to exist *with* yours. In this next chapter we will look at what it means to be assertive, and how that is distinctly different than being passive or aggressive. We will also explore different tools to utilize in order to become more assertive.



## The Passive - Assertive - Aggressive Continuum



**“People who fight fire with  
fire usually end up with  
ashes.” Abigail Van Buren**

## THE PASSIVE – ASSERTIVE – AGGRESSIVE CONTINUUM

People tend to relate to communication based on one of three styles.

**Passive** communicators tend to put the rights of others before his or her own. Passive communicators tend to be apologetic or sound tentative when they speak. They do not speak up if they feel like they are being wronged.

**Assertive** communicators respect their rights and the rights of others when communicating. This person tends to be direct but not insulting or offensive. The assertive communicator stands up for his or her own rights but makes sure the rights of others aren't affected.

**Aggressive** communicators, on the other hand, will come across as standing up for his or her rights while possibly violating the rights of others. This person tends to communicate in a way that tells others they don't matter or their feelings don't matter.

	<b>Passive</b>	<b>Assertive</b>	<b>Aggressive</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Communication style in which you put the rights of others before your own, minimizing your own self-worth	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights while maintaining respect for the rights of others	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights but you violate the rights of others
<b>Implications to others</b>	My feelings are not important I don't matter I think I'm inferior	We are both important We both matter I think we are equal	Your feelings are not important You don't matter I think I'm superior
<b>Verbal styles</b>	Apologetic Overly soft or tentative voice	I statements Firm voice	You statements Loud voice
<b>Nonverbal styles</b>	Looking down or away Stooped posture, excessive head nodding	Looking direct Relaxed posture, smooth and relaxed movements	Staring, narrow eyes Tense, clenched fists, rigid posture, pointing fingers
<b>Potential consequences</b>	Lowered self-esteem Anger at self False feelings of inferiority Disrespect from others Pitied by others	High self-esteem Self-respect Respect from others Respect of others	Anger from others Lowered self-esteem Disrespect from others Feared by others

Most of us tend to have a consistent way we relate to communication, and therefore conflict. The majority of people are *either* mostly passive (avoidant and accommodating) or mostly aggressive (competitive) with much

fewer people regularly being assertive (collaborative). That being said, regardless of where you typically land on the passive – assertive – aggressive continuum, most of us have work to do when it comes to being more assertive in our lives.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Human Relations” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



## Drawing Boundaries - Developing Assertive Messages



**“Being assertive does not  
mean attacking or ignoring**

**others feelings. It means that you are willing to hold up for yourself fairly without attacking others.” Albert Ellis**

### **BOUNDARIES AND BEING ASSERTIVE**

One word that is often used for being assertive in our society today is to draw or hold our “boundaries”. In a physical space, boundaries are easy to identify, such as a fence, stop signs, or a door. Boundaries in our social experiences are not as easy to identify but are just as real and important as physical boundaries. Fences and doors tell us where it is safe to go, and how to behave. The same is true when we are assert our social boundaries, think of them as the invisible fences or doors we draw in our lives. Asserting our social boundaries, tell those around us what is acceptable and what isn’t acceptable in our interaction, they are the guidelines and rules we provide people around us for how we want our relationship with them to look.

Robert Bolton (1979), he gives us a simple but effective template for developing assertive messages to help us draw boundaries:

When you\_\_\_\_\_ (a nonjudgmental description of someones behavior)

I feel\_\_\_\_\_ (a specific feeling)

Because\_\_\_\_\_ (how someone's behavior directly impacts you, how they have crossed a boundary)

While this assertion template seems really simple, it actually can be quite challenging to utilize. Some tips for making sure that you are asserting your boundaries in a productive way.

- Focus on one behavior at a time. *If you have been more passive in your communications you might want to jump into drawing all the boundaries. Pick one to start with and work from there*
- Describe the behavior you chose to focus on in a nonjudgmental way (easier than it sounds) with nonjudgmental language. *Example – “When you don’t pick up your crap” vs “When you leave dirty laundry in the bathroom”*
- Pick a very specific feeling (most specifics on this below)
- Watch out for a feeling statement that says “I feel you...” the feeling word should describe your feeling in this situation, not be about the other person *Example- “I feel like you don’t care” vs “I feel hurt”*
- When you describe the impact on you, really express how someones behavior impacts you. *Think back to the types of goals or SCARF model trigger, express what is really going on for you*
- Keep it concise.

- Use this template for positive reinforcement of behavior you want to keep seeing. *When you pick up your dirty clothes, I feel appreciative, because I don't have to take time to pick them up.*

## Asserting your Emotions



**“Labeling your emotions  
provides useful information.  
Your emotions become  
beacons, helping you identify**

**what you care about most  
and motivating you to make  
positive change.” Susan  
David**

### ASSERTING EMOTIONS

Emotions play many important roles in people's lives and have been the topic of scientific inquiry in psychology for well over a century (Cannon, 1927; Darwin, 1872; James, 1890). This module explores why we have emotions and why they are important. Doing so requires us to understand the function of emotions, and this chapter does so below by dividing the discussion into three sections. The first concerns the intrapersonal functions of emotion, which refer to the role that emotions play within each of us individually. The second concerns the interpersonal functions of emotion, which refer to the role emotions play between individuals within a group. The third concerns asserting your emotions. All in all, we will see that emotions inform us of who we are, what our relationships with others are like, and how to behave in social interactions. Emotions give meaning to events; without emotions, those events would be mere facts. Emotions help coordinate interpersonal relationships.

## INTRAPERSONAL FUNCTIONS OF EMOTIONS

Emotions are rapid information-processing systems that help us act with minimal thinking (Tooby & Cosmides, 2008). Problems associated with birth, battle, death, and seduction have occurred throughout evolutionary history and emotions evolved to aid humans in adapting to those problems rapidly and with minimal conscious cognitive effort. If we did not have emotions, we could not make rapid decisions concerning whether to attack, defend, flee, care for others, reject food, or approach something useful, all of which were functionally adaptive in our evolutionary history and helped us to survive. For instance, drinking spoiled milk or eating rotten eggs has negative consequences for our welfare. The emotion of disgust, however, helps us immediately take action by not ingesting them in the first place or by vomiting them out. This response is adaptive because it aids, ultimately, in our survival and allows us to act immediately without much thinking. In some instances, taking the time to sit and rationally think about what to do, calculating cost-benefit ratios in one's mind, is a luxury that might cost one one's life. Emotions evolved so that we can act without that depth of thinking.

## EMOTIONS PREPARE THE BODY FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

Emotions prepare us for behavior. When triggered, emotions orchestrate systems such as perception, attention, inference, learning, memory, goal choice, motivational priorities,

physiological reactions, motor behaviors, and behavioral decision making (Cosmides & Tooby, 2000; Cosmides & Tooby, 2008). Emotions simultaneously activate certain systems and deactivate others in order to prevent the chaos of competing systems operating at the same time, allowing for coordinated responses to environmental stimuli (Levenson, 1999). For instance, when we are afraid, our bodies shut down temporarily unneeded digestive processes, resulting in saliva reduction (a dry mouth); blood flows disproportionately to the lower half of the body; the visual field expands; and air is breathed in, all preparing the body to flee. Emotions initiate a system of components that includes subjective experience, expressive behaviors, physiological reactions, action tendencies, and cognition, all for the purposes of specific actions; the term “emotion” is, in reality, a metaphor for these reactions.

One common misunderstanding many people have when thinking about emotions, however, is the belief that emotions must always directly produce action. This is not true. Emotion certainly *prepares* the body for action; but whether people actually engage in action is dependent on many factors, such as the context within which the emotion has occurred, the target of the emotion, the perceived consequences of one’s actions, previous experiences, and so forth (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zang, 2007; Matsumoto & Wilson, 2008). Thus, emotions are just one of many determinants of behavior, albeit an important one.



## EMOTIONS INFLUENCE THOUGHTS

Emotions are also connected to thoughts and memories. Memories are not just facts that are encoded in our brains; they are colored with the emotions felt at those times the facts occurred (Wang & Ross, 2007). Thus, emotions serve as the neural glue that connects those disparate facts in our minds. That is why it is easier to remember happy thoughts when happy, and angry times when angry. Emotions serve as the affective basis of many attitudes, values, and beliefs that we have about the world and the people around us; without emotions those attitudes, values, and beliefs would be just statements without meaning, and emotions give those statements meaning. Emotions influence our thinking processes, sometimes in constructive ways, sometimes not. It is difficult to think critically and clearly when we feel intense emotions, but easier when we are not overwhelmed with emotions (Matsumoto, Hirayama, & LeRoux, 2006).

## EMOTIONS MOTIVATE FUTURE BEHAVIORS

Because emotions prepare our bodies for immediate action, influence thoughts, and can be felt, they are important motivators of future behavior. Many of us strive to experience the feelings of satisfaction, joy, pride, or triumph in our accomplishments and achievements. At the same time, we also work very hard to avoid strong “negative” feelings; for example, once we have felt the emotion of disgust when drinking the spoiled milk, we generally work very hard to avoid having those feelings again (e.g., checking the

expiration date on the label before buying the milk, smelling the milk before drinking it, watching if the milk curdles in one's coffee before drinking it). Emotions, therefore, not only influence immediate actions but also serve as an important motivational basis for future behaviors.

## INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONS OF EMOTION

Emotions are expressed both verbally through words and nonverbally through facial expressions, voices, gestures, body postures, and movements. We are constantly expressing emotions when interacting with others, and others can reliably judge those emotional expressions (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Matsumoto, 2001) thus, emotions have signal value to others and influence others and our social interactions. Emotions and their expressions communicate information to others about our feelings, intentions, relationship with the target of the emotions, and the environment. Because emotions have this communicative signal value, they help solve social problems by evoking responses from others, by signaling the nature of interpersonal relationships, and by providing incentives for desired social behavior (Keltner, 2003).

## EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS FACILITATE SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS IN PERCEIVERS

Because facial expressions of emotion are universal social signals, they contain meaning not only about the expressor's psychological state but also about that person's intent and

subsequent behavior. This information affects what the perceiver is likely to do. People observing fearful faces, for instance, are more likely to produce approach-related behaviors, whereas people who observe angry faces are more likely to produce avoidance-related behaviors (Marsh, Ambady, & Kleck, 2005). Even subliminal presentation of smiles produces increases in how much beverage people pour and consume and how much they are willing to pay for it; presentation of angry faces decreases these behaviors (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005). Also, emotional displays evoke specific, complementary emotional responses from observers; for example, anger evokes fear in others (Dimberg & Ohman, 1996; Esteves, Dimberg, & Ohman, 1994), whereas distress evokes sympathy and aid (Eisenberg, Fabes, Miller, Fultz, Shell, Mathy, & Reno, 1989).

#### EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS SIGNAL THE NATURE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Emotional expressions provide information about the nature of the relationships among interactants. Some of the most important and provocative set of findings in this area come from studies involving married couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Gottman, Levenson, & Woodin, 2001). In this research, married couples visited a laboratory after having not seen each other for 24 hours, and then engaged in intimate conversations about daily events or issues of conflict. Discrete expressions of contempt, especially by the men, and

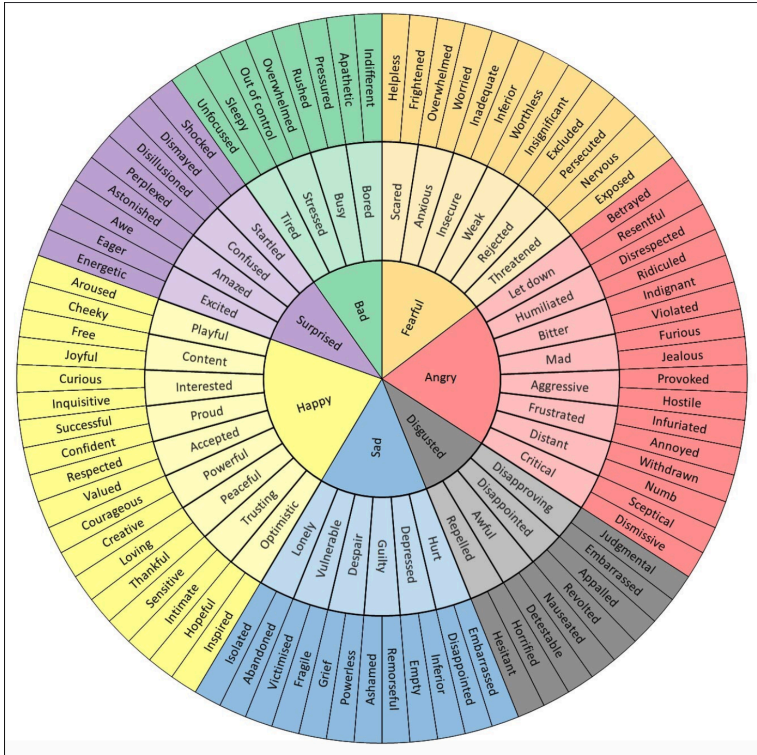
disgust, especially by the women, predicted later marital dissatisfaction and even divorce.

### ASSERTING YOUR EMOTIONS

Have you ever been so swept up in your emotions that you can't think straight? Or to the point where you can't even if we can't exactly put a finger on how you are feeling? Ever felt like you just don't have the right words to describe what you are going through? You aren't alone. I often joke that feelings are the "f-word", some of us love them, sometimes they make us uncomfortable, and they are only to be spoken in front of the right people. A big part of being assertive includes understanding and expressing your feelings, not just what you want and need from others. Expressing our feelings can be challenging for a number of reasons, some of which we will explore now and some in later chapters.

For most of us, we have a *very* limited emotional vocabulary. Think about it, how many emotion words can you even list? And more importantly, how many emotional experiences can you appropriately label? One of the best ways to improve your ability to be assertive is to improve your emotional vocabulary. A great tool for this is a Feelings Wheel.

### Feelings Wheel



As you can see, there are a *lot* of words to describe our emotional vocabulary. One of the worlds leading experts in emotions is Susan David (2016), here research in the book Emotional Agility tells us that we need to have an emotional vocabulary of at least 30 words in order to accurately experience, express, and ultimately work through our emotions.

More from Susan David in this wonderful TedTalk.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=261>

While sometimes asserting our emotions is challenging because of a lack of vocabulary, another reason is that we don't know what to say or how to say it. Remember back to Chapter 3 I-Statements and Framing and consider asserting your emotions like this:

“I am not sure how your will respond to this but I care about our relationship enough to want to share this and work on it together. (FRAME) I feel depressed. (I-Statement with a feeling).”

or

“This is a new experience for me. (Frame) I feel nervous. (I-Statement with a feeling)”

Understanding and asserting our emotions is important and challenging work. Lisa Feldman Barrett is a Neuroscientist and Psychologist who also studies emotions. Her research helps us understand that we are in control of our emotions, they aren’t in control of us. Take a look at her TedTalk below.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=261>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Together: The Science of Social Psychology – Functions of Emotions” by Hyisung Hwang, David Matsumoto is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



## Different Types of Assertions



**“The difference between  
being assertive and**

**aggressive is how our words  
and behaviors affect the  
rights and well being of  
others.” Sharon Anthony  
Bower**

### **DIFFERENT WAYS TO ASSERT YOURSELF**

There are many types of assertions, the template above is just a start. The examples below are hardly exhaustive, it is just to give you a sense of the different ways to be assertive and hold your boundaries.

Sometimes even when you assert yourself and hold your boundaries, the people in your life might not respect them. Robert Bolton (1979) shares with us that part of being assertive and holding boundaries might be:

**Selective Inattention** – ignoring unwanted behavior if it is a one time occurrence

**Temporary Withdrawl** – taking time away from a relationship that doesn't respect your boundaries

**Permanent Withdrawl** – ending a relationship because your boundaries aren't respected

Think about this as an order of progression. You assert your boundaries, if they aren't respected you can ignore the other persons behavior and assert yourself again. If this

person continues to step on and not respect your boundaries you might need to take some time apart. If that behavior continues, you might need to end that relation. This can happen with friends, partners, co-workers, and even family.

A basic act of being assertive is simply **saying “no”**. Saying no without little white lies or justifying why you are saying no takes some practice. Have you ever been invited out with friends but didn’t want to go? Did you make something up? “I’m busy” when really you just don’t want to go out. Being assertive in that moment looks like “I really appreciate the offer, and I hope you invite me in the future, but no, I just need some me time”.

The last type of assertion we will look at is **asking for help**. Heidi Grant’s ted talk describes how to ask for help in the TedTalk below.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=263>

If you are interested in exploring more information about being assertive, here is a great article on Psychology Today – 4 ways to be assertive without alienating others

## When to NOT Assert



**“There is perhaps no psychological skill more fundamental than resisting impulse.” Daniel Golman**

## **STOP – THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO ASSERT**

There is a wonderful acronym to remember when you are considering being assertive. HALT. Ask yourself, are you?

Hungry?

Angry?

Lonely?

Tired?

If you answer yes to any of those questions, then HALT. Satisfy your needs, whether that is eating a snack, taking a deep breath, connecting with someones, or taking a nap. Then reevaluate your need to assert a boundary. If the need is still there, then proceed with delivering your assertive message.

Another time to NOT assert, is through a text message. An article from Psychology Today talks about Things to not send in a text. Assertive messages are important. Sending them verbally, and ideally in person (on screen or in the same space) impacts our ability to deliver and see nonverbal messages. In the next section we will explore nonverbal communication and conflict.

## 6 Step Assertion Process



**“Speaking assertively is not about raising your voice. It is about raising your listening skills.” *unknown***

## 6 STEP ASSERTION PROCESS

Imagine you know it's time to draw a boundary with someone close to you, you've thought long and hard about what is important to you, you know what you want to say, So what do you do now? Robert Bolton (1979), gives us a process to follow when delivering our assertion.

- 1) Preparation
- 2) Delivering the Message
- 3) Silence
- 4) Active Listening
- 5) Recycle steps 2-4 (as necessary)
- 6) Focus on a Solution

**Preparation** – In the preparation stage you spend time, before you enter into a conversation with the other person, reflecting on what is important for you to convey, developing your framing (from chapter 3) and assertion message, and preparing yourself for this process and active listening.

**Deliver the Message** – Share your frame and your assertion message

**Silence** – Allow the other person time to process what you have just said. Sometimes after we assert ourselves, we want to justify ourselves, or jump in when there is silence because it can be awkward and uncomfortable. Take a deep breath while they consider what you have just said, they may have not considered this topic before this very moment.

**Active Listening** – Once the person responds to your assertion, your job is to reflect back what their response



is. This response could be defensive, it could be off track from your original topic, or they could shut down. Actively listening to the other person will likely be the last thing you want to do, so make sure to prepare for this part of the process as much as you can in the preparation step.

**Recycle Steps 2-4 (as necessary)** – You will likely have to reassert yourself, provide more silence, and actively listen a few times, before you can move into the next step in the process. This part of the process allow you and the other person to really understand each other and get on the same page.

**Focus on A Solution** – Often times in conflict we jump to this step *without* taking the time to go through steps 1-5. Only focus on a solution after you have understood the other person, they have understood you, and you are both ready and capable of focusing on a solution.

## Using These Tools



**“Do not wait: the time will never be ‘just right’. Start**

**where you stand, and work whatever tools you you may have at your command and better tools will be found as you go along.” Napoleon Hill**

## **Chapter 4 Using The Tools**

### **USING THESE TOOLS FOR SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING**

The framework presented in this chapter, the passive – assertive – aggressive continuum, is a great tool for developing your self-awareness. It helps us understand the typical way we engage with the world around us, how we express our needs, get our needs met, and build relationships.

Utilize this table to reflect upon where you typically fall on this continuum.

	<b>Passive</b>	<b>Assertive</b>	<b>Aggressive</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Communication style in which you put the rights of others before your own, minimizing your own self-worth	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights while maintaining respect for the rights of others	Communication style in which you stand up for your rights but you violate the rights of others
<b>Implications to others</b>	My feelings are not important I don't matter I think I'm inferior	We are both important We both matter I think we are equal	Your feelings are not important You don't matter I think I'm superior
<b>Verbal styles</b>	Apologetic Overly soft or tentative voice	I statements Firm voice	You statements Loud voice
<b>Nonverbal styles</b>	Looking down or away Stooped posture, excessive head nodding	Looking direct Relaxed posture, smooth and relaxed movements	Staring, narrow eyes Tense, clenched fists, rigid posture, pointing fingers
<b>Potential consequences</b>	Lowered self-esteem Anger at self False feelings of inferiority Disrespect from others Pitied by others	High self-esteem Self-respect Respect from others Respect of others	Anger from others Lowered self-esteem Disrespect from others Feared by others

Things to consider in this reflection:

- where do you think you fall on this continuum most regularly
- where do you want to fall on this continuum most regularly

- are there times or relationships where you are more passive, more aggressive, or more assertive. If so, what about those times or relationships lead to that
- are there times you would like to be more assertive
- what and where can you be more assertive in your daily life
- what are boundaries in my life that are most important

These points of reflection can help you identify strategies for developing and living a more assertive life. In order to be more assertive in your life and draw the appropriate boundaries in your relationships, you first and foremost need to understand what is truly important to you. In chapter 7 we will look at a framework to consider how to define what is core to who you are, and what is flexible, so for now just start this reflection process.

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR OTHER AWARENESS BUILDING

The passive – assertive – aggressive continuum also allows us to understand where other people might fall on this continuum. You can ask yourself these questions to start understanding others:

- what behaviors do I see when I am in conflict with this person
- does this person shut down, lash out, or express

themselves when in a stressful situation or conflict

- do I know what this persons needs or idea are
- does this person understand what my needs or ideas are
- how does this other person responds to you. If you are more passive or aggressive, how does that impact the other person

Gaining insight into yourself and the other person on this continuum help you better prepare for building strong relationships with the people around you.

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Strong relationships are built on solid boundaries, shared values, mutual understanding, and where each person understands and works to help meet the need of the other. An underlying principle of being assertive and setting boundaries is respect. Respecting yourself, respecting others, and respecting your relationship. The passive – assertive – aggressive continuum is an important framework in building strong relationships. In order for relationships to be productive and meaningful, we need to understand how we relate to one another. For example:

If one person is passive and the other is aggressive, the passive persons needs my not be met (in the worst version of this, their needs my be ignored) and the aggressive person my always get their needs met.

Resentment can build in the passive person, they may feel like they don't matter or that the other person doesn't care about them. Frustration can build in the aggressive person, they aren't sure what the other person wants or needs and feels like they are always guessing and failing. Resentment and frustration erode relationships.

This very common example happens in many relationships. When one person's needs get met, and the other doesn't, when one person understands what the other wants and needs, but it isn't reciprocated, we do not have a meaningful, productive, or sustainable relationship.

Putting this framework to use, with active listening, i-statements, effective questions, framing, and reframing gives us the greatest chance to build strong and lasting relationships, build on mutual respect and understanding.





# Chapter 5 - Why are they (am I) so defensive? Getting your brain under control

## Learning Objectives

- Understand the basic neuroscience components of conflict
- Develop strategies for managing your own defensive responses
- Develop strategies for managing the defensive responses of other people

**“Defensiveness is usually  
someone silently screaming  
that they need you to value  
and respect them in disguise.  
When you look for  
deeper meanings behind  
someone’s pain you can then  
begin to heal not only  
yourself, but others.”  
Shannon Alders**



Have you ever had the experience, where after you’ve been in a conflict, you can’t remember what you said OR you can’t figure out why you said what you said? You are not alone. This occurs when we are experiencing a defensive response. The neuroscience of conflict and defensive responses is

fascinating! For the purposes of this book we will only touch the surface of this concept, focusing our efforts on figuring out how to help everyone's brain stay engaged (or get them reengaged) during a conflict.



## Your Brain on Conflict



**“Follow your heart but take  
your brain with you.” Alfred  
Adler**

## **SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE**

There are many connections to be made from social neuroscience research to conflict, we will look at two major areas for the purposes of this book:

1. How Your Brain Processes Conflict
2. How Automatically Your Brain Judges People

Psychology has a long tradition of using our brains and body to better understand how we think and act. For example, in 1939 Heinrich Kluver and Paul Bucy removed (i.e. lesioned) the temporal lobes in some rhesus monkeys and observed the effect on behavior. Included in these lesions was a subcortical area of the brain called the amygdala. After surgery, the monkeys experienced profound behavioral changes, including loss of fear. These results provided initial evidence that the amygdala plays a role in emotional responses, a finding that has since been confirmed by subsequent studies (Phelps & LeDoux, 2005; Whalen & Phelps, 2009).

### **WHAT IS SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE?**

Social neuroscience uses the brain and body to understand how we think and act, with a focus on how we think about and act toward other people. More specifically, we can think of social neuroscience as an interdisciplinary field that uses a range of neuroscience measures to understand how other people influence our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As such, social neuroscience studies the same topics as social

psychology, but does so from a multilevel perspective that includes the study of the brain and body. Although the field is relatively new – the term first appeared in 1992 (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1992) – it has grown rapidly, thanks to technological advances making measures of the brain and body cheaper and more powerful than ever before, and to the recognition that neural and physiological information are critical to understanding how we interact with other people.

### HOW DOES YOUR BRAIN PROCESS CONFLICT?

When we experience conflict we all have some kind of physical tells that we are experiencing stress or being triggered. This could be rosy cheeks, sweaty palms or pits, queazy stomachs, or clenched teeth. If you aren't sure what your physical tells are, pay close attention the next time you feel frustrated, stressed out, or find yourself in the middle of a conflict. These are the physical symptoms of conflict. But what is going on in our brains?

When you *first* experience conflict, your **limbic system** (this system includes our **amygdala** which plays an important part in regulating emotions and behaviors and is typically talked about as the place where our “Fight, Flight, or Freeze” responses live) scans the environment for threats or rewards (think back to the SCARF model in Chapter 1). Depending on the intensity of conflict you are having, you could experience an **Amygdala Hijacking** where you can no longer access the **prefrontal cortex**, this is the part of the brain that regulates empathy, decision making, problem

solving, and much more. You can often see people experience an amygdala hijacking, some people lash out (fight), some people run away (flight), and some people sink into themselves (freeze).

Next, the **thalamus**, your brain's perception center starts to work on interpreting the stimuli created by the conflict. This is where our regularly wrong assumptions come from. From this, our brain creates a story or a narrative of the entire conflict from beginning, middle, to end (even if we don't have all the information necessary for the complete story).

Essentially, our brain is wired to *react* to conflict not to *respond* productively.

## HOW AUTOMATICALLY DO WE JUDGE OTHER PEOPLE?

**Social categorization** is the act of mentally classifying someone as belonging in a group. Why do we do this? It is an effective *mental shortcut*. Rather than effortfully thinking about every detail of every person we encounter, social categorization allows us to rely on information we already know about the person's group. For example, by classifying your restaurant server as a man, you can quickly activate all the information you have stored about men and use it to guide your behavior. But this shortcut comes with potentially high costs. The stored group beliefs might not be very accurate, and even when they do accurately describe some group members, they are unlikely to be true for every member you encounter. In addition, many beliefs we



associate with groups – called stereotypes – are negative. This means that relying on social categorization can often lead people to make negative assumptions about others.

Imagine how social categorization impacts us in conflict situations. If we have previous experiences with someone, or even with someone who simply reminds us of another person, our brain relies on that *past* and potentially *unrelated* information to directly inform our current conflict. The potential costs of social categorization make it important to understand how social categorization occurs.

Is social categorization rare or does it occur often? Is it something we can easily stop, or is it hard to override? One difficulty answering these questions is that people are not always consciously aware of what they are doing. In this case, we might not always realize when we are categorizing someone. Another concern is that even when people are aware of their behavior, they can be reluctant to accurately report it to an experimenter. In the case of social categorization, subjects might worry they will look bad if they accurately report classifying someone into a group associated with negative stereotypes. For instance, many racial groups are associated with some negative stereotypes, and subjects may worry that admitting to classifying someone into one of those groups means they believe and use those negative stereotypes.

Social neuroscience has been useful for studying how social categorization occurs without having to rely on self-report measures, instead measuring brain activity differences that

occur when people encounter members of different social groups. Much of this work has been recorded using the electroencephalogram, or EEG. EEG is a measure of electrical activity generated by the brain's neurons. Comparing this electrical activity at a given point in time against what a person is thinking and doing at that same time allows us to make inferences about brain activity associated with specific psychological states. Researchers simply pull the cap onto the subject's head to get the electrodes into place; wearing it is similar to wearing a swim cap. The subject can then be asked to think about different topics or engage in different tasks as brain activity is measured.

To study social categorization, subjects have been shown pictures of people who belong to different social groups. Brain activity recorded from many individual trials (e.g., looking at lots of different Black individuals) is then averaged together to get an overall idea of how the brain responds when viewing individuals who belong to a particular social group. These studies suggest that social categorization is an automatic process— something that happens with little conscious awareness or control – especially for dimensions like gender, race, and age (Ito & Urland, 2003; Mouchetant-Rostaing & Giard, 2003). The studies specifically show that brain activity differs when subjects view members of different social groups (e.g., men versus women, Blacks versus Whites), suggesting that the group differences are being encoded and processed by the perceiver. One interesting finding is that these brain changes occur both when subjects

are purposely asked to categorize the people into social groups (e.g., to judge whether the person is Black or White), and also when they are asked to do something that draws attention away from group classifications (e.g., making a personality judgment about the person) (Ito & Urland, 2005). This tells us that we do not have to intend to make group classifications in order for them to happen. It is also very interesting to consider how quickly the changes in brain responses occur. Brain activity is altered by viewing members of different groups within 200 milliseconds of seeing a person's face. That is just two-tenths of a second. Such a fast response lends further support to the idea that *social categorization occurs automatically and may not depend on conscious intention*.

Overall, this research suggests that we engage in social categorization very frequently. In fact, it appears to happen automatically (i.e., without us consciously intending for it to happen) in most situations for dimensions like gender, age, and race. Since classifying someone into a group is the first step to activating a group stereotype, this research provides important information about how easily stereotypes can be activated. And because it is hard for people to accurately report on things that happen so quickly, this issue has been difficult to study using more traditional self-report measures. Using EEGs has, therefore, been helpful in providing interesting new insights into social behavior.

Social categorization has a huge impact on how we perceive the world. Our brain is trying to help us be *efficient*

with this mental shortcut, but in reality this shortcut can hinder our ability to really understand who someone is and to be fully open to their thoughts and ideas. In his TedTalk *This is your brain on Communication* Uri Hasson describes what is happening in our brain when we communicate. Of particular note here is what he describes between minutes 10 and 12. “In the lab, we did the following experiment. We took a story by JD Salinger, in which a husband lost track of his wife in the middle of a party, and he’s calling his best friend, asking, “Did you see my wife?” For half of the subjects we said that the wife was having an affair with the best friend. For the other half, we said that the wife is loyal and the husband is very jealous. This one sentence before the story started was enough to make the brain responses of all the people that believed the wife was having an affair be very similar in these high-order areas [of the brain] and different than the other group. And if one sentence is enough to make your brain similar to people that think like you and very different than people that think differently than you, think how this effect is going to be amplified in real life, when we are all listening to the exact same news item after being exposed day after day after day to different media channels, like Fox News or The New York Times, that give us very different perspectives on reality.” It takes very little for social categorizations to happen, as little as one sentence or one short experience with someone. To understand more about his research, watch Uri’s Ted Talk below.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=344>

For even more interesting neuroscience information, check out The Neuroscience of Restorative Justice TedTalk by Dan Reisel.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=344>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Together: The Science of Social Psychology – Social Neuroscience” by Tiffany A Ito and Jennifer T. Kubota is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Getting Your Brain Under Control



**“If you could kick the person responsible for most of your**



**trouble, you wouldn't sit for a month." Theodore Roosevelt**

## **MANAGING YOURSELF- STARTING WITH YOUR BRAIN**

Conflict is, by its very nature, stressful. Being able to get your own brain under control during conflict comes down to you being able to manage yourself productively under stress. Below we will explore just a few ways to get your brain under control in times of conflict. But first let's take a look at what stress really is.

### **WHAT IS THE COST OF SOCIAL STRESS?**

Stress is an unfortunately frequent experience for many of us. Stress – which can be broadly defined as a threat or challenge to our well-being – can result from everyday events like a course exam or more extreme events such as experiencing a natural disaster. When faced with a stressor, sympathetic nervous system activity increases in order to prepare our body to respond to the challenge. This produces what Selye (1950) called a fight or flight response. The release of hormones, which act as messengers from one part of an organism (e.g., a cell or gland) to another part of the organism, is part of the stress response.

A small amount of stress can actually help us stay alert and

active. In comparison, sustained stressors, or chronic stress, detrimentally affect our health and impair performance (Al'absi, Hugdahl, & Lovallo, 2002; Black, 2002; Lazarus, 1974). This happens in part through the chronic secretion of stress-related hormones (e.g., Davidson, Pizzagalli, Nitschke, & Putnam, 2002; Dickerson, Gable, Irwin, Aziz, & Kemeny, 2009). In particular, stress activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HAP) axis to release cortisol (see Figure 5 for a discussion). Chronic stress, by way of increases in cortisol, impairs attention, memory, and self-control (Arnsten, 2009). Cortisol levels can be measured non-invasively in bodily fluids, including blood and saliva. Researchers often collect a cortisol sample before and after a potentially stressful task. In one common collection method, subjects place polymer swabs under their tongue for 1 to 2 minutes to soak up saliva. The saliva samples are then stored and analyzed later to determine the level of cortisol present at each time point.

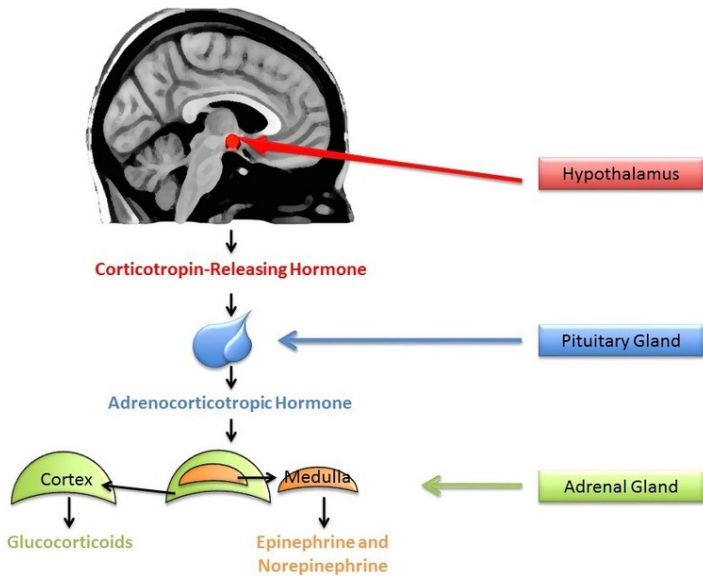


Figure 5: The Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. Black arrows represent the stress response pathway starting in the brain at the hypothalamus (an area within the brain). Stress triggers neurons in the hypothalamus to release corticotrophin-releasing hormone (CRH). The CRH is transported to the pituitary gland, another area in the brain, that activates the secretion of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). In turn, ACTH stimulates the adrenal glands that sit on top of the kidneys. The adrenal glands are composed of the outer adrenal cortex and inner adrenal medulla. The adrenal cortex secretes glucocorticoids (including cortisol) and the medulla secretes epinephrine and norepinephrine. Stress, both psychological and physical, activates the HPA axis and results in the systemic release of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine.

Whereas early stress researchers studied the effects of physical

stressors like loud noises, social neuroscientists have been instrumental in studying how our interactions with other people can cause stress. This question has been addressed through neuroendocrinology, or the study of how the brain and hormones act in concert to coordinate the physiology of the body. One contribution of this work has been in understanding the conditions under which other people can cause stress. In one study, Dickerson, Mycek, and Zaldivar (2008) asked undergraduates to deliver a speech either alone or to two other people. When the students gave the speech in front of others, there was a marked increase in cortisol compared with when they were asked to give a speech alone. This suggests that like chronic physical stress, everyday social stressors, like having your performance judged by others, induces a stress response. Interestingly, simply giving a speech in the same room with someone who is doing something else did not induce a stress response. This suggests that the mere presence of others is not stressful, but rather it is the potential for them to judge us that induces stress.

Worrying about what other people think of us is not the only source of social stress in our lives. Other research has shown that interacting with people who belong to different social groups than us – what social psychologists call outgroup members – can increase physiological stress responses. For example, cardiovascular responses associated with stress like contractility of the heart ventricles and the amount of blood pumped by the heart (what is called cardiac output) are increased when interacting with outgroup as

compared with ingroup members (i.e., people who belong to the same social group we do) (Mendes, Balcovich, Likel, & Hunter, 2002). This stress may derive from the expectation that interactions with dissimilar others will be uncomfortable (Stephan & Stephan, 1985) or concern about being judged as unfriendly and prejudiced if the interaction goes poorly (Plant & Devine, 2003).

The research just reviewed shows that events in our social lives can be stressful, but are social interactions always bad for us? No. In fact, while others can be the source of much stress, they are also a major buffer against stress. Research on social support shows that relying on a network of individuals in tough times gives us tools for dealing with stress and can ward off loneliness (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). For instance, people who report greater social support show a smaller increase in cortisol when performing a speech in front of two evaluators (Eisenberger, Tayler, Gable, Hilmert, & Lieberman, 2007).

What determines whether others will increase or decrease stress? What matters is the context of the social interaction. When it has potential to reflect badly on the self, social interaction can be stressful, but when it provides support and comfort, social interaction can protect us from the negative effects of stress. Using neuroendocrinology by measuring hormonal changes in the body has helped researchers better understand how social factors impact our body and ultimately our health.

In her TedTalk, *How to Make Stress Your Friend*, Kelly

McGonigal discusses some of the finding above, and helps us all become more aware of how to mange stress in our daily lives.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=409>

### **TAKE A DEEP BREATH**

One simple, and often over looked strategy for managing stress, and specifically getting our own brain under control, is to simply focus on our breathing. Take a deep breath sends a message to your brain to calm and slow down.

Check out Stacey Schuerman's Ted Talk, Breath– five

minutes can change your life to practice how to use your breath to calm down and get your brain under control.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=409>

### **TAKE A BREAK**

If you find yourself overwhelmed, triggered, and actively in conflict. Don't be afraid to take a break. Taking a break, when you need one, is a great place to be assertive and create the boundaries that you need in your life. Sometimes you only need a break for 5 minutes to calm down, get your brain under control, and re-engage in the conflict in a more

productive way. Other times you may need to take a break for an hour, a day, or even a week.

When you need to take a break in the middle of a conversation or a conflict, don't forget to use productive framing and I-Statements to help the other person understand what you need. Examples:

“I know we are in the middle of this conversation but right now, I can't get my thoughts together. I need to take a break. I'm going to take a walk for 5-10 minutes and then I will come back.”

“I'm not the best version of myself right now, I feel really overwhelmed. I care about this conversation, and you, enough to know I need to get my thoughts together. I need a day or two to process all this new information. Can we set up a time to pick this conversation back up?”

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Together: The Science of Social Psychology – Social Neuroscience” by Tiffany A Ito and Jennifer T. Kubota is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



## Getting Their Brain Under Control



**“Deep listening,  
compassionate listening is**

**not listening with the purpose  
of analyzing or even  
uncovering what has  
happened in the past. You  
listen first of all in order to  
give the other person relief, a  
chance to speak out, to feel  
that someone finally  
understands him or her...  
During this time you have in  
mind only one idea, one  
desire: to listen in order to  
give the other person the  
chance to speak out and  
suffer less... First of all listen  
with compassion.” Thich Nhat  
Hanh**

**REMEMBER THAT ACTIVE LISTENING THING?  
DO THAT.**

What do you do when you recognize that someone is experiencing a defensive response, when you see redness in their cheeks or tension in their body language, or maybe they lash out or withdrawal? If you are like most of us, when

someone reacts defensively we *also* react defensively. It takes a lot of self-awareness and self-management to productively respond to someones defensive response. The most productive way to help someone's brain reengage fully during a defensive response is to listen to them. Below is a listening framework to help you consider how to help someone calm down and get their brain ready to start working on a solution to the conflict at hand.

Using your EARS to help someones brain reengage.

**Empathy** – Watch the Brene Brown RSA below. She does a wonderful job in helping us understand the difference between empathy and sympathy and the four elements of empathy. 1) Perspective Taking, taking the perspective of another, 2) Staying out of judgement, 3) Recognizing emotions in another, and 4) and communicating the emotion you recognize.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=411>

**Attention** – The easiest act of empathy is to pay attention to someone. You can not be empathetic with someone if you are distracted and not paying attention to them. Be present with them, and giving them the time and space to share their story or experience what they need to experience.

**Reflection** – Reflection is another act of empathy. It is the 4th element of empathy, communicating the feelings, thoughts, and experience that you recognize in the other person. A reflection is as simple as “I can

see that you are really excited” or “I’m not sure what that is like I’m just really glad you shared that with me.”

**Summary** – Summary is simply a longer version of reflection. It is to make sure that you fully understand someones story and experience. Reflection and Summary is the key to minimizing miscommunication and making sure that you truly understand someone else’s experience. Reflection and Summary also validates someones else’s experience, helps them feel heard, and starts the process of their brain reengaging.

## **SLOW DOWN THE PROCESS AND GIVEN THEM A BREAK**

Sometimes, you gotta go slow to go fast. When someone is having a defensive response, they are incapable of having a productive conversation to solve or manage a conflict. So rushing to solution mode when someone is defensive *does not work*. It takes time to deescalate and calm a defensive response. Don’t be afraid to **take a break** when someone else (or even yourself) is experiencing a defensive response. A break can take multiple forms:

- A 5 minute break
- A lunch break
- A day long break
- Even multiple days

## **REFRAME THE DEFENSIVE RESPONSE AS**

## **CARING ABOUT THE ISSUE**

A really interesting form of reflection and validation is reframing someones defensive response.

Reframe a defensive response as caring examples:

“I appreciate that you are obviously invested in the solution and our relationship, we only react strongly to something if you care.”

“I didn’t realize you cared this much about this issue. What can we do to find a path forward?”

## Using These Tools



**“The goal is not to be better than the other man, but your previous self.” The Dalai Lama**

## **CHAPTER 5 USING THE TOOLS**

### **USING THESE TOOLS FOR SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING**

This chapter allows us to really think about what is going on with in us when we experience conflict. These concepts allow us to reflect on and consider:

- what physiological indicators do you experience during conflict
- what psychological indicators do you experience during conflict
- what experiences trigger your brain to go into survival mode
- what strategies can you use to keep your brain under control in conflict

There is no one size fits all approach to keeping yourself calm in high stress, high conflict situations. The ideas presented in this chapter, making stress your friends, breathing, and taking



a break, barely touches the surface of the ways in which you can manage your brain. These ideas are just a starting place for you to find your own ways to manage your self physically and psychologically during conflict.

## USING THESE TOOLS FOR OTHER AWARENESS BUILDING

This chapter also allows us to consider what is going on for someone else when they experience conflict and how we can help someone manage themselves during high stress, high conflict situations.

The most important element of helping someones brain reengage is to Actively Listen to them and reflect back what you see them experiencing. Don't forget to use your EARS:

Empathy

Attention

Reflection

Summary

You can't start solving a problem when you, or the other persons brain is disengaged. Try your best to not rush to solve the problem, spending time up front actively listening and reflecting pays off in the end. You can also use Reframing as a powerful tool in leveraging someones defensive responses as a way to engage in productive problem solving.

Finding your own style in deescalating someones defensive responses takes time, intention, practice, and patience. Remember to extend respect and empathy during the

deescalation process, we are all human and sometimes we react to situations in less than productive ways.

## USING THESE TOOLS FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

One thing you can do to help build relationships with the ideas from this chapter, is to help slow down conversations around conflict and problem solving. When our brains are defensive, we are not capable of solving problems. We get stuck, sometimes on a short sighted or unrealistic solution.

Taking the time to really help your own, and the other persons, brain reengage shows that you care enough about the relationship to spend the time working towards a productive and lasting relationship and solution.

# Chapter 6 - Why don't people change? Delivering effective feedback for growth and change

## Learning Objectives

- Develop strategies for developing feedback messages that are easily heard by others
- Develop strategies for delivering productive feedback
- Develop self-management strategies for receiving feedback

**“Failure is merely feedback that there is something blocking the path of the emergence and expansive of the greatest version of yourself.” Mother Teresa**

Giving and receiving feedback are critical skills for productively managing conflict. Feedback promote personal and professional growth.



Taking the time to give someone feedback is an indication that you respect and care about the person, your relationship, and the overall success of both. In this chapter we will look at key elements of delivering and receiving feedback.

## Creating Messages that Get Heard



**“Effective feedback is not praise or criticism. It is carefully chosen language and actions that propel the learner forward.” Reggie Routman**

### CREATING LISTENABLE MESSAGES

A big part of giving productive feedback is to create constructive feedback messages that people can hear. Below are some tips for creating productive messages for feedback.

Some of the listening challenges we all face would be diminished if speakers created listenable messages. **Listenable messages** are messages that are tailored to be comprehended by the listener (Rubin, 1993). While most of our communication is in an “oral style,” meaning spoken and intended to be heard, we sometimes create messages that are unnecessarily complex in ways that impede comprehension. Listenable messages can be contrasted with most written messages, which are meant to be read.

The way we visually process written communication is different from the way we process orally delivered and aurally received language. Aside from processing written and spoken messages differently, we also speak and write differently. This

becomes a problem for listening when conventions of written language get transferred into oral messages. You may have witnessed or experienced this difficulty if you have ever tried or watched someone else try to orally deliver a message that was written to be read, not spoken. For example, when students in my classes try to deliver a direct quote from one of their research sources or speak verbatim a dictionary definition of a word, they inevitably have fluency hiccups in the form of unintended pauses or verbal trip-ups that interfere with their ability to deliver the content. These hiccups consequently make the message difficult for the audience to receive and comprehend. Remember back to the difference between speech and thought rate, the more hiccups you have delivering your message, the more likely it is that the person listening to you will get distracted.

The strategies for becoming an active listener discussed earlier in chapter 3 will also help you mentally repair or restructure a message to make it more listenable. As a speaker, in order to adapt your message to a listening audience and to help facilitate the listening process, you can use the following strategies to create more listenable messages:

- Use shorter, actively worded sentences.
- Use I-Statements instead of You-Statements (“I want to show you...”).
- Use lists or other organizational constructions like problem-solution, pro-con, or compare-contrast.
- Use transitions and other markers that help a

listener navigate your message (time markers like “today”; order indicators like “first, second, third”; previews like “I have two things I’d like to say about that”; and reviews like “So, basically I feel like we should vacation at the lake instead of the beach because...”).

- Use examples relevant to you and your listener’s actual experiences.

Below is a wonderful 5 minute video from The Way We Work TED series about The Secret to Giving Great Feedback. They provide a fantastic 4 part process that is brain centered for giving feedback in any difficult conversation.





A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=29>

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Communication in the Real World” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Giving Formal Feedback to Others



**“The key to effective  
feedback lies in our intention,**

**not our method. Your intentions must be about helping others, not just yourself.” *unknown***

### **THE ART OF GIVING FEEDBACK**

The ability to give effective feedback benefits oneself and others. Whether in professional or personal contexts, positive verbal and nonverbal feedback can boost others' confidence, and negative feedback, when delivered constructively, can provide important perception checking and lead to improvements. Of course, negative feedback that is not delivered competently can lead to communication difficulties that can affect a person's self-esteem and self-efficacy.

It is likely that you will be asked at some point to give feedback to another person in a personal, academic, professional, or civic context. As schools, companies, and organizations have moved toward more team-based environments over the past twenty years, peer evaluations are now commonly used to help assess performance. I, for example, am evaluated every year by my students, and my two faculty directors. I also evaluate my faculty and teaching assistants and peers yearly. Since it's important for us to know how to give competent and relevant feedback, and since the feedback can be useful for the self-improvement of the

receiver, many students are asked to complete peer evaluations verbally and/or in writing for classmates after they deliver a speech or work on a project together. The key to good feedback is to offer constructive criticism, which consists of comments that are specific and descriptive enough for the receiver to apply them for the purpose of self-improvement. The following are guidelines for giving feedback.

#### WHEN GIVING FEEDBACK TO OTHERS

1. **Be specific and descriptive.** I often see a lack of specific comments when it comes to feedback on speech delivery. Students write things like “Eye contact” on a peer comment sheet, but neither the student nor I know what to do with the comment. While a comment like “Good eye contact” or “Not enough eye contact” is more specific, it’s not descriptive enough to make it useful. What would be best is “Good consistent eye contact with the audience during your introduction. Eye contact with the audience diminished when you seemed less confident in what you were presenting in the last 3 slides of your powerpoint.”
2. **Be positive.** If you are delivering your feedback in writing, pretend that you are speaking directly to the person and write it the same way. Comments like “Stop fidgeting” or “Get more sources” wouldn’t likely come out during verbal feedback,

because we know they sound too harsh. The same tone, however, can be communicated through written feedback. Instead, make comments that are framed in such a way as to avoid defensiveness or hurt feelings.

3. **Be constructive.** Although we want to be positive in our feedback, comments like “Good job” aren’t constructive, because a communicator can’t actually take that comment and do something with it. A comment like “You were able to explain our company’s new marketing strategy in a way that even I, as an engineer, could make sense of. The part about our new crisis communication plan wasn’t as clear. Perhaps you could break it down the same way you did the marketing strategy to make it clearer for people like me who are outside the public relations department.” This statement is positively framed, specific, and constructive because the speaker can continue to build on the positively reviewed skill by applying it to another part of the speech that was identified as a place for improvement.
4. **Be realistic.** Comments like “Don’t be nervous” aren’t constructive or realistic. Instead, you could say, “I know the first speech is tough, but remember that we’re all in the same situation and we’re all here to learn. I tried the breathing exercises discussed in the book and they helped

calm my nerves. Maybe they'll work for you, too?" I've also had students make comments like "Your accent made it difficult for me to understand you," which could be true but may signal a need for more listening effort since we all technically have accents, and changing them, if possible at all, would take considerable time and effort.

5. **Be relevant.** Feedback should be relevant to the assignment, task, and/or context. I've had students give feedback like "Rad nail polish" and "Nice smile," which although meant as compliments are not relevant in formal feedback unless you're a fashion consultant or a dentist.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from "Communication in the Real World" is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Receiving Formal Feedback



**“We all need people who will give us feedback. That’s how we improve.” Bill Gates**

### THE ART OF RECEIVING FEEDBACK

I have never met someone that was born with a love of receiving feedback. I have however, met plenty of people

who have *learned* to love receiving feedback. Receiving feedback is a wonderful way to truly learn about yourself and grow into the person you want to be.

Joe Hrisch helps us all see The Joy of Getting Feedback in his Ted Talk below.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://boisestate.pressbooks.pub/makingconflictsuckless/?p=367>

Some guidelines for learning to love receiving feedback.

**Be Open and Accept Someone Else’s Perspective** – In order for someones feedback to help you grow and develop



personally and professionally you must be open to hearing and accepting what they have to say.

**Embrace the Discomfort** – Receiving feedback can be uncomfortable, accepting that, and embracing it allows you to get the most of out of the feedback someone gives you.

**Ask for More Information, Examples, and Clarifying Questions** – Don't hesitate to dig into the feedback. Ask questions to make sure that you understand the feedback, that you get really clear about how you can improve, and seek out examples of where you do great and where you have room for improvement.

**Remember – Feedback Doesn't Mean You Suck** – Everyone has something to improve upon. Having someone in your life willing to give you feedback and help you grow is a privilege. Embrace the feedback, don't take it personally or to heart as a reflection that you are terrible at your job or a terrible person. Feedback is simply an opportunity to grow and improve who you are.

For more on receiving feedback read the article [10 Tips on Receiving Critical Feedback](#).

#### GIVING FORMAL FEEDBACK TO YOURSELF

Don't forget, you can also give yourself feedback. Self-evaluation can be difficult, because people may think their performance was effective and therefore doesn't need critique, or they may become their own worst critic, which can negatively affect self-efficacy. The key to effective self-evaluation is to identify strengths and weaknesses, to evaluate

yourself within the context of the task, and to set concrete goals for future performance. What follows are guidelines that I give my students for self-evaluation of their speeches.

**Identify strengths and weaknesses.** We have a tendency to be our own worst critics, so steer away from nit-picking or over focusing on one aspect of your performance that really annoys you and sticks out to you. It is likely that the focus of your criticism wasn't nearly as noticeable or even noticed at all by others. For example, I once had a student write a self-critique of which about 90 percent focused on how his face looked red. Although that was really salient for him when he watched his video, I don't think it was a big deal for the audience members.

**Evaluate yourself within a context.** If you are asked to speak about your personal life in a creative way, don't spend the majority of your self-evaluation critiquing your use of gestures. People have a tendency to overanalyze certain aspects of their performance, which usually only accounts for a portion of their overall effectiveness or productiveness, and underanalyze other elements that have significant importance.

**Set goals for next time.** Goal setting is important because most of us need a concrete benchmark against which to evaluate our progress. Once goals are achieved, they can be "checked off" and added to our ongoing skill set, which can enhance confidence and lead to the achievement of more advanced goals.

**Revisit goals and assess progress at regular intervals.**

We will not always achieve the goals we set, so it is important to revisit the goals periodically to assess our progress. If you did not meet a goal, figure out why and create an action plan to try again. If you did achieve a goal, try to build on that confidence to meet future goals.

Material in this chapter has been adapted from “Communication in the Real World” is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

## Using These Tools



**“Change is your friend, not your foe. Change is a brilliant opportunity to grow.” Simon T. Bailey**

## **CHAPTER 6 USING THESE TOOLS**

### **USING THESE TOOLS FOR SELF-AWARENESS BUILDING**

Delivering and receiving feedback are key leadership skills. Feedback is how you manage conflict in leadership roles. There are two main ways to utilize the tools and frameworks presented in this chapter.

First, developing your ability to deliver feedback allows you to hone in on your ability to:

- frame feedback in a positive and productive way
- be concise and specific about how someone can improve and grow
- actively listen
- ask information gathering and clarifying questions
- be assertive and draw boundaries

The second way the tools and framework can help improve your self-awareness is by helping you consider how well you receive feedback from your friends, family, peers, and bosses. This chapter provides some mindsets that are critical for receiving feedback:

- embracing discomfort
- being open to someone else's perspective

As well as skill sets, such as:

- setting and revisiting goals
- asking questions to further understand the feedback
- identifying your strengths and weaknesses

Getting feedback also provides an interesting insight into what your triggers might be. If someone gives you feedback on how to improve your work, and an important value you have is *hard work*, it might be hard for you to hear their feedback as relevant and valuable. Your initial reaction will likely be defensive, and you will likely try to explain how hard of a worker you are and why your work is the best. Receiving feedback means that we listen, fully and actively, to the feedback we receive, even if it makes us defensive and uncomfortable. Feedback is where we learn and grow. Working on becoming more responsive and less reactive to feedback is an important skill to master.

#### USING THESE TOOLS FOR OTHER AWARENESS BUILDING

Delivering and receiving feedback also allows us to understand others in a deeper way.

First, if someone takes the time to give us feedback, we can learn what is important to them, what their expectations are, and how they are willing to interact with us and develop our relationships with them.

Second, when we deliver feedback to someones, we get to learn about them through their reaction and responses, we

get to ask questions and actively listen to their answers to learn more about them and their perspective.

## USING THESE TOOLS FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Feedback is one of the most interesting ways that you can building strong relationships (or ruin relationships if the feedback is given poorly). A relationships, personal or professional, that allows for two way constructive feedback is a relationship built on respectfully asserting boundaries, and allowing space for both peoples truths.





## Key Terms

**Accommodating** style of conflict management shows low importance of your goals and high importance of your relationship, is often viewed as passive or submissive, in that someone complies with or obliges another without providing personal input.

**Action-oriented listeners** prefer well-organized, precise, and accurate information.

**Agender** describes an individual who may have no gender or describe themselves as having a neutral gender.

**Amygdala Hijacking** where you can no longer access the prefrontal cortex, this is the part of the brain that regulates empathy, decision making, problem solving, and much more.

**Amygdala** is an important part in regulating emotions and behaviors and is typically talked about as the place where out “Fight, Flight, or Freeze” responses live.

**Autonomy** is our sense of control over events that impact our future.

**Avoiding** style of conflict management shows low

importance of your goals and your relationship, and no direct communication about the conflict takes place.

**Bigender** describes an individual who identifies as two genders.

**Certainty** is our sense of clarity to predict future outcomes.

**Cisgender** describes someone with a gender that matches their biological sex.

**Collaborating** style of conflict management that shows high importance of your goal and your relationship and usually indicates investment in the conflict and/or relationship.

**Competing** style of conflict management shows high importance for your goals and low importance for your relationship, in which one party attempts to win by gaining concessions or consent from another.

**Compromising** style of conflict management shows moderate important of your goals and your relationship and may indicate there is a low investment in the conflict and/or the relationship.

**Conflict** interactions in which there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints. occurs in interactions where there are real or perceived incompatible goals, scarce resources, or opposing viewpoints.

**Content-oriented listeners** are analytic and enjoy processing complex messages.

**Critical listening** is listening with the goal of analyzing or evaluating a message based on information presented verbally and information that can be inferred from context.

**Developmental intergroup theory** postulates that adults' heavy focus on gender leads children to pay attention to gender as a key source of information about themselves and others, to seek out any possible gender differences, and to form rigid stereotypes based on gender that are subsequently difficult to change.

**Discriminative listening** is a focused and usually instrumental type of listening that is primarily physiological and occurs mostly at the receiving stage of the listening process, this is where we distinguish between and focus on specific sounds.

**Empathetic listening** is the occurs when we try to understand or experience what a speaker is thinking or feeling.

**External attributions** connect the cause of behaviors to situational factors.

**Face Goals** the ability to uphold one's self-image in a social setting.

**Fairness** is our sense of non-biased and just treatment between people.

**False consensus error** is the tendency to overestimate how similar we are to other people.

**Framing** is the act of intentionally setting the stage for the conversation you want to have.

**Fundamental attribution error** refers to our tendency to explain others' behaviors using internal rather than external attributions.

**Gender binary** is viewing a person is either male or female

and assuming that a person's gender matches their biological sex.

**Gender identity** refers to their psychological sense of being male or female.

**Gender** refers to the cultural, social, and psychological meanings that are associated with masculinity and femininity.

**Gender roles** are the behaviors, attitudes, and personality traits that are designated as either masculine or feminine in a given culture.

**Gender stereotypes** are the beliefs and expectations people hold about the typical characteristics, preferences, and behaviors of men and women.

**Genderfluid** describes an individual who may identify as male, female, both, or neither at different times and in different circumstances.

**Genderqueer or gender nonbinary** are umbrella terms used to describe a wide range of individuals who do not identify with and/or conform to the gender binary.

**Halo effect** is when initial positive perceptions lead us to view later interactions as positive.

**Horn effect** is when initial negative perceptions lead us to view later interactions as negative.

**Inattentional blindness** the failure to notice a fully visible, but unexpected, object or event when attention is devoted to something else.

**Inattentional deafness** the auditory analog of inattentional blindness. People fail to notice an unexpected

sound or voice when attention is devoted to other aspects of a scene.

**Informational listening** is listening with the goal of comprehending and retaining information.

**Internal attributions** connect the cause of behaviors to personal aspects such as personality traits.

**Limbic system** scans the environment for threats or rewards.

**Listenable messages** are messages that are tailored to be comprehended by the listener.

**Nonverbal communication** is the process of conveying a message without the use of words.

**People-oriented listeners** are concerned about the needs and feelings of others and may get distracted from a specific task or the content of a message in order to address feelings.

**Process Goals** the ability to have events and processes unfold in a certain way (includes decision making and how/when communication happens).

**Reframing** happens when things get off track and you need to bring a conversation back on topic.

**Relatedness** is our sense of connection with others in our groups.

**Relationship Goals** are the ability to relation to the people around you in the way you want to.

**Schemata** are sets of information based on cognitive and experiential knowledge that guide our interaction.

**Selective distortion** is a tendency to adapt information

that conflicts with our earlier impressions in order to make it fit within the frame we have established.

**Selective perception** simply means that we pay selective attention to parts of the environment while ignoring other parts.

**Self-effacement bias (or modesty bias)** is the tendency to underestimate our performance and capabilities and to see events in a way that puts ourselves in a more negative light.

**Self-enhancement bias** is the tendency to overestimate our performance and capabilities and see ourselves in a more positive light than others see us.

**Self-fulfilling prophecies** are thought and action patterns in which a person's false belief triggers a behavior that makes the initial false belief actually or seemingly come true.

**Self-serving bias** refers to our tendency to have situations work out in our favor.

**Sex** refers to the biological category of male or female, as defined by physical differences in genetic composition and in reproductive anatomy and function.

**Sexual orientation** is the direction of their emotional and erotic attraction toward members of the opposite sex, the same sex, or both sexes.

**Social categorization** is the act of mentally classifying someone as belonging in a group.

**Status** is the sense of respect and importance we have in relation to others.

**Stereotypes** are generalizations based on a group characteristic.

**Substantive Goals** are the ability to secure tangible resources and/or something measurable/visible.

**Time-oriented listeners** are concerned with completing tasks and achieving goals.

**Transgender** describes someone with a gender that does not match their biological sex.

## Resource List

Al'Absi, M., Hugdahl, K., & Lovallo, W. (2002). Adrenocortical stress responses and altered working memory performance. *Psychophysiology*, 39(1), 95–99.

Armenta, B. E., & Hunt, J., S. (2009). Responding to Societal Devaluation: Effects of Perceived Personal and Group Discrimination on the Ethnic Group Identification and Personal Self-Esteem of Latino/Latina Adolescents. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 12, no. 1, 11–12.

Arnsten, A. F. T. (2009). Stress signaling pathways that impair prefrontal cortex structure and function. *Nature Neuroscience Reviews*, 10(6), 410–422.

Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., DeWall, N., & Zhang, L. (2007). How emotion shapes behavior: Feedback, anticipation, and reflection, rather than direct causation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 11(2), 167–203.

Beebe, S. [Steven], Beebe, S. [Susan], & Redmond, M.



(2002). *Interpersonal communication relating to others* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Bigler, R. S., & Liben, L. S. (2007). Developmental intergroup theory: Explaining and reducing children's social stereotyping and prejudice. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(3), 162–166. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8721.2007.00496.x

Black, P. (2002). Stress and the inflammatory response: A review of neurogenic inflammation. *Brain, Behavior, & Immunity*, 16, 622–653.

Bobot, L. (2010). Conflict Management in Buyer-Seller Relationships. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 27, no. 3, 296.

Bodie, G. D., & Villaume, W. A. (2003). Aspects of Receiving Information: The Relationships between Listening Preferences, Communication Apprehension, Receiver Apprehension, and Communicator Style. *International Journal of Listening* 17, no. 1, 48 – 50.

Bolton, R. (1986) *People Skills*. New York, NY: Touchstone.

Brewer, M. B., (1999). The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love or Outgroup Hate?" *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3, 429–44.

Brownell, J. (1993) *Listening Environment: A Perspective. Perspectives on Listening*. Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 245.

Bruneau, T. (1993). Empathy and Listening. *Perspectives on Listening*. Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 188.

Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, B. (2008). *Loneliness: Human*

*nature and the need for social connection*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Cai, D. A., & Fink, E. L. (2002). Conflict Style Differences between Individualists and Collectivists. *Communication Monographs* 69, no. 1, 67–87.

Canary, D. J., & Messman, S.J. (2000). Relationship Conflict. *Close Relationships: A Sourcebook*, eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 261–70.

Cannon, W. B. (1927). The James–Lange theory of emotions: A critical examination and an alternative theory. *American Journal of Psychology*, 39, 106–124.

Cacioppo, J. T., & Berntson, G. G. (1992). Social psychological contributions to the decade of the brain: Doctrine of multilevel analysis. *American Psychologist*, 47, 1019–1028.

Cherniss, C. (2000). Paper presented to annual meeting of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, New Orleans, LA, April 15, 2000. Accessed February 26, 2012, [http://www.eiconsortium.org/reports/what\\_is\\_emotional\\_intelligence.html](http://www.eiconsortium.org/reports/what_is_emotional_intelligence.html).

Cherry, E. C. (1953). Experiments on the recognition of speech with one and two ears. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 25, 975–979.

Conway, A. R. A., Cowan, N., & Bunting, M. F. (2001). The cocktail party phenomenon revisited: The importance of working memory capacity. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 8, 331–335.

Dalton, P., & Fraenkel, N. (2012). Gorillas we have missed:

Sustained inattentional deafness for dynamic events. *Cognition*, 124, 367–372.

Darwin, C. (1872). *The expression of emotion in man and animals*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

David, R. (2008). SCARF: a brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, no. 1, 1–9.

David, S. (2016). *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC.

Davidson, R. J., Pizzagalli, D., Nitschke, J. B., & Putnam, K. (2002). Depression: Perspectives from affective neuroscience. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 545–574.

Davis, M.H., Capobianco, S., & Kraus, L.A. (2010). Gender Differences in Responding to Conflict in the Workplace: Evidence from a Large Sample of Working Adults. *Sex Roles*, 63, 500–514

Dickerson, S. S., Mycek, P. J., & Zaldivar, F. (2008). Negative social evaluation, but not mere social presence, elicits cortisol responses to a laboratory stressor task. *Health Psychology*, 27(1), 116–121.

Dickerson, S. S., Gable, S. L., Irwin, M. R., Aziz, N., & Kemeny, M. E. (2009). Social-evaluative threat and proinflammatory cytokine regulation an experimental laboratory investigation. *Psychological Science*, 20, 1237–1244.

Dimberg, U., & Ohman, A. (1996). Behold the wrath:

Psychophysiological responses to facial stimuli. *Motivation & Emotion*, 20(2), 149–182.

Dindia, K., & Baxter, L. A. (1987). Strategies for Maintaining and Repairing Marital Relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 4, no. 2, 143–58.

DiSalvo, V.S., (1980). A Summary of Current Research Identifying Communication Skills in Various Organizational Contexts. *Communication Education* 29, 283–90.

Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., Miller, P. A., Fultz, J., Shell, R., Mathy, R. M., & Reno, R. R. (1989). Relation of sympathy and distress to prosocial behavior: A multimethod study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 55–66.

Eisenberger, N. I., Taylor, S. E., Gable, S. L., Hilmert, C. J., & Lieberman, M. D. (2007). Neural pathways link social support to attenuated neuroendocrine stress responses. *Neuroimage*, 35(4), 1601–1612

Elfenbein, H. A., & Ambady, N. (2002). On the universality and cultural specificity of emotion recognition: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(2), 205–235.

Else-Quest, N. M., Hyde, J. S., Goldsmith, H. H., & Van Hulle, C. A. (2006). Gender differences in temperament: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(1), 33–72. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.132.1.33

Esteves, F., Dimberg, U., & Ohman, A. (1994). Automatically elicited fear: Conditioned skin conductance responses to masked facial expressions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 8(5), 393–413.

Fields, J. M., & Schuman, H. (1976). Public beliefs about

the beliefs of the public. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 40 (4), 427–448.

Flores, A.R., Herman, J.L., Gates, G.J., & Brown, T.N.T. (2016). *How Many Adults Identify as Transgender in the United States?* Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute.

George, J. M., & Jones, G. R. (1996). The experience of work and turnover intentions: Interactive effects of value attainment, job satisfaction, and positive mood. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81, 318–325.

Goleman, D. (n.d.). Emotional intelligence. <http://danielgoleman.info/topics/emotional-intelligence/>.

Gottman, J. M., & Levenson, R. W. (1992). Marital processes predictive of later dissolution: Behavior, physiology, and health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(2), 221–223.

Gottman, J. M., Levenson, R. W., & Woodin, E. (2001). Facial expressions during marital conflict. *Journal of Family Communication*, 1, 37–57.

Guyll, M., Mason, S., Prieto, L., & Scherr, K. C. (2010). The Potential Roles of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies, Stigma Consciousness, and Stereotype Threat in Linking Latino/a Ethnicity and Educational Outcomes,” *Social Issues* 66, no. 1, 116 –117.

Hargie, O. (2011). *Skilled Interpersonal Interaction: Research, Theory, and Practice*. London: Routledge, 182–207, 281, 406–7, 430.

Higgins, E. T., & Bargh, J. A. (1987). Social cognition and social perception. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 38, 369–425.

Hyde, J. S. (2005). The gender similarities hypothesis. *American Psychologist*, 60(6), 581–592. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.60.6.581

Isenhardt, M. W., & Spangle, M. (2000). *Collaborative Approaches to Resolving Conflict*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 26.

Imhof, M. (2004). Who Are We as We Listen? Individual Listening Profiles in Varying Contexts. *International Journal of Listening* 18, no. 1, 39.

Ito, T. A., & Urland, G. R. (2003). Race and gender on the brain: Electrocortical measures of attention to race and gender of multiply categorizable individuals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 616–626.

Ito, T.A., & Urland, G.R. (2005). The influence of processing objectives on the perception of faces: An ERP study of race and gender perception. *Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 5, 21–36.

James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology*. New York, NY: Holt.

Johnson, K. L., & Roloff, M. E. (2000) Correlates of the Perceived Resolvability and Relational Consequences of Serial Arguing in Dating Relationships: Argumentative Features and the Use of Coping Strategies. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 17, no. 4–5, 677–78.

Judge, T. A., & Bretz, R. D. (1992). Effects of work values on job choice decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77, 261–271.

Katz, M. (2009). “Tossing Out the Diet and Embracing

the Fat,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/health/nutrition/16skin.html>.

Keirsey, D., & Bates, M. (1984). *Please Understand Me II: Character and Temperament Types*. Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, Carlsbad, CA.

Kellman, P. J., & Shipley, T. F. (1991). A theory of visual interpolation in object perception. *Cognitive Psychology*, 23, 141–221.

Keltner, D., Ellsworth, P. C., & Edwards, K. (1993). Beyond simple pessimism: Effects of sadness and anger on social perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 740–752.

Keltner, D. (2003). Expression and the course of life: Studies of emotion, personality, and psychopathology from a social-functional perspective. In P. Ekman, J. Campos, R. J. Davidson, & F.B.M. De Waal (Eds.), *Emotions inside out: 130 years after Darwin's "The expression of the emotions in man and animals"* (Vol. 1000, pp. 222–243). New York, NY: New York Academy of Sciences.

Lazarus, R. S., (1974). Psychological stress and coping in adaptation and illness. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 5, 321–333.

Leeper, C., & Smith, T. E. (2004). A meta-analytic review of gender variations in children's language use: Talkativeness, affiliative speech, and assertive speech. *Developmental Psychology*, 40 (6), 993–1027. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.40.6.993

Levenson, R. W. (1999). The intrapersonal functions of emotion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 13(5), 481–504.

Levin, D. T., & Angelone, B. L. (2008). The visual metacognition questionnaire: A measure of intuitions about vision. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 121, 451–472.

Lord, C. G., Ross, L., & Lepper, M. R. (1979) Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 2098–2109.

Lusk, E. J., & Oliver, B. L. (1974). Research notes. American manager's personal value systems-revisited. *Academy of Management Journal*, 17 (3), 549–554.

Luthans, Fred. (2002). The need for and meaning of positive organizational behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 23(6), 695–706.

Maccoby, E. E. (1998). *The two sexes: Growing up apart, coming together*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press.

Macdonald, J. S. P., & Lavie, N. (2011). Visual perceptual load induces inattentional deafness. *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics*, 73, 1780–1789.

Macintosh, G., & Stevens, C. (2008). Personality, Motives, and Conflict Strategies in Everyday Service Encounters. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 19, no. 2, 115.

Mack, A., & Rock, I. (1998). Inattentional blindness. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Markman, H. J., Renick, M. J., Floyd, F. J., Stanley, S. M., & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing Marital Distress through



Communication and Conflict Management Training: A 4- and 5-Year Follow-Up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61, no. 1, 70–77.

Marsh, A. A., Ambady, N., & Kleck, R. E. (2005). The effects of fear and anger facial expressions on approach- and avoidance-related behaviors. *Emotion*, 5(1), 119–124.

Matsumoto, D. (2001). Culture and emotion. In D. Matsumoto (Ed.), *The handbook of culture and psychology* (pp. 171–194). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Matsumoto, D., Hirayama, S., & LeRoux, J. A. (2006). Psychological skills related to adjustment. In P.T.P. Wong & L.C.J. Wong (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural perspectives on stress and coping* (pp. 387–405). New York, NY: Springer.

Matsumoto, D., & Wilson, J. (2008). Culture, emotion, and motivation. In R. M. Sorrentino & S. Yamaguchi (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation and cognition across cultures* (pp. 541–563). New York, NY: Elsevier.

Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D., & Salovey, P. (1999). Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for an intelligence. *Intelligence*, 27(4), 267–298.

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2000). *Handbook of intelligence*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 396–42.

McCorkle, S., & Reese, M. (2009). *Personal Conflict Management*. New York, NY: Pearsons, 51–58.

Mehrabian, A. (1972). *Nonverbal communication*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Atherton.

Mendes, W. B., Blascovich, J., Lickel, B., & Hunter, S.

(2002). Challenge and threat during social interactions with White and Black men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 939–952.

Milardo, R. M., & Helms-Erikson, H. (2000) Network Overlap and Third-Party Influence in Close Relationships. *Close Relationships: A Sourcebook*, eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 37.

Moray, N. (1959). Attention in dichotic listening: Affective cues and the influence of instructions. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 11, 56–60.

Most, S. B., Simons, D. J., Scholl, B. J., Jimenez, R., Clifford, E., & Chabris, C. F. (2001). How not to be seen: The contribution of similarity and selective ignoring to sustained inattentional blindness. *Psychological Science*, 12, 9–17.

Mouchetant-Rostaing, Y., & Giard, M. H. (2003). Electrophysiological correlates of age and gender perception on human faces. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 15, 900–910.

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2010). *Job Outlook 2011*, 25.

NAAFA: the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance. *About Us*. <http://www.naafaonline.com/dev2/about/index.html>.

Neisser, U., & Becklen, R., (1975). Selective looking: Attending to visually specified events. *Cognitive Psychology*, 7, 480–494.

Neisser, U. (1979). The control of information pickup in

selective looking. In A. D. Pick (Ed.), *Perception and its development: A tribute to Eleanor J. Gibson* (pp. 201–219). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Phelps, E. A., & LeDoux, J. E. (2005). Contributions of the amygdala to emotion processing: From animal models to human behavior. *Neuron*, 48, 175.

Plant, E. A., & Devine, P. G. (2003). The antecedents and implications of interracial anxiety. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 790–801.

Ravlin, E. C., & Meglino, B. M. (1987). Effect of values on perception and decision making: A study of alternative work values measures. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 72, 666–673.

Reese-Weber, M., & Bartle-Haring, S. (1998) Conflict Resolution Styles in Family Subsystems and Adolescent Romantic Relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 27, no. 6, 735–52.

Ridge, A. (1993). A Perspective of Listening Skills. *Perspectives on Listening*. Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 5–6.

Riskind, J. H., Moore, R., & Bowley, L. (1995). The looming of spiders: The fearful perceptual distortion of movement and menace. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 33, 171.

Roberts, B. W., Walton, K. E., & Viechtbauer, W. (2006). Patterns of mean-level change in personality traits across the life course: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132, 1–25.

Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press.

Ross, L., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The “false consensus effect”: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 13, 279–301.

Rubin, D. L. (1993). Listenability = Oral-based Discourse + Considerateness. *Perspectives on Listening*. Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 269.

Seiler, W., & Beall, M. (2000). *Communication: Making connections* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Selye, H. (1950). *The physiology and pathology of exposure to stress*. Montreal: Acta Inc.

Sillars, A. L. (1980). Attributions and Communication in Roommate Conflicts. *Communication Monographs* 47, no. 3, 180–200.

Simons, D. J., & Chabris, C. F. (1999). Gorillas in our midst: Sustained inattention blindness for dynamic events. *Perception*, 28, 1059–1074.

Simons, D. J., & Chabris, C. F. (2010). The invisible gorilla, and other ways our intuitions deceive us. New York, NY: Crown.

Snyder, M., Tanke, E. D., & Berscheid, E. (1977). Social perception and interpersonal behavior: On the self-fulfilling nature of social stereotypes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 656–666.

Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1985). Intergroup anxiety. *Journal of Social Issues*, 41(3), 157–175.

Stinson, D. A., Logel, C., Shepard, S., & Zanna, M., P. (2011). Rewriting the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Social Rejection: Self-Affirmation Improves Relational Security and Social Behavior up to 2 Months Later. *Psychological Science* 20, no. 10, 2.

Toppo, G. (2011). "Colleges Start Offering 'Midnight Classes' for Offbeat Needs," *USA Today*, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2011-10-26/college-midnight-classes/50937996/1>.

Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (2008). The evolutionary psychology of the emotions and their relationship to internal regulatory variables. In M. Lewis, J. M. Haviland-Jones, & L. Feldman Barrett (Eds.), *Handbook of Emotions* (3rd ed., pp. 114–137). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Treisman, A. (1960). Contextual cues in selective listening. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 12, 242–248.

Tzuriel, D., & Egozi, G. (2010). Gender differences in spatial ability of young children: The effects of training and processing strategies. *Child Development*, 81(5), 1417–1430. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01482.x

Wang, Q., & Ross, M. (2007). Culture and memory. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp. 645–667). New York, NY: Guilford.

Watson, K. W., Barker, L. L., & Weaver III, J. B. (1995). The Listening Styles Profile (LS-16): Development and Validation of an Instrument to Assess Four Listening Styles. *International Journal of Listening* 9, 1–13.

Wayand, J. F., Levin, D. T., & Varakin, D. A. (2005).

Inattentional blindness for a noxious multimodal stimulus. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 118, 339–352.

Whalen, P. J., & Phelps, E. A. (2009). *The human amygdala*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Willax, P. (1999). Treat customers as if they are right. *Business First*. <http://www.bizjournals.com/louisville/stories/1999/12/13/smallb2.html?page=all>.

Winkielman, P., Berridge, K. C., & Wilbarger, J. L. (2005). Unconscious affective reactions to masked happy versus angry faces influence consumption behavior and judgments of value. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31(1), 121–135.

Wolvin, A. D., & Coakley, C. G. (1993). A Listening Taxonomy. *Perspectives on Listening*. Norwood, NJ: Alex Publishing Corporation, 18–19.

Wood, W., & Eagly, A. H. (2002). A cross-cultural analysis of the behavior of women and men: Implications for the origins of sex differences. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(5), 699–727. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.128.5.699

Worthington, D. L. (2003) Exploring the Relationship between Listening Style Preference and Personality. *International Journal of Listening* 17, no. 1, 82.

Zabava, W. S., & Wolvin, A. D., (1993). The Differential Impact of a Basic Communication Course on Perceived Communication Competencies in Class, Work, and Social Contexts. *Communication Education*, 215–17.

