
PREFACE FOR INSTRUCTORS

Instructors who are familiar with *A First Look at Communication Theory* and understand the approach, organization, and features of the book may want to jump ahead to the “Major Changes in the Seventh Edition” section. For those who are new to the text, reading the entire preface will give you a good grasp of what you and your students can expect.

A Balanced Approach to Theory Selection. *A First Look* is written for students who have no background in communication theory. It’s designed for undergraduates enrolled in an entry-level course, whatever the students’ classification. The trend in the field is to offer students a broad introduction to theory relatively early in their program. *A First Look* is written for those beginning students. Yet if a department chooses to offer its first theory course on the junior or senior level, the class will still be the students’ first comprehensive look at theory, so the book will meet them where they are.

The aim of this text is to present 32 specific theories in a way that makes them both interesting and understandable. By the time readers complete the book they should have a working knowledge of theories that explain a wide range of communication phenomena. My ultimate goal is to help students see the relationship between different theoretical positions. The final chapter offers an integrative synthesis. But before students can integrate the leading theoretical ideas in our field, they need to have a clear understanding of what those theories are. The bulk of the book provides that raw material.

With the help of journal and yearbook editors, and the feedback of hundreds of communication theory professors, I’ve selected a wide range of theories that reflect the diversity within the discipline. Some theories are proven candidates for a Communication Theory Hall of Fame. For example, Aristotle’s analysis of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals continues to set the agenda for many public-speaking courses. Mead’s symbolic interactionism is formative for interpretive theorists who are dealing with language, thought, self-concept, or the effect of society upon the individual. The axioms of Watzlawick’s interactional view continue to be debated by interpersonal scholars. And no student of mediated communication should be ignorant of Gerbner’s cultivation theory, which explains why heavy television viewing cultivates fear of a mean and scary world.

It would be shortsighted, however, to limit the selection to the classics of communication. Some of the discipline’s most creative approaches are its newest. For example, Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery’s theory of relational dialectics

offers insight into the ongoing tensions inherent in personal relationships. Joe Walther's social information processing is one of the few fully developed and well-researched theories of computer-mediated communication. And Gerry Philipsen's speech codes theory upgrades the ethnography of communication from a methodology to a theory that can be used to explain, predict, and control discourse about discourse.

Organizational Plan of the Book. Each chapter introduces a single theory in 10–15 pages. I've found that most undergraduates think in terms of discrete packets of information, so the concentrated coverage gives them a chance to focus their thoughts while reading a single chapter. In this way, students can gain an in-depth understanding of important theories rather than acquire only a vague familiarity with a jumble of related ideas. The one-chapter–one-theory arrangement also gives teachers the opportunity to drop theories or rearrange the order of presentation without tearing apart the fabric of the text.

The opening chapter, "Launching Your Study of Communication Theory," provides working definitions of both *theory* and *communication*, and also prepares students for the arrangement of the chapters and the features within them. Chapter 2, "Talk About Theory," lays the groundwork for understanding the differences between objective and interpretive theory. Chapter 3, "Weighing the Words," presents two sets of criteria for determining a good objective or interpretive theory. I apply these standards to Bormann's symbolic convergence theory because he has dual scientific and rhetorical agendas. Based on the overall conception of Robert Craig at the University of Colorado, Chapter 4, "Mapping the Territory," introduces seven traditions within the field of communication theory.

Following this integrative framework, I present the 31 other theories in 31 self-contained chapters. Each theory is discussed within the context of a communication topic: interpersonal messages, relationship development, relationship maintenance, influence, group decision making, organizational communication, public rhetoric, media and culture, media effects, intercultural communication, and gender and communication. These communication context sections usually contain two or three theories. Each section has a brief introduction that outlines the crucial issues that the theorists address and places the subsequent chapters within that context. The placement of theories in familiar categories helps students recognize that theories are answers to questions they've been asking all along. The final chapter, "Common Threads in Comm Theories," offers a new form of integration that will help students discern order in the tapestry of communication theory that might otherwise seem chaotic.

Because all theory and practice has value implications, I briefly explore a dozen ethical principles throughout the book. Consistent with the focus of this text, each principle is the central tenet of a specific ethical theory. Other disciplines may ignore these thorny issues, but to discuss communication as a process that is untouched by questions of good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice, would be to disregard an ongoing concern in our field.

Features of Each Chapter. Most people think in pictures. Students will have a rough time understanding a theory unless they apply its explanations and interpretations to concrete situations. The typical chapter uses an extended example to illustrate the "truth" a theory proposes. I encourage readers to try out ideas by visualizing a first meeting of freshman roommates, responding to conflict in a dysfunctional family, trying to persuade other students to support a zero tolerance policy on driving after drinking, and many more. I also use the films *Bend It Like*

Beckham, Thank You for Smoking, Erin Brockovich, When Harry Met Sally, You've Got Mail, Blade Runner, and Toni Morrisons book Beloved, as well as speeches of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to illustrate principles of the theories. The case study in each chapter follows the pedagogical principle of explaining what students don't yet know in terms of ideas and images already within their experience.

Some theories are tightly linked with an extensive research project. For example, the impact of cognitive dissonance theory was greatly spurred by Festinger's surprising finding in his now classic \$1/\$20 experiment. Philippsen's speech codes theory began with a three-year ethnographic study of what it means to speak like a man in Teamsterville. And Delia's constructivist research continues to be dependent on Crockett's Role Category Questionnaire. When such exemplars exist, I describe the research in detail so that students can learn from and appreciate the benefits of grounding theory in systematic observation. Thus, readers of *A First Look* are led through a variety of research designs and data analyses.

Students will encounter the names of Baxter, Berger, Burgoon, Burke, Deetz, Fisher, Giles, Kramarae, Pacanowsky, Pearce, Philippsen, Ting-Toomey, Walther, Wood, and many others in later communication courses. I therefore make a concerted effort to link theory and theorist. By pairing a particular theory with its originator, I try to promote both recall and respect for a given scholar's effort.

The text of each chapter concludes with a section that critiques the theory. This represents a hard look at the ideas presented in light of the criteria for a good theory outlined in Chapter 3. I usually provide a brief summary of the theory's strengths and then turn to the weaknesses, unanswered questions, and possible errors that still remain. I try to stimulate a "That makes sense, and yet I wonder . . ." response among students.

I include a short list of thought questions at the end of each chapter. Labeled "Questions to Sharpen Your Focus," these probes encourage students to make connections among ideas in the chapter and also to apply the theory to their everyday communication experience. As part of this feature, the words printed in italics remind students of the key terms of a given theory.

The end of every chapter also has a short list of annotated readings entitled "A Second Look." The heading refers to resources for students who are interested in a theory and want to go further than a 10- to 15-page introduction will allow. The top item is the resource I recommend as the starting point for further study. The other listings identify places to look for material about each of the major issues raised in the chapter. The format is designed to offer practical encouragement and guidance for further study without overwhelming the novice with multiple citations. The sources of quotations and citations of evidence are listed in an "End-notes" section at the end of the book.

I believe professors and students alike will get a good chuckle out of the cartoons I've selected, but their main function is to illustrate significant points in the text. As in other editions, I'm committed to using "Calvin and Hobbes," "The Far Side," "Dilbert," "Cathy," "Zits," and quality art from the pages of *The New Yorker* and *Punch* magazines. Perceptive cartoonists are modern-day prophets—their humor serves the education process well when it slips through mental barriers or attitudinal defenses that didactic prose can't penetrate.

In 13 of the chapters, you'll see photographs of the theorists who appear in the video "Conversations with Communication Theorists." The text that accompanies each picture previews a few intriguing comments that the theorist makes so that students will watch the interview with a specific purpose in mind.

While no author considers his or her style ponderous or dull, I believe I've presented the theories in a clear and lively fashion. Accuracy alone does not communicate. I've tried to remain faithful to the vocabulary each theorist uses so that the student can consider the theory in the author's own terms, but I also translate technical language into more familiar words. Students and reviewers cite readability and interest as particular strengths of the text. I encourage you to sample a chapter dealing with a theory you regard as difficult so that you can decide for yourself.

If you are new to the book, there's one other feature you should know about. The Web site www.afirstlook.com offers a number of instructional aids that equip teachers to make studying theory exciting for students. These include information on movie clips to illustrate specific theories, student application log entries that show Kurt Lewin was right when he said that there's nothing as practical as a good theory, and a comparison of all major comm theory texts to see what theories are covered in each book. Many of you will be grateful for the theory archive, which contains 20 complete chapters from previous editions. This way you can assign one of your favorites if it isn't in the current edition. But by far the most popular resource on the site is the world-class instructor's manual prepared by Emily Langan and Glen McClish, which accounts for the vast majority of the 40,000 log-ins per month. Many of the visitors are students whose instructors have encouraged them to tap into the resources that they first discovered—all openly accessible except for exam questions.

Major Changes in the Seventh Edition. The expanded trim size of the book is the most obvious difference from previous editions. The change was made to provide room for key definitions in the margins—a request from students—while making sure that the breadth and depth of coverage for each theory is just as thorough—an instructor concern. Expanding the size of the margins became the win-win solution.

I've added two new theories in this edition. Howard Giles' *communication accommodation theory*, a well-established theory of intercultural and intergroup communication, is now the lead chapter in the intercultural communication section. And a greatly revised chapter on *media ecology* reintroduces the thoughts of Marshall McLuhan. Previously billed as *technological determinism*—a label McLuhan's detractors use—the new title reflects a distinct change in focus. Although a longer version has been online the past 3 years, few students have read it. In response to the request of many instructors, I'm pleased to bring a more user-friendly description of McLuhan's ideas to the media and culture section of the book.

As important as these two additions are, I regard the most significant change in this edition to be the expansion of theoretical integration. I've added two new "book-end" chapters that deal with metatheoretical issues. At the front end I walk students through the issues of what a theory is, and how to get their minds around the concept of communication. Since the text truly offers a first look at theories used within the communication discipline, I think it's no longer fair to assume that students enter the class knowing what a *theory* is or does. Nor do I think it's likely that they've thought much about the thorny issue of what *communication* is or isn't. The first chapter, "Launching Your Study of Communication Theory," starts that process.

In the new final chapter, I take a quite different approach to identifying similarities and differences among the theories by identifying 10 principles of communication that run through multiple theories. These principles cut across communication context, the objective-interpretive distinction, and traditions of communication theory—the ways that students have been classifying theories throughout the book. I refer to these principles as *threads*, because each strand

connects theories that might otherwise seem unrelated. Hopefully my review of these common threads will help students to better understand the whole matrix of ideas they've studied during the course, and will also serve as a comprehensive review before the final exam. Glance at Figure 36-1 on page 484 to get a preview of this integrative project.

Chapters 2 and 3, "Talk About Theory" and "Weighing the Words," continue to lay out the distinction between objective and interpretive theories and how to evaluate them, but with new examples. In this edition, Glenn Sparks and Marty Medhurst analyze a humorous commercial featuring football star Peyton Manning as a diehard fan. At the end of Chapter 2, I not only describe an objective-interpretive scale, but also display the chart that classifies the location of every theory in the book on that continuum instead of waiting until the end of the book. Each theory chapter displays the appropriate slice of that chart on the opening page to flag students to its metatheoretical location. I continue to use Bormann's symbolic convergence theory to illustrate how to use scientific or interpretive criteria to evaluate a theory. But I've also added an extensive example of fantasy themes and fantasy chains that a communication professor recorded among the regular patrons at a cigar store as they resist antismoking pressure coming from others outside the group. I believe the ethnographic study makes symbolic convergence theory come alive for readers.

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achieved the impossible by making the extensive permissions process enjoyable; Robyn Tellefsen was my student research assistant for the fourth edition of the book, and enthusiastically agreed to proofread the entire text when I needed someone familiar with the content and I needed to work in sync with someone I trusted implicitly. Other authors are envious when they hear of my good fortune to work with these nine people.

Three other individuals have contributed in ways that are above and beyond what any author could expect. Emily Langan, my colleague and former student at Wheaton, and Glen McClish at San Diego State University have written an instructor's manual that is recognized as the gold standard by others in our field. Instructors tell me that they walk into class with confidence after reading Glen and Emily's insights regarding a theory and of best practices on how to help students to grasp and appreciate it. Their ideas are also woven into what I've written in the book. My research assistant for this edition has been Kevin Sheehan, a communication honors student and computer whiz who started on the project in his senior year at Wheaton and then committed to working in the area for a year after graduation so he could help me. His work has included the Herculean task of constructing the index for the book in just a few weeks while the publishing deadline loomed. Kevin's expertise, dedication, suggestions, and cheerful helpfulness are greatly appreciated.

Finally, I gratefully recognize the continued encouragement, understanding, and loving support of my wife, Jean—not just on this project, but throughout 48 years of marriage. Her love, sense of humor, and parallel passion to create art and play glorious music have made it possible for me to throw myself into this project.

Em Griffin