

The Communication Process 101

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the general process behind communication by focusing on:

1. Elements of Communication
 - a. Codes, Symbols, and Messages
 - b. Senders and Receivers
2. Impact of Communication on Conflict
 - a. Filters
 - b. Confirmation Messages

1. Elements of Communication

As human beings, we spend our days communicating with each other:

- Talking to family, friends, and coworkers
- Sending and receiving emails
- Leaving and receiving voicemails

We need to communicate in order to get things done and to have relationships.

1a. Codes, Symbols, and Messages

Communication can be defined as the process of moving **information** from person to person using symbolic codes. These **codes** are simply sets of symbolic symbols with consistent meanings used to hold and convey information.



HINT

You've likely heard of codes being used in the context of secrecy, such as codes used in World War II to ensure that any secret messages that were intercepted by the enemy wouldn't be understandable. But here we are talking about code as simply meaning the symbols that transmit meaning. Instead of imagining a spy with a secret code book, you can imagine a telegraph operator, translating the dots and dashes of Morse Code into a message wishing someone a happy birthday.

Whether it's keystrokes, the pictures in a cave, or letters in an alphabet that make up words, communication involves trying to decode **symbols**, which are representations of a concept in a tangible form.

When you put these symbols together, they form words or pictures. This creates information, or a sequence of symbols that can be interpreted as a **message**, or a “packet” of information that has been encoded.

We all know about information and messages. We live in a world of information overload, and messages come to us through a variety of sources:

- Emails
- Tweets
- Blogs
- In-person conversations
- Phone calls
- Voicemails



TERMS TO KNOW

Communication

The process of moving information from person to person using symbolic codes.

Information

A sequence of symbols that can be interpreted as a message.

Code

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

Symbol

A representation of a concept in a tangible form.

Message

A "packet" of information which from sender to receiver.

1b. Senders and Receivers

When these symbols are put into codes, they are moved from the sender to the receiver.

In the context of communication, a **sender** is the person moving information from him or herself or another; a **receiver** is person who gets the information from the sender.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** Two people who are trying to communicate with one another; we'll call them Jack and Tony. Jack is our sender, as he has a message that he wants to send to Tony, our receiver.

Jack has to decide how he wants to send his message, and what kind of code—spoken or written—he's going to use. Jack might decide to email, tweet, blog, call, or maybe just talk to Tony in person if they're in the same room. Depending on what Jack does, Tony is going to either read or hear what Jack says.

While we've all probably thought at some point that it would be convenient if we could just take what's in our heads and move it over into someone else's head as raw information, we know that this doesn't work.

Jack can't just move this information into Tony's head, but let's say Jack and Tony both speak English. This may seem like it makes the transmission very simple because we tend to imagine communication like throwing a ball when the ball is the message. Jack has the ball, and he's going to throw it to Tony. Tony throws it back to Jack.

**Sender**

In communication, the person moving information from him or herself to another.

Receiver

In communication, the person receiving information from another.

2. Impact of Communication on Conflict

While communication may seem as simple as throwing a ball back and forth, it's a little more like throwing Jello. If someone throws you Jello, you can try catch it, but you probably don't get all of it because there are blobs of it that fall apart.

1a. Filters

This deterioration occurs because of **filters**, or factors that can prevent a message from being received, or cause the message to be received or interpreted in a way other than the one meant by the sender.

There are two types of filters that can interfere with communication:

- External filters
- Internal filters

↪ **EXAMPLE** *External Filters.* Let's say Jack wants to send his message to Tony by calling. But when he calls, there's static, and Tony can't get the message. Or maybe they're in a restaurant together, but it's very noisy because there's a band playing. Tony can't hear what Jack is trying to say. If Tony is multitasking by checking his email while he's also trying to talk to Jack, he may not get all of what Jack is trying to tell him. These are all examples of external filters.

↪ **EXAMPLE** *Internal filters.* Tony's a little annoyed with Jack because Jack says something that kind of upsets Tony. So now Tony's not even paying attention to the message; he's just focusing on the statement that Jack made that he found upsetting.

Or maybe Jack says to Tony, "Get this to me ASAP." And Tony thinks, "ASAP, as soon as possible. Okay, I'll get it him in the middle of the week after I finish my other project." But what Jack actually meant by ASAP was right now. If Jack is Tony's boss, and Tony doesn't get the information to him right away because he misinterpreted Jack's message, you can see how that would lead to a conflict.

**Filter**

A factor that can prevent a message from being received or cause it to be received or interpreted in a way other than the one meant by the sender.

1b. Confirmation Messages

While filters can cause a communication-related conflict, there is a way to solve this confusion. Before there can be what we would call a communication event, the sender needs a **confirmation message**.

A confirmation message is a message sent by the receiver to the sender indicating that a message has been

received, and indicating how the message has been interpreted.

 **EXAMPLE** Tony can get back to Jack and say, “Let me clarify what you mean by ASAP. Is it okay if I get it to you next week?” Then Jack would have the opportunity to say, “No, that’s not what I meant.”

This a way of clarifying the message, and while it may sometimes be unnecessary to do this, it’s an important part of communication when there are multiple ways a message can be interpreted.



BIG IDEA

Communication is critical to relationships, and it's vital to communicate clearly to avoid conflict. Sometimes the communication process is not quite as smooth as we think it should be because of the external and internal filters, so a confirmation message can be helpful for clarification.



TERM TO KNOW

Confirmation Message

A message sent by receiver to sender indicating that a message has been received and indicating how the message has been interpreted.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that the **elements of communication** are codes containing symbols, which form information that is transmitted as a message from a sender to a receiver. You now understand the **impact of communication on conflict** external and internal filters can affect how a message is received, but a confirmation message from the receiver can provide an opportunity for clarification. Communicating more clearly with others can help us resolve or even prevent conflict. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

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

Communication

The process of moving information from person to person using symbolic codes.

Confirmation Message

A message sent by receiver to sender indicating that a message has been received and indicating how the message has been interpreted.

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A factor that can prevent a message from being received or cause it to be received or interpreted in a way other than the one meant by the sender.

Information

A sequence of symbols that can be interpreted as a message.

Message

A "packet" of information which has been encoded and is moved from sender to receiver.

Receiver

In communication, the person receiving information from another.

Sender

In communication, the person moving information from him or herself to another.

Symbol

A representation of a concept in a tangible form.