

Communication Is Constant

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how we are all constantly sending messages to be interpreted by others, whether we realize it or not. The particular areas of focus include:

1. How We Send Messages
2. Unintentional Communication

1. How We Send Messages

There are a variety of ways we can send messages, such as through:

- Words (spoken or written)
- Gestures
- Emails
- Tweets
- Blogs
- Texts

All of these methods are either verbal, in a spoken or written form, or nonverbal.

The way that we choose to send a message is referred to as a **code**, or a set of **symbols** with consistent meanings used to hold and convey information. These symbols are representations of a concept in a tangible form.

IN CONTEXT

For example, if you speak English, you use the letters of the alphabet as your symbols. You put those letters together to form words, and then you put the words together to form a code.

If someone who doesn't speak English wants to understand the code, they would be trying to figure out what the letters in the words mean.



TERMS TO KNOW

Code

A set of symbols with consistent meanings used to hold and convey information.

Symbol

A representation of a concept in a tangible or otherwise perceivable form.

2. Unintentional Communication

Because there are a variety of verbal and nonverbal codes that we can use to communicate, it's very easy to send an unintentional message.

Unintentional communication is the interpretation of symbols observed by a receiver, but not intentionally transmitted by the sender. In other words, you can send some sort of symbol or code without even realizing that you're doing it. Someone who observes this code will get a message.

If this message is correctly understood, there may not be a misunderstanding, but oftentimes there can be.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Someone is sitting in a cafe and texting. Depending on the context, the interpretation of what that means may or may not lead to a misunderstanding. If whoever's texting is sitting in a cafe with her peers who are also texting while having a conversation, it's understood that no one is being rude or ignored. Everybody is listening and texting simultaneously.

That same person goes to a business meeting and listens to the speaker while also texting. There could be unintentional communication in this context because what the people in the meeting see, or certainly what the person speaking sees, is someone not paying attention. Maybe that's not what this person intended; maybe she is just busy and trying to keep up.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Facial expressions are another way this can happen. In the same meeting, someone else is sitting there with a scowl on his face while you're speaking.

Later, you bring it up with someone who knows that person well. This person says, "No, that's just what he looks like when he's concentrating. He gets a scowl, but it means he's listening very carefully to what you're saying." This individual was sending a message without realizing it; maybe he didn't even know he was frowning. He was concentrating, but you thought he was scowling at you.

Yawning could be the same thing. You yawn because you're tired, but someone interprets it as you being bored. These types of little things that we don't think about can often send unintentional messages to others.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Appearance is another way that we send these messages. You show up dressed incorrectly for a particular setting. You're coming very casual, and you were supposed to be more business professional. Or, you go to a party, and you think, "I'm supposed to dress up here, but everybody's casual."

People look at the way we dress, and they make assumptions about us. Some of the assumptions might have to do with status in terms of whether we're wearing certain brands. For some people, that's important, and you'll be communicating something about your status by the brand of clothing or the fashion that you're wearing.

➦ **EXAMPLE** The way we speak also may or may not be communicating something unconsciously. You may be around somebody who is speaking very loudly and gesticulating. You are put off by this, thinking this person is upset. This is just the way this person communicates, but you are used to people communicating in a more constrained fashion with lowered voices.

So when someone raises his or her voice and uses a lot of gestures, you feel like there must be something wrong. There's just a difference in what that means to you.



BIG IDEA

If both people understand what certain gestures are communicating, then there likely won't be a conflict. However, negative unintentional communication can occur when one person does something that another person interprets incorrectly. This is why confirming the intentions of others can be important in avoiding conflict.



TERM TO KNOW

Unintentional Communication

The interpretation of symbols observed by a receiver but not intentionally transmitted by the sender.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned **how we send messages** to one another constantly through both verbal and nonverbal mediums. You now understand that **unintentional communication** occurs when a sender transmits a message to a receiver without realizing it. If this message is misunderstood by the receiver, conflict can arise between the parties. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



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