

# Body Language:

## Speak Volumes Without Saying a Word

Believe it or not, most communication is nonverbal. Are you *really* saying what you think you're saying? If you often find that people misunderstand you, perhaps your body language is communicating different thoughts than what your voice is saying!

Adjusting your body language can enhance your communication and help you make a better impression in various social and professional settings. Facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture all communicate specific meanings. ***When your body language agrees with your words, what you say is much more powerful.***

Whether you wonder what messages you're sending with your body language or you want some tips to brush up on your communication skills, here are some techniques you can try.

### General Principles

1. **Match up your body and speech.** To appear authentic, ensure your body language and speech are consistent. If you're telling someone you enjoyed the date but you're anxiously rubbing your forehead, you'll create some doubts.
2. **Mirror others.** *When people are on the same page, they naturally start mimicking each other's expressions and movements.* You can make it easier to connect with people by doing this intentionally. Do this sparingly, though; too much mirroring and your efforts will start to look like a comedy routine.
3. **Double-check your assumptions.** As you become more knowledgeable about nonverbal messages, keep in mind that different causes can produce the same behavior. You may want to use additional cues to discern their real meaning.
  - For example, if someone is looking around the room while you talk, they may be bored with what you're saying. Or they may be too tired to concentrate on anything. Or maybe they're especially interested in the interior decorating! Asking them questions can help you decipher the correct meaning behind their body language.

### Adjustments for Your Head

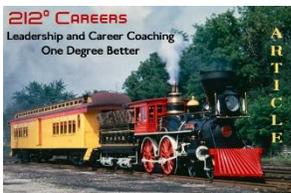
1. **Make eye contact.** While there are cultural differences, subtle eye contact is often perceived as a sign of friendliness and honesty. Look people in the eye when you're first introduced. As someone is talking, ***meet their eye from time to time to show interest***, while also looking away for appropriate intervals to avoid staring.

2. **Hold your head up.** Looking at the ground all the time may give people the impression that you're depressed or trying to avoid them. Keeping your head up makes you appear more approachable.
3. **Nod judiciously.** Nod your head slightly to let someone know you have their attention and agree with what they're saying.
4. **Smile.** *A smiling face is your best asset, whether you're at a job interview or trying to resolve a family conflict.* Our relationships become more harmonious when we reassure people that we like them. Smiling is a primary way to do this.

### Adjustments for Your Body

1. **Work on your handshake.** *Palm-to-palm contact is the most important ingredient in your handshake.* Ask a friend for their feedback to ensure your handshake sends the message you want.
2. **Control your hand gestures.** Hand gestures can reinforce what you're saying and make your presentations more effective. Make your gestures with confidence so you look composed and engaged.
3. **Stand straight and relaxed.** Maintaining good posture has numerous health and social benefits. Press your navel against your lower back, open your chest, and relax your shoulders. You'll come across as open and self-assured.
4. **Keep your arms and legs open.** Crossing your arms and legs can seem defensive and distant. If you often adopt this position because your office is chilly, try wearing a sweater or a layer of long underwear instead.
5. **Slow down.** We can easily get caught up in rushing from one task to the next. Pausing briefly or intentionally slowing down your movements can help you feel more poised.
6. **Lean forward.** Inclining slightly toward someone is a great way to show that you like them and that you care about what they're saying. Just facing someone while they talk can help. When addressing a group, shift your position occasionally.
7. **Respect the personal space of others.** Be sensitive to their comfort zones. Back up a little if you sense that someone is feeling crowded.

***Body language is an essential interpersonal skill.*** By taking conscious control of your nonverbal communication, you help yourself to feel more confident, and you put others at ease.



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