Chapter 8 Outline

(Italicized words are key words)

I. Conversations are an integral part of relationships, and increased conversational skills can increase informative value and enjoyment of participating.
   A. A conversation is an interactive, extemporaneous, locally managed, and sequentially organized interchange of thoughts and feelings between two or more people.
      1. Conversations are interactive and involve turn-taking, alternating between speaking and listening in an interaction.
      2. Conversations are extemporaneous, which means that they are uttered in the spur of the moment without lengthy preplanning.
      3. Conversations involve local management, which is the way that conversational partners produce and monitor every aspect of the conversational give-and-take, including not only turn-taking but also topic changes.
      4. Conversations involve sequential organization, which means that conversations have identifiable beginnings (openings), middles (bodies), and ends (closings), similar to other forms of communication.
   B. There is variation in conversational types.
      1. Small talk is message exchanges on inconsequential topics that meet the social needs of participants with low amounts of risk.
      2. Gossip is message exchanges about other people who are not present in the conversation.
   C. Differences are also explained by conversation purpose, or what the conversation is intended to do.
      1. While all conversations have openings, bodies, and conclusions, the turn-by-turn sequence of any conversation is unique.
         a. Scriptedness is the use of routine conversational phrases from past encounters applied appropriately to new situations.
         b. Co-narration is when two people finish each other’s sentences because they know each other’s style of conversation very well.
      2. The tone of a conversation is its emotional and relational quality, or how it feels “inside” the interaction.
         a. Formality is the degree to which a conversation must follow rules and procedures.
         b. Conversations vary with the participants, because how conversational partners talk to each other is fundamentally influenced by their roles, their relationship to each other, and their individual characteristics and personality traits.
         c. Any conversation is influenced by the setting or physical environment in which it occurs, and the setting often
influences our perception of the kinds of conversation that are appropriate.

II. There are several guidelines to follow to be a better conversational partner.
A. Develop an other-centered focus by asking questions, introducing topics of interest to the others in the conversation, and devoting full attention to the conversation.
B. Engage in appropriate turn-taking, i.e., paying attention to the turn-taking process so that one speaks freely when appropriate and remains silent and listens when appropriate.
C. Maintain conversational coherence—the extent to which the comments made by one person relate to those made previously by others earlier in the conversation.
D. Practice politeness by relating to others in ways that meet their need to be appreciated and protected by engaging in face-saving, helping others to preserve their self-image or self-respect.
E. Protect privacy by paying attention to who may be an audience to your conversation and keeping confidences.
F. Ethical dialogue is characterized by authenticity, empathy, confirmation, presentness, equality, and supportiveness.
   1. **Authenticity** is communication information and feelings that are relevant and legitimate to the subject at hand directly, honestly, and straightforwardly.
   2. **Empathy** is demonstrating an understanding of another person’s point of view without giving up one’s own position or sense of self.
   3. **Confirmation** is expressing a warm affirmation of others as unique persons without necessarily approving of their behaviors or views.
   4. **Presentness** is the willingness to become fully involved with another person by taking time, avoiding distraction, being responsive, and risking attachment.
   5. **Equality** is treating conversational partners as peers, regardless of the status differences that separate them from other participants.
   6. **Supportiveness** is encouraging other participants in a conversation to communicate by praising their worthwhile efforts.

III. There are skills that can be employed for conversing with strangers.
A. When starting a conversation, there are some things to keep in mind.
   1. Make a comment that invites the other person to respond.
   2. Ask a question, like a **ritual question**, a question about the other person or the situation that is easy to answer and doesn't pry into personal matters.
   3. Introduce yourself.
   4. Pay attention to nonverbal cues.
B. Sustaining a conversation involves skill.
   1. Use **free information** that is volunteered during conversation rather than specifically required or requested.
   2. Use a mix of **closed-ended questions**, questions that can be answered with “yes,” “no,” or a few words, and **open-ended**
questions, questions that require answers with more elaboration and explanation.

3. Seek out topics of interest to the other person.
4. Use appropriate self-disclosure, which involves verbally sharing personal ideas and feelings with others.
5. Actively listen by paying close attention to what the other person is saying.

C. Closing a conversation is just as important as starting one.

1. Notice leave-taking cues, which are nonverbal behaviors that indicate someone wants to end the conversation.
2. Verbalize your desire to end the conversation.
3. Ask to see the person again if appropriate.

IV. Conversations are no longer just face to face and may be technologically mediated or occur in cyberspace; consequently, conversational rules are seen as less important, and traditional understandings of conversations are changing.

A. An awareness of audience is different because when we send e-mails or text messages, post to a blog, or develop a profile on a social networking site, we cannot always be sure who our conversational partner will be.

B. The degree of conversational spontaneity is different, as e-mails and blogs do not conform strictly to face-to-face conversational norms.

C. The abruptness of disengagement may be heightened in cyber conversations, with abrupt departures more acceptable than in face-to-face interactions.

D. Due to technology, it is possible to be involved in a multiplicity of conversations without the knowledge of all the participants.

E. Traditionally it was considered rude to interrupt a face-to-face conversation to communicate with someone else, but technology has made the interruptions socially acceptable as people answer mobile phones or respond to texts while talking to someone face to face.

F. The notions of privacy have changed with the advent of technology so that the distinctions between public and private spaces for communication have become blurred.

V. There is cultural variation in how individuals have conversations, particularly those from high- and low-context cultures.

A. Conversations in low-context cultures are likely to include greater use of direct categorical words such as “certainly,” “absolutely,” and “positively,” whereas high-context conversations rely on indirectness using verbal qualifiers such as “maybe,” “perhaps,” and “probably.”

B. Low-context cultures have a strong expectation that conversational contributions will be overtly relevant; but in high-context cultures individuals’ responses are likely to be more indirect because listeners rely more on nonverbal cues.

C. In low-context cultures, there is an expectation of verbal directness and honesty, whereas people in high-context cultures put a high priority on maintaining harmony with others so messages may mask their true feelings.
D. In low-context cultures, periods of silence are perceived as uncomfortable, but in high-context cultures, silences in conversation are often meaningful.

IX. Digital conversation skills
1. There are guidelines for conducting effective digital conversations that are just as important as rules governing face-to-face interactions.
2. Social presence theory posits that the available social cues of social media permit us to perceive the intimacy of the conversation and the degree of closeness we feel with our conversational partner.
3. Awareness of audience occurs differently between face-to-face and digital communication; the knowledge of this may help improve digital communication skills.
4. Conversational spontaneity refers to the degree to which a conversation unfolds in an informal and natural fashion.
5. Another important aspect to note about digital communication is that there is an abruptness of disengagement and multiplicity of conversations.
6. One way to improve digital conversation skills is to best manage privacy.