So what causes our messages that we send one another to fall apart? When communication doesn't work the way we expect it to, it can be really frustrating. It can lead to conflict. Well, I'm Marlene. And in this tutorial, I'd like to talk with you about some of the factors that get in the way when we communicate.

So communication, what is it? It's the process of moving information from person to person using symbolic codes. Now, we know these codes is oftentimes language, words. We put words together, string letters together from the alphabet to create words, put words together. And we have information.

And that information can become a message. I'm sending you a message. You send me a message back. So a message is a packet of information which has been encoded and is moving from sender to receiver. Sounds easy. Sounds simple.

Oftentimes, it's not quite so easy and so simple. And there can be a lot of misinterpretation. So what gets in the way here?

Well, it's something called a filter. Now, you can have an external filter, something from the outside that obstructs a message, or an internal filter. That would be something internal.

Let's start with external filters. An external filter is an impediment to a message being received or being interpreted as intended originating outside the mind of the receiver. OK. So you're sending me a message. And something is getting in the way.

It's not internal. It's nothing I'm thinking in my mind. But something outside of me is getting in the way. We'll call this static.

So you call me on the phone. I pick up my phone. And I can't hear you. I can't hear you. There's static on the line.

So you're moving around asking, can you hear me now? Can you hear me now? We've all had this experience, probably on a cellphone.

We don't need technology to have that experience. You could be in a restaurant. And I can't hear you because it's very noisy. Or we're outside and there is a wind blowing and we can't hear one another. So that kind of external thing can get in the way.

Sometimes something external could be multitasking. I'm talking to you. But at the same time I'm talking to you, I'm cooking dinner. I'm answering what the kids want to say over here. I'm checking my email.
So those kinds of activities take my attention away from the conversation or the message that you’re trying to give me. So those are a couple of examples of external filters.

Now if you’re not sure that someone is going to be getting your message, that it might be noisy, that perhaps they're driving while you’re trying to talk to them on the phone, probably it's best to think of sending the message a different way. You might send both a voicemail, leave a voicemail and an email. Then you know people have it in two different ways.

Or you might text somebody and say, check your email or when you have a moment, I've left you a phone message. And the text is just a short little message letting them know that there’s something that you want to communicate. So sending messages with a variety of different codes, a couple of different codes sometimes can be a way to avoid that external static that can happen, the external filters.

Now there's also an internal filter that can get in the way. Internal filters are an impediment to a message being received or being interpreted as intended originating inside the mind of the receiver, inside the mind of the receiver. So this is something going on in terms of how I am understanding or interpreting the message if you’re trying to send me a message.

There could be misunderstanding of a particular word or phrase, either in context or just in general. Let's take some of these phrases that we might throw around thinking everybody understands them. That was a real bitter pill to swallow. Well, you're not talking about taking a literal pill here, are you? Maybe you are if you're standing there taking medicine and saying it’s a bitter pill to swallow, it might be very literally true.

Oftentimes we use this expression it means that it was very difficult to get a particular piece of news. Perhaps we lost the contract. And you say to some coworkers it was a bitter pill to swallow. Maybe there's someone in the group who doesn't understand that phrase. They don't understand that meaning.

Or you say to someone, stop beating around the bush. These are what are called idioms. And they’re expressions in English that a lot of people might not understand if they aren't very familiar with the language.

Or you say to a coworker, you know, this doesn't quite cut the mustard. Cut the mustard? You don't quite know what that means. So that would be an example of an idiom or a phrase not being understood because the person doesn't quite understand the code here, or perhaps what's meant in this particular context.

Now, this can happen outside of using idioms. A very commonly misunderstood phrase is as soon as possible. People use it all the time, ASAP. And I've asked people what they mean by ASAP. When you get that-- I've asked people, when someone says ASAP to you, what do you think?
And really about half the people I ask think it means as soon as possible, when I get around to it. And the other half think, I better do it right away. Well, what did the sender intend, the person sending the message? Do they want you to drop everything and do it now, or do it as soon as possible, whenever you have time?

If you don't know and you simply act on what you think the intention is here, there could be a misunderstanding, ineffective communication. This internal filter, the way you’re filtering that expression can get in the way. And it could lead to a conflict. So that's another example here.

Now, you might also think in this instance that it would be good to check. We've talked about getting a confirmation message. So if you've sent this message ASAP, you might check with someone to make sure they understood what you meant.

If you received it, it’s always good to clarify. What did you mean by that? Is it OK if I get it to you by Wednesday, or do you need it by the end of today? So asking questions and clarifying to make sure that the understanding is correct, whether or not you're the one who sent the message or you the one who received it, is always a very helpful and useful thing to do.

Now, we can also, if we think-- sending a message, we think there might be misunderstanding here, it might be good to rethink how we code and send this message. I think about a meeting that a colleague that I once worked with was telling me about. She was dreading writing a report because she had to send it to a variety of people in the organization, in different areas, different departments. And it was about some changes. The whole company was going through change. And there were some new announcements she had to make, some things that had been decided.

And she knew it was going to raise a lot of questions. But she was supposed to send this status report. She dreaded writing it.

So we’re talking about it. And I suggested, why don't you wait on the status report and just schedule a conference call? And she thought that was a great idea. She scheduled the conference call where she was able to speak with people, get their questions, answer the questions, summarize what it is that she needed them to now, and then follow it up with the report.

So you see, that was a more strategic way of thinking about how to avoid what might have been any number of internal filters on the part of people reading this report not quite understanding or having questions or maybe some negative feelings about what they were reading. That's the other thing that can get in the way. People may think you have-- they may have an attitude about something. They may be feeling internally just a little out of sorts. And they get your message and it hits them wrong.
So it's always good to ask questions to clarify, to think about who is going to be receiving your message and what might be the best way to send it to avoid these external or internal filters. And when you do that, you can perhaps avoid creating unnecessary conflicts.

Well, I've enjoyed being part of this tutorial. And I look forward to next time.