

1. Explain what the functional perspective on communication means. What does this perspective say about the reasons why we communicate?
2. List and describe the six characteristics of communication.
3. What are the essential features of competent communication? In what ways are process and outcome related, and in what ways are they distinctly different from one another? How about appropriateness and effectiveness?
4. Describe how a person's cultural identity influences his or her communication behavior.
5. Consider a time when you and a communication partner failed to communicate competently. Describe what happened in the situation and what went wrong in both your and your partner's communication. Based on what you have learned so far about competent communication, what could you and the other person do to communicate more competently if you could go back in time and redo the interaction?
6. Using classroom interaction as the source for your examples, illustrate the characteristics of communication as being symbolic, requiring a shared code, being linked to culture, being both intentional and unintentional, occurring through various channels, and being transactional. Explain how understanding these characteristics can help a teacher communicate more competently with his or her students.
7. Compare and contrast the essential features of the three models of communication discussed in your textbook: the linear model, the interaction model, and the competent communication model.
8. Describe a recent conflict you had with your roommate, a close friend, a family member, or your significant other. Apply the model of competent communication to this interaction to illustrate the elements of the model. How does considering the interaction through the lens of this model help you understand the interaction differently than you might have before engaging in this analysis?

Answer Key

1. Ideal answers will acknowledge that the desire and the need to communicate are innate and that we begin communicating the moment we are born. Communication is essential to beginning, maintaining, and ending our relationships. It is through these interdependent communication relationships that we get the things we need. We communicate to express affiliation, manage relationships, and influence others.
2. Ideal answers will describe the following characteristics:
 - Communication is symbolic—The verbal and nonverbal symbols we use are arbitrarily constructed.
 - Communication requires a shared code—Communicators both encode and decode symbolic messages.
 - Communication is linked to culture—The shared values, beliefs, and norms of a group of people influence the way they interact and their expectations of others. Our communication is also influenced by our membership in co-cultural groups, and we use communication to identify ourselves as members of these co-cultural groups, as well as to delineate who is not a member of the group.
 - Communication can be unintentional—Some of our communication is planned and intentional and some of it is spontaneous and unintentional. Our unintentional messages are often more believable to others.
 - Communication occurs through various channels—We have a variety of channels available to us, but competent communication requires us to consider what channel or channels will work best for us to communicate our messages.
 - Communication is transactional—We are simultaneously sending and receiving messages, our messages influence the messages of others and vice versa, and our messages cannot be reversed.
3. Ideal answers to this question will reflect an understanding that competent communicators are able to adapt their communication to particular situations so that they behave both appropriately and effectively. Competent communicators are aware of ethics and the way their messages affect others. Competent communication is process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented. Competent communicators continually evaluate and assess their own communication processes to ensure they are appropriate, effective, and ethical. Strong answers will identify that although the process leads to the outcome, a focus on outcome rather than process may lead to unethical behavior. Similarly, appropriate behavior is determined by the situation, and behaving appropriately increases communication effectiveness. Although a person may be effective at getting what he or she wants in the short term (outcome), if the means used (process) is not appropriate, he or she may ultimately undermine relationships, long-term competence, and satisfaction.
4. Culture provides the backdrop to the situational context in which we communicate. Culture provides us with values, norms, and rules to guide our cognitions as well as our behavior. Culture helps provide us with expectations about how others will behave, as well as guidelines for what others expect of us. Culture, co-culture, and our cultural identity shape the choices we make, as well as how we interpret the choices of others. Ultimately, we cannot separate ourselves from our culture, but an awareness of the way culture influences us can help us adapt and communicate more competently.

5. Answers to this question will vary, as the student is required to reflect on his or her personal experiences and personal knowledge and theories about communication. Ideal answers will demonstrate self-reflexive ability and critical thinking abilities. At this point, most students will not have an especially strong sense of how to improve their communication competence, but they should demonstrate an awareness of concepts such as appropriateness, effectiveness, the difference between process and outcome, and ethics. They may be able to demonstrate how lack of agreement about the meaning of symbols contributed to miscommunication and how the ability to adapt one's communication to the expectations and needs of the other person would improve their competence. This question can be used early on in the term and again later on in the term to assess students' progress as their understanding of communication in general, as well as of specialized areas (interpersonal, group, organizational) in communication research, deepens.
6. Ideal answers will provide clear examples of communication within the classroom context (situational context) that reflect the characteristics of communication. For example, students may identify:
 - The use of symbols—The instructor's use of lecture and assignment of reading material to convey information, as well as the use of demonstrations, graphic models, and diagrams to represent ideas.
 - The need for a shared code—New terms introduced in the course of study must be defined so that all communicators are able to encode and decode accurately.
 - The link to culture—Culture has shaped our expectations regarding the roles of the teacher and the student and what is appropriate for each in this situation.
 - Communication is both intentional and unintentional—An instructor may need to be adept at reading a student's unintentional communication to know whether new concepts are understood before moving ahead.
 - Communication occurs through multiple contexts—A diverse classroom means that most instructors use a variety of means to convey information (reading, oral discourse, use of graphic depictions, interactive activities, and use of both face-to-face and electronic modes of communication).
 - Communication is transactional—A student's behavior in class will impact the behavior of the instructor as well as other students in the class, and vice versa. A “boring” instructor may come to life if students express interest, and even the most dispassionate students may perk up if an instructor conveys information in a manner that resonates with them.
7. Ideal answers will recognize an understanding of the following ideas or concepts:
 - Linear model—The most basic model depicts communication as being linear and unidirectional. A sender encodes a message and sends it to a receiver through a channel, and the receiver decodes it. Along the way, noise may change the message leading to misunderstanding. Although the model is limited, it does portray certain forms of communication and provides the basic elements for more complex models of communication.

- Interaction model—Building on the linear model, the interaction model acknowledges that the receiver also responds to messages with feedback. Although more complex, this model portrays the sender and receiver as being locked into their roles and the communication process as being disjointed with the receiver having to wait until the sender finishes encoding to begin decoding and the sender having to wait until the receiver has finished decoding the message to respond with any feedback.
 - Competent communication model—This model is the most complex of the three, portraying communication as being transactional, with all communicators simultaneously sending and receiving messages within a relational context, a situational context, and a cultural context. This model allows for flexibility in roles and for the focus to shift to the transaction rather than just isolated messages that are being sent back and forth.
8. Answers to this question will vary, as the student is required to identify a personal example. Ideal answers will demonstrate a clear understanding of the transactional nature of communication and the impact of the relational context, situational context, and cultural context on their expectations of the other, the choices they made, and the way they interpreted the other's behavior. Strong answers will also demonstrate an ability to question initial assumptions about what was expected of themselves and others and an ability to reinterpret the other's behaviors based on this awareness. At this point, students should not be expected to have mastery of these abilities but should be able to demonstrate some self-reflexive questioning of their assumptions as well as a basic awareness of the process. This question can be repeated toward the end of the course to assess whether or not students can synthesize what they have learned in subsequent chapters into the model and can provide a sense of cohesion and continuity between the various topic areas covered throughout the text.