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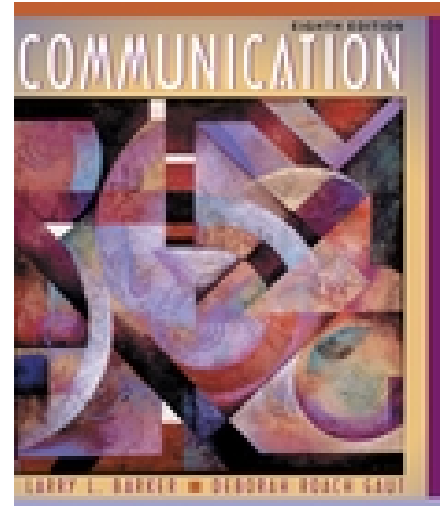
Communication (8th Ed.)

Barker, Larry and Gaut, Deborah

[Allyn and Bacon](#), 2001

432 pages

Paper: \$45.00 US



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Survey textbooks such as *Communication* must perform a balancing act. The discussion needs to cover a broad subject within the confines of a few hundred pages, yet it must go into enough detail to make the reading meaningful. The authors, Larry L. Barker, Professor Emeritus at Auburn University, and Deborah Roach Gaut, Assistant Professor at James Madison University, approach the task by personalizing the subject--so much so that it reads like a self-help textbook. The fact that this is the eighth edition of *Communication* attests to the authors' measure of success in finding and filling a niche.

In the preface, the authors state that the most recent edition "was written to aid you in communicating in an increasingly complex world." The statement implies the inclusion of contemporary research and the authors deliver. Examples include a discussion of Pamela Shockley-Zalabak's work in postmodern and feminist theories of organizational communication, and the organizational networking research of Virginia Richmond and James McCroskey.

Clearly the target audience for the book is the undergraduate population who are taking their first--and perhaps only--communication course. Each chapter begins with a fictitious email conversation that attempts to replicate correspondence from one college student to another. It is, no doubt, intended to illustrate relevance, but the reviewer felt ill at ease with the approach. Nevertheless, the mock emails illustrate how theoretical concepts can be applied to everyday interactions.

The text covers each topic, from intrapersonal to organizational communication, by touching on the milestones of communication studies as well as recent advances. But the "how to" nature of the book is underscored by the fact that the last four chapters are devoted exclusively to aspects of rhetoric. By contrast, the subject of mass communication is covered in a single chapter. *Communication* appendices offer a sample speech and analysis, speech outline, and a "how to" primer on preparing for a job interview.

At the outset, the authors state that their intentions are "[t]o help you achieve you fullest potential as a communicator. . . ." That objective need not be restricted to college students. The latest edition includes a

chapter on small group and team communication, which proved to be one of the most interesting chapters, connecting communication study with a broad spectrum of professional environments. In this section, the authors discuss the advent of technology-based groups, the benefits and inherent difficulties of teleconferencing, and global, intercultural, and virtual global teams, and other manifestations or by-products of technological advances. The chapter looks at leadership issues, problem-solving through group discussion, and factors such as conformity and cohesion, that affect small group communication. For anyone who must facilitate a small group in multiple-perspective discussion or participate in such a group, the information is truly valuable.

The book gives the lay person a better command of communication dynamics with no previous experience required, but you will have to put up with a somewhat patronizing tone. For those who want to read more in-depth material, each chapter ends with an extensive list of references and the book includes a comprehensive bibliography.

Ultimately, *Communication* succeeds in leaving those who will never pursue another course in communication with an appreciation of this field of inquiry.

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