

Review of *Communication in the real world*

Kelsey Denton

Communication Studies Faculty
Green River College
kdenton@greenriver.edu

University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing (2016). *Communication in the real world*.

An ideal text for an Introduction to Communication course delivers on several fronts; it provides a no-cost and adaptable overview of core communication theory, it is engaging and readable for an beginning college student, and it provides timely, interesting, applications of the communication discipline – all for free. *Communication In the Real World* provides on several, but not all, these fronts. This free, OER text gets the job done, mostly in its readable, succinct format that allows for focused assigning of topics and subtopics relevant to any flavor of introductory communication courses. Students won't be clamoring to read this text (as what it accomplishes in brevity and adaptability, it lacks in general energy and entertainment value), but they will find it informative and applicable to their course and lives, particularly because the instructor can select and assign relevant chapters and subsections with ease.

This text is organized into sixteen chapters with each chapter containing a brief introductory paragraph followed by three to six subtopics. Each subtopic is organized as a standalone section, opening with a list of objectives, including one to two application sidebars, and concluding with a summary of main ideas and exercises for further thought. The first five chapters of the text cover communication foundations; Introduction to Communication Studies, Communication and Perception, Verbal Communication, and Listening. These provide an adequate and approachable footing for the further exploration of the forthcoming chapters on Interpersonal Communication, Public Communication, Small Group Communication and Mass

Communication. The three Interpersonal Communication chapters are Interpersonal Communication Process, Communication in Relationships, and Culture & Communication, the final of which does serve as an adequate primer on the basics of intercultural communication concepts. The following four chapters on public communication cover Preparing a Speech, Delivering a Speech, Informative & Persuasive Speaking, as well as Public Speaking in Various Contexts. Of great value in these chapters are example speaking outlines and video clips for speeches of different rhetorical purpose. While the video clips, like the text in general, are dated, they do accomplish the aim of providing a student with a workable example from which they can extrapolate. The Small Group Communication chapters include Small Group Communication fundamentals of Development and Dynamics, and a chapter on Leadership, Roles and Problem Solving. The final two chapters on Media, Technology, and New Media are where the text's 2013 publishing date are especially painful, given the acceleration of mediated communication products, services, and documented effects in recent years.

The reading level of this text is appropriate for a first-year college student, and even a college student with a low reading prowess. Many students enter college unprepared for academic reading or with English as a second language, and this text uses vocabulary and language structures that are easy to understand and decipher with little jargon that goes undefined. Additionally, as an OER text from the University of Minnesota Library, the text is available in an exceptional number of formats, ensuring screen readers, translators, and other accessibility tools will be able to engage and process the material successfully.

The faults of this text are really a result of its publication date. The images in the text show mostly able bodied, cis-gendered, white people engaging in communication activities, with few non dominant identities represented visually except in the expected or necessary cases of

discussing culture or race. Surely an OER text developed in 2021 would be more mindful of its stock photo selections and the implications they have on students consuming them. Similarly, there are no references dating past 2012 in this text meaning that many of the application topics feel woefully incomplete as our discussions and experiences as a society on subjects such as “Perception, Schemata, and, Police,” “Political Spin,” “Textese,” among others, are deeply changed by the Black Lives Matter movement, Trump presidency, and Covid 19 Pandemic. While the text does work to include critical topics like the meaning of the Confederate Flag and Toxic Masculinity, among others, these are literally asides, which read hollow in a time when these topics and realities are justifiably front and center in our personal, social, and cultural consciousness. Finally, while there are several video clips embedded in the text, they are too few, twelve in total only, given the opensource video content widely available on these subjects. This again is an indication of the text’s age, as in many ways twelve video clips for an OER text in 2013 is prescient, as is covering topics of perception, race, and police – but the dynamism of communication demands that our materials meet the current moment, and this text on its own, does not.

Thankfully, a text does not exist on its own – it is typically accompanied by a skilled and thoughtful instructor who can put it to use within the context of their course. Despite the limitations and problems of this text, it is the one I choose to use for my Introduction to Communication course. Few OER textbooks exist with as broad a range of topics and subtopics. The span of content demanded by introductory and survey courses frequently come at a steep cost for students or institutions in acquiring a text designed to cover the range of designated outcomes. Curated and thoughtful assigning out of Communication the Real World, combined with current research, video, and reporting will result in a dynamic, thorough overview of

Communication Studies and its disciplines. For the low price of zero dollars and the ease of adaptability, *Communication in the Real World*, does a more than adequate job when an instructor frames and augments the limitations of this text to meet the needs of their particular students and course.