

15.11: The Business Audience

Learning Objectives

- Identify characteristics of your audience in business communication
- Discuss the process of the social communication model

As a business communicator, you'll be communicating to two types of audiences.

- Your **primary audience** is the audience that your communication is intended for. For instance, if you're preparing an earnings report, the audience is likely your senior team. They will review the information, give you feedback, and decide if they need to take action based on the information you've provided.
- Your **secondary audience** is the group of people that aren't real stakeholders in your communication. That same earnings report, with the senior team as its primary audience, might find other audiences in investors, stockholders, or even your competitors or the media. They may comment on your data or take action on it.

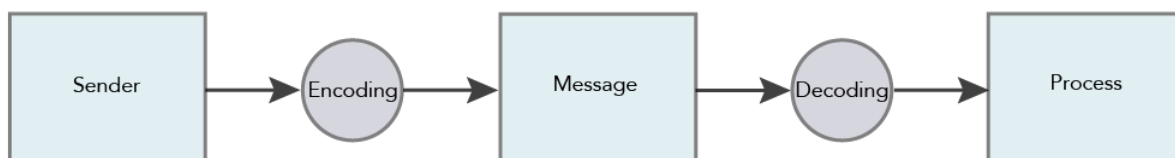
Why is it important to understand primary and secondary audiences and what the differences are between them? Consider the following points:

- **Managing information:** When you consider the information you should be communicating, you need to consider the needs of your primary audience first. The information they require to do their work is your first concern. Any information that would be important to a secondary audience should be relegated to a less prominent area of the report.
- **Managing language:** A key factor in communicating effectively is the assessment of the knowledge that your intended audience brings to the table. If your primary audience is a bunch of school kids and your challenge is to explain key economic factors in the 1929 stock market collapse, your language will be much different than if you explain it to a group of historians. Choose the correct language to communicate.
- **Managing the depth of your topic:** The human resources team might want to dig into a turnover report in great detail and, if they're your primary audience, it's your job to communicate that information to them. On the other hand, the CEO may just want to know what the annualized rate is. "Are people staying or are they leaving?" he will ask. Sometimes a simple, "Staying," is all he needs to know.

You will communicate more effectively if you understand your audience and the depth of knowledge they bring with them to the communication event.

The Social Communication Model

Communication suggests a linear process. There's a sender of a message—let's say that's you talking. You put your thoughts into words. And then there's a recipient of a message. He hears those words and considers their meaning. That's your co-worker, listening. It looks something like this:

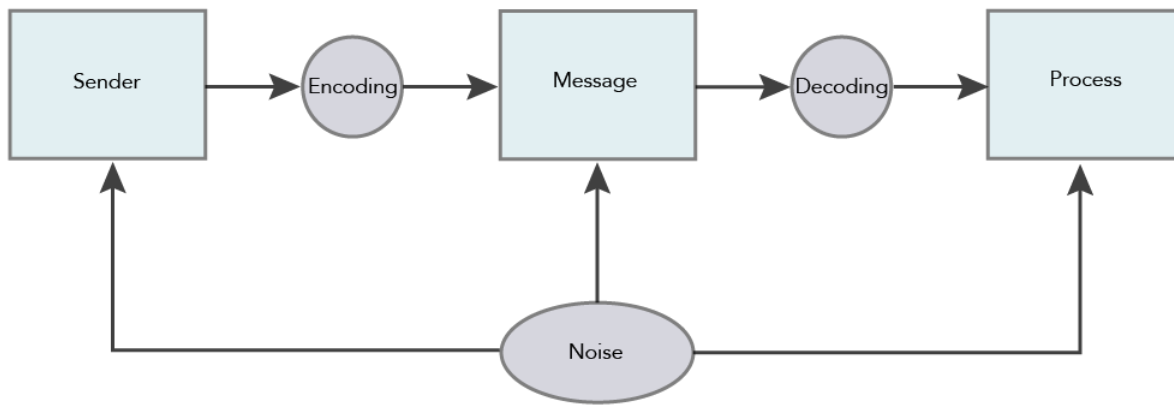


You, the sender, have a thought. You put that thought into words (encoding). The message comes out of your mouth, and then it is decoded (processed) by the recipient, your co-worker, who then decides on the meaning of your words as a result of that decoding process.

But what you say isn't always what your co-worker hears. And that's where things go wrong.

Let's pretend that you're listening to some music, a good Jimi Hendrix tune. And you sing along with the lyric, "Excuse me while I kiss the sky": *Purple Haze*—classic Jimi Hendrix.

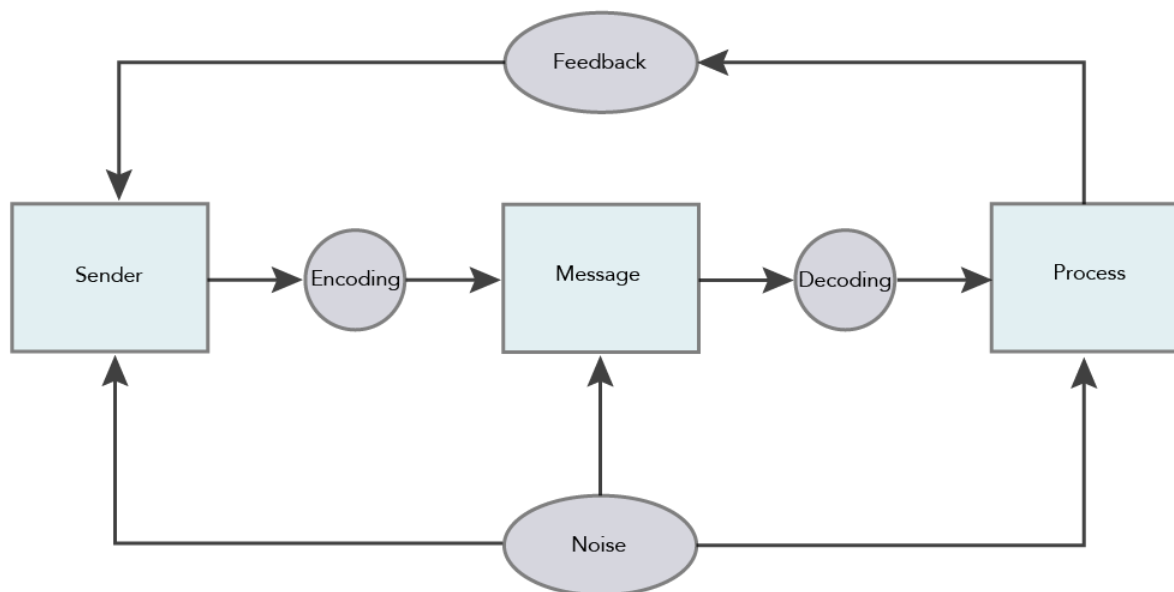
So, you're inspired by the music and sing the words in much the same way Jimi sings it. You think it, you put it into words (encoding it), and it becomes a message. Is everything good? Maybe not. It's possible that Jimi's "stylized" approach to singing lyrics is going to get in the way of your message. This is called noise.



The noise disturbing your message can jump in at any time. It can be actual noise, it can be a concept misunderstood by the sender before the message is even formed, it can be a message that's not articulated properly, or it can be a message that's just not understood by the receiver. In this case, the "noise" is you imitating the way Jimi sings his lyric, which is not spoken all that clearly.

Your co-worker hears your communication, and the message you encoded and sent to him is not decoded in the same way, because the decoding process is affected by "noise." As a result, your coworker thinks you've said, "Excuse me while I kiss this guy."

He frowns and tells you, "You probably shouldn't be kissing anyone at work." This is called feedback.



Your recipient has let you know that you've been misunderstood by giving you feedback. At this point you can:

- Repeat the message a second time
- Ask some clarifying questions to determine why your recipient didn't understand what you said and then address those issues on your next attempt to communicate your idea.

In this case, you immediately realize how you've been misunderstood. This happens all the time when people hear this song. You process the feedback and encode a new message. You tell him, "No. It's 'Excuse me while I kiss *the sky*.' Not 'Excuse me while I kiss this guy.'"

When the communication is only linear, extending from sender to recipient, you're talking *at* your audience. The minute there's feedback from the audience, like with the social communication model, you're talking *with* your audience. Talking with an audience ensures a better level of understanding.

Effective communication means leveraging the social communication model to make sure your team is all singing the same song.

References

Basic Model of Social Communication. In: ManagementMania.com [online]. Wilmington (DE) 2011–2018, 08/24/2016 [cit. 06/05/2018]. Available at: [Management Mania Basic Model of Social Communication](#)

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