



THE UNIVERSAL ACCREDITATION BOARD ACCREDITATION STUDY COURSE

COMMUNICATIONS THEORY

Session **3**

OVERVIEW

This session of the Accreditation Study Course is designed to introduce Communications Theory to the participants and to give them experience in working with it.

► **Reading to be assigned BEFORE this session**

- Communications process: theory and models
- Importance of feedback in effective communication
- Barriers to effective communications
- Section 4, Detailed list of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities tested, Candidate's Preparation Guide for Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations

Special Note for Coach

If you have not been coaching recently, please review these preliminary materials: For You, the Coach; The Coaching Method; Managing the Class; About House Rules. Before the day of the class, make sure you are familiar with the content in the reading which candidates should have done, and with the exercises you are going to conduct in this session. Consider any adjustments you may need to make if this is a free-standing unit, or is part of a sequence of preparation classes.

► **Significance of Subject Matter**

- Knowledge of communications theories and barriers underlies everything we do in public relations, and is weighted at 15 percent in the multiple-choice Examination.

► **Handouts for this session**

- Shannon and Weaver Model – Handout #8
- Shannon and Weaver Model with feedback – Handout #9
- Schramm Model – Handout #10
- Calisthenics #3 – Handout #11

► **Visual Aids needed for this session**

- Shannon and Weaver – Visual #4
 - Shannon and Weaver with feedback – Visual #5
 - Schramm Model – Visual #6
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- ▶ **Other materials needed for this session**
 - White board or flip chart and markers
 - Projector for visuals
- ▶ **Exercises conducted during this session**
 - Communications diagramming on whiteboard or flip chart
 - Identify communicators, Schramm model
 - Barriers to communication, Lippmann, et al
- ▶ **New lecture material to be delivered during this session**
 - Communications Theory

I. Agenda for Session

Instructions: Coach introduces activity

1 minute

II. Basic Communication Theory

Instructions: Coach presents theory

Allow 40 minutes

- ▶ The title of this section is “basic” communication theory. Basic, like the multiplication table. Some of the subject matter may be in your head already – in the back of your mind. We want to get it up front, today, so we can work with it.
- ▶ A quick reprise, from the all-day workshop you may have attended, about basic communication theory, which is reflected in everything you do or attempt to do in your daily work:
 - > Communication is a complex process, as all of us in the profession are aware.
 - > A lot of people think it is simpler than it is.
 - > To paraphrase an old spiritual, “Everybody talkin’ about communicating ain’t a doin’ it” – at least not very well.
 - > People who try to make sense out of complicated things like to draw diagrams, and there are several you need to know and understand.
 - > Looking back in history for a moment, here is the simplest one. It reflects the work of a couple of telephone engineers named Shannon and Weaver.

VISUAL #4: Shannon and Weaver
- ▶ In essence, it involves a sender, a message, a channel through which the message travels, and a receiver.
 - > Going back to high school physics, you may recall that the telephone instrument converts the sound, such as spoken words, into electrical impulses which can then be transmitted over a telephone line. We’re back in history, here, speaking about land lines for telephone circuits. That’s when this theory was constructed. At the other end of the line, the process is reversed; the electrical signals are converted back into speech. This is, of course, the way telephone engineers think – or did at the time. In today’s cell phones, we are dealing with different kinds of science, but the diagram still applies.

▶ **Communications Theory**

The terminology is Sender, Encoding, Channel, Decoding, and Receiver

▶ **Ask:** Is this familiar to you?

You can apply the diagram to many aspects and many forms of communication:

> **Speech:** Your thoughts must be encoded into words, transmitted by sound waves, and decoded into understanding of the words by the receiver – if that person is within earshot.

> **Pantomime:** Your body expresses your thoughts, transmitted by gestures or posture, decoded into understanding of the movements by the receiver.

> **Printing:** Your thoughts are encoded into words and typographic characters – in English, Espanol, Italiano, Arabic or some other language, transmitted on a printed page and decoded by the receiver – IF that person is able to read and understand that language, and that type face.

▶ You can go on with this – art, music, drama, signs, symbols – all the ways we attempt to transmit thoughts and meaning.

▶ Now, in this diagram, What’s missing? [Two most important words to keep in your head: *What’s missing?*]

> Take responses from class

> If necessary, probe for Feedback

VISUAL #5: Shannon and Weaver with feedback

▶ **Observe** that feedback goes through the same steps as the message in reverse.

▶ **If you don’t get feedback**, you never know whether the so-called receiver is really receiving your message, or understanding it.

> **Ask:** Who is willing to put this diagram on the whiteboard [or flip chart]?

Make it pretty big – we have further work to do with it.

[Give class handouts #8 and #9, two versions of Shannon and Weaver]

▶ When diagram is complete, *ask:* What can get in the way? [barriers]

> Have candidates place barriers on diagram as they come up in discussion.

> **Ask:** What barriers do you encounter in your own practice?

- Oral responses from class; suggest they make a list for reference and review.

> **Probe** for barriers of vocabulary, culture, distractions, transmission failure, values, natural censorship, gatekeepers, others from your own experience.

> **Ask:** What can you do to overcome some of those barriers?

> What else?

- [Keep asking “What else?” as long as necessary. Don’t do the candidates’ thinking for them. You may gain some original and creative ideas.]

> **Ask:** “What do you do in your daily work, to get through these barriers?”

“What else could you do, in your own situation?”

- > They should come up with such things as:
 - common language
 - clear language
 - alignment with culture and values
 - finding times and places where distractions are few
 - using the influence of groups with which the receivers are affiliated (unions, churches, service clubs)
 - using respected peers
 - showing benefit
 - credible sources or spokespeople
 - history of trust
 - using reliable media
 - using the media to which people spontaneously turn by choice (the Web for webheads, professional channels for professionals)
 - captive audiences
 - direct contact to avoid gatekeepers . . .
- > Extend the list from your own experience.
- > If the candidates show a drought or dearth of ideas, introduce additional possibilities through questions such as:
 - “What do you think about trade association publications?”
 - “What’s the principle we are applying here?”
 - But warn them to stimulate their own thinking; you are not going to spoon-feed them because they must rely on their own brains in the Examination and thereafter in their roles as Accredited professionals.
- > **Probe** for the advice of Wilbur Schramm: (next four items here)
 - Design and deliver the message in a manner that will gain the attention of the intended audience.
 - Employ signs that refer to experience common to the source and destination.
 - Arouse personality needs in the receiver.
 - Suggest a way to meet those personality needs that is appropriate to the group situation in which the receiver is, at the time when you want the receiver to respond.

- ▶ Now let’s give the late Mr. Schramm a little more attention. *Allow 30 minutes*

Wilbur Schramm, a university professor and celebrated author, spent a lot of time and brain power on the factors which affect real communication. You would be wise to read his work in a textbook – there probably are only a few pages – and ponder it, and reflect on how it affects your everyday work.

- ▶ Here is one excerpt from Schramm, quoted in “*Effective Public Relations:*”

“Communication (human communication, at least) is something people do. It has no life of its own. There is no magic about it except what what people in the communication relationship put into it. There is no meaning in a message except what the

people put into it. When one studies communication, therefore, one studies people – relating to each other and to their groups, organizations, and societies, influencing each other, being influenced, informing and being informed, teaching and being taught, entertaining and being entertained—by means of certain signs which exist separately from either of them. To understand the human communication process one must understand how people relate to each other.”

► Here is the way he diagrammed his concept: *VISUAL #6: Schramm model*

- > **Tell class:** Take a good look at the diagram. Notice he names persons A and B.
 - Take one minute to think about people in your organization who could be Communicator A and B
 - Make a note on paper
- > **Ask:** Who will give me one note— an A and a B?
[Use standard process for responses; continue as long as is productive.]
- > **If needed:** Think of communicator A as management; B as employees, and how different their frame of reference is, how the employer-employee relationship affects what is said and what is heard, and whether the overall social environment in the organization, or the community, has a bearing.
- > **Open a discussion:**
 - Try putting salespeople and prospects into the diagram. What are the differences in their frames of reference? Where is the common ground – in the middle of the diagram – where they can do business?
 - Suppose we change the example to long-time residents of your area, and new comers or immigrants.
 - How are their social environments different or the same?
 - *If needed:* A real-life example: A Latino family immigrates from Mexico to a Midwest city, works hard, saves money and buys a \$200,000 house in a good suburban neighborhood. Numerous children drive numerous cars and work different shifts at minimum-wage jobs. They come and go at all hours. They take up parking space in front of other houses. Before long, a petition to ban street parking is underway.
 - What are the factors impacting communication?
 - Consider the factors of culture, customs, language, occupation which make a difference.
 - **This bears study.**

Give class Handout #10: Schramm model

- > **Tell class:** What I hope you will do is:
 - Copy this Schramm diagram with your own hands. Draw it out with pencil or pen. Looking at it is not the same as drawing it, for your brain. Color-code the areas if that helps.
 - Put the labels on your drawing: frame of reference, context of relationship, social environment, and so on.

- Post the drawing on your office wall, where you will see it frequently. Maybe someone will ask you to explain it all, which will be good!

Allow 15 minutes

- ▶ Now let's step back a little further into history, and look at the concepts of a pioneer in the field of barriers. In 1922 Walter Lippmann published a book called *Public Opinion*.¹ Writing about Lippmann, Scott Cutlip – a more contemporary name perhaps more familiar to you – observes that Lippmann “predicted the need for intermediaries in a complex society. Social scientists have been agreeing with him ever since.”
 - > Lippmann emphasized the effect of stereotypes – mental classifications resulting from limited access to facts. Does that sound current today?
 - > **Say:** Let me run through a half-dozen things he saw as significant barriers to communication, then I will ask you to figure out where these barriers interrupt the communication on the diagram before you.
 1. Artificial censorship – gatekeepers in news media, shrinking news hole . . .
 2. Limitations of social contact
 3. Meagre time available for paying attention to public affairs [in 1922? Today?]
 4. Distortion from compressing events into short messages [sound bites?]
 5. Difficulty of expressing a big, complicated world in a small vocabulary
 6. Fear of facing facts which seem to threaten established routines

NOTE TO COACH: As candidates identify the stage where the barrier becomes a barrier, have them put numbers or key words on the diagram. It's good reinforcement.

- > **You may inquire:** Do any of these seem valid in your current work?
- > **Ask:** What about the methods you proposed earlier in this session, to work around the barriers you encounter. Do some of those apply to Lippmann's barriers?
- > **Ask:** Does anything else come to mind now?
- > **Probe for:**
 - Going where the audience is, at meetings they already attend, to present your message.
 - Using publications they already read, and broadcast channels they habitually patronize.
 - Speaking their language, to the point of vernacular, where possible.
 - Using multiple media.
 - Involving as many senses as possible– vision, hearing, taste, smell, touch.
 - Working through people they already trust.
 - Connecting with their values. (Schramm)

- **Summing up:** Give some thought to the fact that the creative ways you devise to work around barriers in communication become creative strategies in your public relations planning. These are all ways you show *How* you are planning to reach your objectives for the various audiences or publics you are targeting. That's why you learn communications theory, and try to keep it in the front of your mind as you go about your daily work.

III. Follow-Up Assignment: Mental Calisthenics

Here is a mental exercise to help you get your brain in even better shape for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations. If you have been doing calisthenics in an earlier session, this one follows, but you can begin here. Do make time for this. It is an essential workout for your mental muscles.

Give class handout #11 Calisthenics #3, Overcoming Communication Barriers.

Elapsed time: 1:30

- 1 *THE UNSEEN POWER: Public Relations. A History.* Scott M. Cutlip Page 107.
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Session 3 Links

Handouts

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| #8 | Shannon and Weaver Model | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO8.pdf |
| #9 | Shannon and Weaver Model
with feedback | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO9.pdf |
| #10 | Schramm Model | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO10.pdf |
| #11 | Calisthenics #3 | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO11.pdf |

Visual Aids

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|----|-------------------------------------|---|
| #4 | Shannon and Weaver | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachVis4.pdf |
| #5 | Shannon and Weaver
with feedback | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachVis5.pdf |
| #6 | Schramm Model | http://www.prsa.org/_Advance/apr/coachpdf/coachHO6.pdf |