

Positive Communication Activity
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The Art and Practice of Communication Savoring

Learning Outcomes:

Through this activity, students will learn to (a) identify different types of communication savoring, (b) enhance present moment positive emotions through recall and imagination, and (c) increase skills at recognizing and enhancing communication moments to savor.

Expected Time

A full week devoted to the practice of communication savoring.

Background & Brief Description

Most of us have had an experience so pleasurable that we tried to prolong the moment to make it last or to bottle it up so we can experience it again later. This is savoring. Savoring is the two-step practice of (1) identifying that you are experiencing pleasure and then (2) working to enhance that pleasurable experience. In this exercise, you will learn how to increase your opportunities to identify *communication* moments to savor and how to enhance them. Savoring offers many health, personal, and relational benefits including mindfulness, life satisfaction, enhanced positive emotions, and bolstering against negative experiences. But, in order to savor, you first have to be open to the experience. Usually, this means that you are at least momentarily free from stressors or social pressures, not overwhelmed by thoughts and planning, present in the moment, and able to identify positive emotions when they arise. Having just written that, now is a good time to take a deep breath.

Although savoring is a familiar idea in the positive psychology academic literature, *communication savoring* is a relatively recent construct in positive communication. Pitts (2019) defined communication savoring as “the process of mindfully attending to pleasurable or meaningful social interaction in real, remembered, or anticipated/imagined encounters and enhancing or prolonging the positive affect” (p. 254). If you have ever stayed up all night long talking to a loved one just to stay in that moment longer or replayed an intimate disclosure time and again in your mind to re-experience that rush of positive emotions, you have savored communication! Early research on communication savoring revealed at least seven different types of communication experiences that people savor (see Table 1). In the first part of this exercise, you will learn to identify the different types of communication savoring. Then, you will learn to enhance them.

Practice

This exercise is designed to deepen your understanding of the readings related to communication savoring (Pitts, 2019; Pitts et al., 2019) and to help you move from the theory to the practice of communication savoring.

Step 1: Study the Communication Savoring Typology (Table 1) which you will find at the end of this document. Try to imagine what each of the seven types entail. Savoring is a slow process, so take your time to muse about each type. Be curious.

Step 2: Read the assigned material on communication savoring. Pay special attention to the seven types of communication described in the findings (“Communication Savoring Types”) and how people experienced communication savoring (“Phenomenology of Communication Savoring”). *Pro-tip: Take notes about each section making a personal memo about what, if anything, resonates with you.* Consider, how did reading the material after studying Table 1 increase your understanding?

Step 3: Now turn to Table 2 at the end of this document. Notice that there is an additional column for *your* examples. Give an example of each type of communication savoring that you have experienced or anticipate experiencing. Provide as much detail as possible.

- Discussion Add On: Share 1-2 of your most vivid examples with a partner or a small group. Take turns describing the moment with as much detail as possible. Try to paint the picture for your listeners. After discussing individual experiences, talk about how it felt to share your own experiences and to listen to others. How do you feel? Does talking about communication savoring enhance positive emotions?

Step 4: Let’s deepen that understanding. Independently write answers to following questions about the types of communication savoring you have experienced. Take your time to really notice how you felt.

- 1) How did it make you feel to recall communication experiences you have savored?
- 2) Are there some types of communication savoring experiences that you were able to identify easily (e.g., you had multiple vivid examples?) Why do you think that is?
- 3) Are there some types of communication savoring that you had difficulty identifying? What do you think that is?

Step 5: Answer the following question about the *experience* of communication savoring.

- 4) Try to fully recall a communication experience that you savored. What did that feel like for you in the moment? How did your mind and body react? Recall the phenomenology section of the reading. Did the descriptions of how others experienced communication savoring resonate with you? For example:
 - a. Heightened present-moment awareness, such as vivid bodily sensations, experiencing a moment as if through a slow motion camera, or telling yourself to soak it all in?
 - b. Trying to absorb a moment in its fullest so you can recall it just as vividly later?
 - c. Continuously replaying a moment you savored?

Step 6: This step is designed to help you become aware of your own savoring patterns. First, make a list of the communication experiences that you savor the most and/or those that have been the most powerful for you. *Pro-tip: Look at your answers in step 4 to help.* Then, answer the following questions.

- 5) What is common between those experiences?
- 6) What are the contexts in which you are most likely to savor a communication experience? Consider, what is the environment, who is there with you, what time of day/week/year is it?
- 7) What patterns do you recognize? How might you use this information to create more opportunities in your life for communication savoring?

Step 7: Commit to Practice! In this final step you will practice communication savoring. Over the next week engage in the practices below and keep a record of your experiences.

- 8) Pick at least 2 different communication savoring types that you wish to practice. Pay attention to your social interactions during the week and seek out opportunities to increase your present-moment awareness for that savoring type. For example, if you want to practice savoring aesthetic communication, seek out opportunities to listen to great speeches, go to a poetry reading, or listen to a familiar voice. Then, listen with an ear toward appreciating a unique cadence, beautiful sounds, delightful words, or ways of speaking. Keep stretching your ears to bring in more language features to enjoy. *Pro-tip: You can experience multiple types of communication savoring at once – try to combine aesthetic communication savoring with recognition and acknowledgment or communication presence with nonverbal communication.*
- 9) Document your experience in detail.

Take Home: An additional benefit to communication savoring is that it can lead to awareness of other positive experiences such as gratitude which can further deepen and prolong the positive experience not only for you, but for the people with whom you share your experiences. As you continue to study practices of positive communication – think about how *savoring* might boost your other experiences.

Additional Questions for Class Discussion

- 1) What inhibits savoring?
- 2) In what ways do media technologies and social media enhance or inhibit savoring?
- 3) Can savoring become problematic?
- 4) Is it possible to savor experiences that are not inherently pleasant?
 - a. What about savoring bittersweet moments?
 - b. Can you savor experiences like grief?

References

- Pitts, M. J. (2019). The language and social psychology of savoring: Advancing the communication savoring model. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 38*(2), 237-259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X18821404>
- Pitts, M. J., Kim, S., Meyerhoffer, H., & Jiao, J. (2019). Savoring as positive communication. In J. A. Muñiz-Velázquez, & C. Pulido (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of positive communication: Contributions of an emerging community of research on communication for happiness and social change* (pp. 98-107). Routledge.

Table 1*Communication Savoring Typology (Pitts, 2019)*

Type of Communication Savoring	Definition
<i>Aesthetic communication</i>	Savoring “the beauty and playfulness of language,” such as colorful or unexpected language that creates a pleasurable emotional response.
<i>Communication presence</i>	Savoring moments in which individuals are fully immersed in an interaction and strongly connected to their conversation partners, often without being aware of time, presence of others, and other environmental stimuli.
<i>Nonverbal communication</i>	Savoring messages that are communicated through means other than talk, such as gaze, touch, vocal warmth, and space.
<i>Recognition and acknowledgment</i>	Savoring messages of praise and positive valuation that are either sent or received.
<i>Relational communication</i>	Savoring talk that moves relationships “toward greater intimacy or better understanding.”
<i>(Extra)Ordinary communication*</i>	Savoring communication events that are extraordinary either because they are unique, special, or novel (extraordinary) or because they become extraordinary through their routine enactment (ordinary).
<i>Implicitly shared communication</i>	Savoring a sense of collective bonding and connection that arises through mutual experience and a perception that explicit communication about the experience would dampen it.

Table 2*Communication Savoring Typology (Pitts, 2019)*

Type of Communication Savoring	Definition	Your Example
<i>Aesthetic communication</i>	Savoring “the beauty and playfulness of language,” such as colorful or unexpected language that creates a pleasurable emotional response.	
<i>Communication presence</i>	Savoring moments in which individuals are fully immersed in an interaction and strongly connected to their conversation partners, often without being aware of time, presence of others, and other environmental stimuli.	
<i>Nonverbal communication</i>	Savoring messages that are communicated through means other than talk, such as gaze, touch, vocal warmth, and space.	
<i>Recognition and acknowledgment</i>	Savoring messages of praise and positive valuation that are either sent or received.	
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