## What is body language?

While the key to success in both personal and professional relationships lies in your ability to communicate well, it’s not the words that you use but your nonverbal cues or “body language” that speak the loudest. Body language is the use of physical behavior, expressions, and mannerisms to communicate nonverbally, often done instinctively rather than consciously.

Whether you’re aware of it or not, when you interact with others, you’re continuously giving and receiving wordless signals. All of your nonverbal behaviors—the gestures you make, your posture, your tone of voice, how much eye contact you make—send strong messages. They can put people at ease, build trust, and draw others towards you, or they can offend, confuse, and undermine what you’re trying to convey. These messages don’t stop when you stop speaking either. Even when you’re silent, you’re still communicating nonverbally.

In some instances, what comes out of your mouth and what you communicate through your body language may be two totally different things. If you say one thing, but your body language says something else, your listener will likely feel that you’re being dishonest. If you say “yes” while shaking your head no, for example. When faced with such mixed signals, the listener has to choose whether to believe your verbal or nonverbal message. Since body language is a natural, unconscious language that broadcasts your true feelings and intentions, they’ll likely choose the nonverbal message.

[[Read: Effective Communication]](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/effective-communication.htm)

However, by improving how you understand and use nonverbal communication, you can express what you really mean, connect better with others, and build stronger, more rewarding relationships.

## The importance of nonverbal communication

Your nonverbal communication cues—the way you listen, look, move, and react—tell the person you're communicating with whether or not you care, if you're being truthful, and how well you're listening. When your nonverbal signals match up with the words you're saying, they increase trust, clarity, and rapport. When they don't, they can generate tension, mistrust, and confusion.

If you want to become a better communicator, it's important to become more sensitive not only to the body language and nonverbal cues of others, but also to your own.

### Nonverbal communication can play five roles:

* **Repetition:** It repeats and often strengthens the message you're making verbally.
* **Contradiction:** It can contradict the message you're trying to convey, thus indicating to your listener that you may not be telling the truth.
* **Substitution:** It can substitute for a verbal message. For example, your facial expression often conveys a far more vivid message than words ever can.
* **Complementing:** It may add to or complement your verbal message. As a boss, if you pat an employee on the back in addition to giving praise, it can increase the impact of your message.
* **Accenting:** It may accent or underline a verbal message. Pounding the table, for example, can underline the importance of your message.

Source: The Importance of Effective Communication, Edward G. Wertheim, Ph.D.

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## Types of nonverbal communication

The many different types of nonverbal communication or body language include:

**Facial expressions.** The human face is extremely expressive, able to convey countless emotions without saying a word. And unlike some forms of nonverbal communication, facial expressions are universal. The facial expressions for happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, fear, and disgust are the same across cultures.

**Body movement and posture.** Consider how your perceptions of people are affected by the way they sit, walk, stand, or hold their head. The way you move and carry yourself communicates a wealth of information to the world. This type of nonverbal communication includes your posture, bearing, stance, and the subtle movements you make.

**Gestures.** Gestures are woven into the fabric of our daily lives. You may wave, point, beckon, or use your hands when arguing or speaking animatedly, often expressing yourself with gestures without thinking. However, the meaning of some gestures can be very different across cultures. While the “OK” sign made with the hand, for example, usually conveys a positive message in English-speaking countries, it's considered offensive in countries such as Germany, Russia, and Brazil. So, it's important to be careful of how you use gestures to avoid misinterpretation.

**Eye contact.** Since the visual sense is dominant for most people, eye contact is an especially important type of nonverbal communication. The way you look at someone can communicate many things, including interest, affection, hostility, or attraction. Eye contact is also important in maintaining the flow of conversation and for gauging the other person's interest and response.

**Touch.** We communicate a great deal through touch. Think about the very different messages given by a weak handshake, a warm bear hug, a patronizing pat on the head, or a controlling grip on the arm, for example.

**Space.** Have you ever felt uncomfortable during a conversation because the other person was standing too close and invading your space? We all have a need for physical space, although that need differs depending on the culture, the situation, and the closeness of the relationship. You can use physical space to communicate many different nonverbal messages, including signals of intimacy and affection, aggression or dominance.

**Voice.** It's not just what you say, it's how you say it. When you speak, other people “read” your voice in addition to listening to your words. Things they pay attention to include your timing and pace, how loud you speak, your tone and inflection, and sounds that convey understanding, such as “ahh” and “uh-huh.” Think about how your tone of voice can indicate sarcasm, anger, affection, or confidence.

### Can nonverbal communication be faked?

There are many books and websites that offer advice on how to use body language to your advantage. For example, they may instruct you on how to sit a certain way, steeple your fingers, or shake hands in order to appear confident or assert dominance. But the truth is that such tricks aren't likely to work (unless you truly feel confident and in charge). That's because you can't control all of the signals you're constantly sending about what you're really thinking and feeling. And the harder you try, the more unnatural your signals are likely to come across.

However, that doesn't mean that you have no control over your nonverbal cues. For example, if you disagree with or dislike what someone's saying, you may use negative body language to rebuff the person's message, such as crossing your arms, avoiding eye contact, or tapping your feet. You don't have to agree, or even like what's being said, but to communicate effectively and not put the other person on the defensive, you can make a conscious effort to avoid sending negative signals—by maintaining an open stance and truly attempting to understand what they're saying, and why.

## How nonverbal communication can go wrong

What you communicate through your body language and nonverbal signals affects how others see you, how well they like and respect you, and whether or not they trust you. Unfortunately, many people send confusing or negative nonverbal signals without even knowing it. When this happens, both connection and trust in relationships are damaged, as the following examples highlight:

* **Jack** believes he gets along great with his colleagues at work, but if you were to ask any of them, they would say that Jack is “intimidating” and “very intense.” Rather than just look at you, he seems to devour you with his eyes. And if he takes your hand, he lunges to get it and then squeezes so hard it hurts. Jack is a caring guy who secretly wishes he had more friends, but his nonverbal awkwardness keeps people at a distance and limits his ability to advance at work.
* **Arlene** is attractive and has no problem meeting eligible men, but she has a difficult time maintaining a relationship for longer than a few months. Arlene is funny and interesting, but even though she constantly laughs and smiles, she radiates tension. Her shoulders and eyebrows are noticeably raised, her voice is shrill, and her body is stiff. Being around Arlene makes many people feel anxious and uncomfortable. Arlene has a lot going for her that is undercut by the discomfort she evokes in others.
* **Ted** thought he had found the perfect match when he met Sharon, but Sharon wasn't so sure. Ted is good looking, hardworking, and a smooth talker, but seemed to care more about his thoughts than Sharon's. When Sharon had something to say, Ted was always ready with wild eyes and a rebuttal before she could finish her thought. This made Sharon feel ignored, and soon she started dating other men. Ted loses out at work for the same reason. His inability to listen to others makes him unpopular with many of the people he most admires.

These smart, well-intentioned people struggle in their attempt to connect with others. The sad thing is that they are unaware of the nonverbal messages they communicate.

[[Read: Tips for Building a Healthy Relationship]](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/relationship-help.htm)

If you want to communicate effectively, avoid misunderstandings, and enjoy solid, trusting relationships both socially and professionally, it's important to understand how to use and interpret body language and improve your nonverbal communication skills.

## How to improve nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is a rapidly flowing back-and-forth process that requires your full focus on the moment-to-moment experience. If you're planning what you're going to say next, checking your phone, or thinking about something else, you're almost certain to miss nonverbal cues and not fully understand the subtleties of what's being communicated. As well as being fully present, you can improve how you communicate nonverbally by learning to manage stress and developing your emotional awareness.

### Learn to manage stress in the moment

Stress compromises your ability to communicate. When you're stressed out, you're more likely to misread other people, send confusing or off-putting nonverbal signals, and lapse into unhealthy knee-jerk patterns of behavior. And remember: emotions are contagious. If you are upset, it is very likely to make others upset, thus making a bad situation worse.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by stress, take a time out. Take a moment to calm down before you jump back into the conversation. Once you've regained your emotional equilibrium, you'll feel better equipped to deal with the situation in a positive way.

The fastest and surest way to calm yourself and manage stress in the moment is to employ your senses—what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch—or through a soothing movement. By viewing a photo of your child or pet, smelling a favorite scent, listening to a certain piece of music, or squeezing a stress ball, for example, you can quickly relax and refocus. Since everyone responds differently, you may need to experiment to [find the sensory experience](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/quick-stress-relief.htm) that works best for you.

### Develop your emotional awareness

In order to send accurate nonverbal cues, you need to be aware of your emotions and how they influence you. You also need to be able to recognize the emotions of others and the true feelings behind the cues they are sending. This is where emotional awareness comes in.

[[Read: Improving Emotional Intelligence (EQ)]](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-eq.htm)

Being emotionally aware enables you to:

* Accurately read other people, including the emotions they're feeling and the unspoken messages they're sending.
* Create trust in relationships by sending nonverbal signals that match up with your words.
* Respond in ways that show others that you understand and care.

Many of us are disconnected from our emotions—especially strong emotions such as anger, sadness, fear—because we've been taught to try to shut off our feelings. But while you can deny or numb your feelings, you can't eliminate them. They're still there and they're still affecting your behavior. By developing your emotional awareness and connecting with even the unpleasant emotions, though, you'll gain greater control over how you think and act. To start developing your emotional awareness, practice the mindfulness meditation in HelpGuide's free [Emotional Intelligence Toolkit](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/emotional-intelligence-toolkit.htm).

## How to read body language

Once you've developed your abilities to manage stress and recognize emotions, you'll start to become better at reading the nonverbal signals sent by others. It's also important to:

**Pay attention to inconsistencies.** Nonverbal communication should reinforce what is being said. Is the person saying one thing, but their body language conveying something else? For example, are they telling you “yes” while shaking their head no?

**Look at nonverbal communication signals as a group.** Don't read too much into a single gesture or nonverbal cue. Consider all of the nonverbal signals you are receiving, from eye contact to tone of voice and body language. Taken together, are their nonverbal cues consistent—or inconsistent—with what their words are saying?

**Trust your instincts.** Don't dismiss your gut feelings. If you get the sense that someone isn't being honest or that something isn't adding up, you may be picking up on a mismatch between verbal and nonverbal cues.

### Evaluating nonverbal signals

**Eye contact** – Is the person making eye contact? If so, is it overly intense or just right?

**Facial expression** – What is their face showing? Is it masklike and unexpressive, or emotionally present and filled with interest?

**Tone of voice** – Does the person's voice project warmth, confidence, and interest, or is it strained and blocked?

**Posture and gesture** – Is their body relaxed or stiff and immobile? Are their shoulders tense and raised, or relaxed?

**Touch** – Is there any physical contact? Is it appropriate to the situation? Does it make you feel uncomfortable?

**Intensity** – Does the person seem flat, cool, and disinterested, or over-the-top and melodramatic?

**Timing and place** – Is there an easy flow of information back and forth? Do nonverbal responses come too quickly or too slowly?

**Sounds** – Do you hear sounds that indicate interest, caring or concern from the person?

Imagine you are walking across your campus. As you pass the student center, you see a couple of people who have set up at a table outside, and they’re passing out information about the student honor society. Open windows in the music building share the sounds of someone practicing the piano in the art studio. Upon entering your class building, you are greeted by student-made posters illustrating various phases of the process of cell division. An open class door allows you to watch a young man in a lab coat and protective gear pour liquid nitrogen over items in a tray while the rest of his classmates look on with great interest. Your own instructor is setting up the computer screen at the front of your class when you walk in, loading up the Powerpoint that he plans to use for the day.

All of these are examples of presentations, and it’s very likely that you’ll be asked to participate in similar activities during your college career. Presenting, whether face-to-face or online, is a skill you will hone as a college student in preparation for your future career.

## Presentation Types

Presentations can take many forms and potentially serve many purposes. When reading the definitions below, keep in mind that many presentations often combine several elements into a hybrid form. You may have to pick and choose what will work best for you depending on the instructor and the course. Let’s start with the different genres or types of presentations.

### Informative

Some presentation assignments will ask you simply to deliver information about a topic. Often these presentations involve research, which you will shape and present to your instructor and classmates. Typically, informative presentations ask that you NOT share your opinion about the subject at hand (which can be more challenging than it seems). With an informative presentation, your goal is to educate your audience by presenting a summary of your research and “sticking to the facts.”

### Persuasive

Unlike informative presentations, persuasive presentations ask that you not only form an opinion about your subject but also convince your audience to come around to your point of view. These presentations often involve research, too, and the findings of your research will be used to bolster the persuasive case you’re making.

### Lesson Delivery

You may be asked to do a “Teaching Presentation,” which will require you to specialize in one topic of the course and give your fellow classmates instruction about it. In short, you become the teacher of a subject. Often your presentation will be the only time that this subject is covered in the class, so you will be responsible for making sure that you provide clear, detailed, and relevant information about it. You may also be asked to provide questions on the subject to be included in a quiz or test.

### Demonstration

These action-based presentations typically model some behavior or subject matter that has been introduced previously in the class. Unlike the Lesson Delivery presentation, a demonstration adds a level of performance in which you show and tell the the audience what you know. You might perform the demonstration yourself, as a way of illustrating the concept or procedure, or you might provide classmates with instructions and guidance as they do it themselves.

### Poster

Poster presentations should convey all the information on a subject necessary for a viewer to consider on her own. They often consist of short, punchy wording accompanied by strong visuals—graphs, charts, images, and/or illustrations. Posters frequently require research to prepare, and they allow for some creativity in design. Depending on the assignment, your poster may be part of a gallery of poster presentations with your classmates. Your poster has to communicate everything that is important without you being there to explain it to your audience.

### Online

Similar to poster presentations, online presentations are generally **asynchronous—**meaning they don’t require you to be present at the same time as your viewer. They often serve similar purposes as poster presentations, but due to the online format, they allow for more interactive possibilities, such as sharing a pertinent video or animated graph. Your online presentation must stand alone to teach your audience everything they need to know.

### Solo and Group Presentations

You may be asked to present as an individual or as part of a group.

**Individual presentations** put all of the responsibility for preparation, research, and delivery on you. You rightfully take all the credit for the final product you produce.

**Group presentations**, in contrast, often involve more complicated tasks and therefore require more participants to make them. Your instructor may make suggestions about how the work should be divided, or the group may delegate tasks internally. Grades may be assigned equally to everyone in the group, though many instructors assign individual grades based on some participation-level factor to inspire each member to pull his or her own weight.

Presentation assignments are often open to creative interpretation, which gives you a lot of room to explore new techniques and add a personal touch to the task.

**[](https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/courses-images-archive-read-only/wp-content/uploads/sites/1110/2016/02/19194246/13702112694_4d2257378c_b.jpg)**

## Think About Audience

Now that you’ve learned a bit about the various types of presentations, it’s helpful to turn to another important part of presenting: the audience. Like reading and writing, presenting is a form of communication. Whether you’re presenting information, giving a demonstration, creating a poster, or trying to change people’s minds, your goal is to get your message across to your audience. For that reason, it’s important to remember that they may not interpret the information you are presenting exactly as you have. It’s your job as a presenter to explain your ideas using specific details, succinct and clear wording (avoid jargon), vivid descriptions, and meaningful images. As you organize your presentation, keeping this imaginary audience in mind can help you gauge how much background information and context to provide.

## Choosing Media and Format for Visual Aids

Perhaps you’ve heard the phrase “Death by PowerPoint” to explain that all-too-familiar feeling of being slowly bored to death by a thoughtless presenter who’s droning on and on about boring slide after boring slide. If you’d like to know what the experience is about, and you have time for a laugh, watch the following video, starring stand-up comedian Don McMillan. McMillan pokes fun at bad presentations, but he has some very sound advice about what not to do.

1. Show your Passion and Connect with your Audience

**It’s hard to be relaxed and be yourself when you’re nervous.**

But time and again, the great presenters say that the most important thing is to connect with your audience, and the best way to do that is to let your passion for the subject shine through.

Be honest with the audience about what is important to you and why it matters.

**Be enthusiastic and honest, and the audience will respond.**

2. Focus on your Audience’s Needs

**Your presentation needs to be built around what your audience is going to get out of the presentation.**

As you prepare the presentation, you always need to bear in mind what the audience needs and wants to know, not what you can tell them.

While you’re giving the presentation, you also need to remain focused on your audience’s response, and react to that.

**You need to make it easy for your audience to understand and respond.**

3. Keep it Simple: Concentrate on your Core Message

**When planning your presentation, you should always keep in mind the question:**

What is the key message (or three key points) for my audience to take away?

You should be able to communicate that key message very briefly.

Some experts recommend a 30-second ‘elevator summary’, others that you can write it on the back of a business card, or say it in no more than 15 words.

Whichever rule you choose, the important thing is to keep your core message focused and brief.

**And if what you are planning to say doesn’t contribute to that core message, don’t say it.**

4. Smile and Make Eye Contact with your Audience

**This sounds very easy, but a surprisingly large number of presenters fail to do it.**

If you smile and make eye contact, you are [**building rapport**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/rapport.html), which helps the audience to connect with you and your subject. It also helps you to feel less nervous, because you are talking to individuals, not to a great mass of unknown people.

To help you with this, make sure that you don’t turn down all the lights so that only the slide screen is visible. **Your audience needs to see you as well as your slides.**

Confidence is not something that can be learned like a set of rules; confidence is a state of mind. [Positive thinking](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/positive-thinking.html), practice, training, knowledge and talking to other people are all useful ways to help improve or boost your confidence levels.

Confidence comes from feelings of well-being, acceptance of your body and mind (your self-esteem) and belief in your own ability, skills and experience. Confidence is an attribute that most people would like to possess.

What is Self-Confidence?

**Although self-confidence can mean different things to different people, in reality it simply means having faith in yourself.**

**Confidence is, in part, a result of how we have been brought up and how we've been taught. We learn from others how to think about ourselves and how to behave - these lessons affect what we believe about ourselves and other people. Confidence is also a result of our experiences and how we've learned to react to different situations.**

Self-confidence is not a static measure. Our confidence to perform roles and tasks and deal with situations can increase and decrease, and some days we may feel more confident than others.

**Low-confidence** can be a result of many factors including: fear of the unknown, criticism, being unhappy with personal appearance (self-esteem), feeling unprepared, poor time-management, lack of knowledge and previous failures. Often when we lack confidence in ourselves it is because of what we believe others will think of us. Perhaps others will laugh at us or complain or make fun if we make a mistake. Thinking like this can prevent us from doing things we want or need to do because we believe that the consequences are too painful or embarrassing.

**Over-confidence** can be a problem if it makes you believe that you can do anything - even if you don't have the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge to do it well. In such situations over-confidence can lead to failure. Being overly confident also means you are more likely to come across to other people as arrogant or egotistical. People are much more likely to take pleasure in your failure if you are perceived as arrogant.

Related Areas

**Confidence and self-esteem are not the same thing**, although they are often linked. Confidence is the term we use to describe how we feel about our ability to perform roles, functions and tasks. Self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, the way we look, the way we think - whether or not we feel worthy or valued. People with low self-esteem often also suffer from generally low confidence, but people with good self-esteem can also have low confidence. It is also perfectly possible for people with low self-esteem to be very confident in some areas.

*For more discussion see our page:*[***What is Self-Esteem?***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/self-esteem.html)*.*

**Performing a role or completing a task confidently is not about not making mistakes.** Mistakes are inevitable, especially when doing something new. Confidence includes knowing what to do when mistakes come to light and therefore is also about problem solving and decision making.

*Visit our sections on both*[***Problem Solving***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/problem-solving.html)*and*[***Decision Making***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/decision-making.html)*for more information.*

**This page provides practical advice about things that you can do to build your confidence.**

Ways to Improve Confidence

**There are two sides to improving confidence. Although the ultimate aim is to feel more confident in yourself and your abilities it is also worth considering how you can appear more confident to other people. The following list has lots of ideas on how to achieve this.**

Planning and Preparation

People often feel less confident about new or potentially difficult situations. Perhaps the most important factor in developing confidence is planning and preparing for the unknown.

If you are applying for a new job, for example, it would be a good idea to prepare for the interview. Plan what you would want to say and think about some of the questions that you may be asked.  Practise your answers with friends or colleagues and gain their feedback.

There are many other examples of planning for an interview. Perhaps you should visit the hairdresser before you go. How are you going to travel to the interview and how long will the journey take? What should you wear? Take control of unknown situations the best you can, break down tasks into smaller sub-tasks and plan as many as you can.

In some situations it may be necessary to also have contingency plans - backup plans if your main plan fails. If you had planned to travel to your interview by car but on the morning the car wouldn't start how would you get there? Being able to react calmly to the unexpected is a sign of confidence.

Learning, Knowledge and Training

**Learning and research can help us to feel more confident about our ability to handle situations, roles and tasks.**

Knowing what to expect and how and why things are done will add to your awareness and usually make you feel more prepared and ultimately more confident.

However, learning and gaining knowledge can sometimes make us feel less confident about our abilities to perform roles and tasks, and when this happens we need to combine our knowledge with experience. By doing something we have learned a lot about we put theory to practice which develops confidence and adds to the learning and comprehension.

First-time parents to-be may well feel nervous and less than confident about having a baby. They are likely to buy books or visit websites which can offer advice and dispel some of the mysteries. They are also likely to talk to other parents to gain knowledge and understanding.

In the workplace, training may be provided for staff to teach them how to manage or work with new systems and procedures. During a period of organisational change this is particularly important as many people will naturally resist changes. However if those affected by the changes are given adequate information and training then such resistances can usually be minimised as the staff feel more prepared and therefore more confident with the new system.

*See our page:*[***Lifelong Learning***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/learn/lifelong-learning.html)*for more information.*

Positive Thought

**Positive thought can be a very powerful way of improving confidence.**

If you believe that you can achieve something then you are likely to work hard to make sure you do if, however, you don't believe that you can accomplish a task then you are more likely to approach it half-heartedly and therefore be more likely to fail. The trick is convincing yourself that you can do something - with the right help, support, preparedness and knowledge.

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

**Helen Keller** - *Author, political activist, and lecturer. The first deaf and blind person to earn a BA degree in the US.*

There is a lot of information about positive thinking both online and in print. The basic rules of positive thinking are to highlight your strengths and successes and learn from your weaknesses and mistakes. This is a lot easier than it sounds, and we often dwell on things that we are not happy with from our past - making them into bigger issues than they need to be. These negative thoughts can be very damaging to confidence and your ability to achieve goals.

**Try to recondition the way you think about your life:**

* **Know your strengths and weaknesses.** Write a list of things that you are good at and things that you know need improvement. Discuss your list with friends and family as, inevitably, they will be able to add to the list. Celebrate and develop your strengths and find ways to improve or manage your weaknesses.
* **We all make mistakes.** Don't think of your mistakes as negatives but rather as learning opportunities.
* **Accept compliments and compliment yourself.** When you receive a compliment from somebody else, thank them and ask for more details; what exactly did they like? Recognise your own achievements and celebrate them by rewarding yourself and telling friends and family about them.
* **Use criticism as a learning experience**. Everybody sees the world differently, from their own perspective, and what works for one person may not work for another. Criticism is just the opinion of somebody else. Be assertive when receiving criticism, don't reply in a defensive way or let criticism lower your self-esteem. Listen to the criticism and make sure that you understand what is being said so you can use criticism as a way to learn and improve. See our page: [**Dealing with Criticism**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/dealing-with-criticism.html) for more information.
* **Try to stay generally cheerful and have a positive outlook on life.**Only complain or criticise when necessary and, when you do, do so in a constructive way. Offer others compliments and congratulate them on their successes. You may find our page [**Offering Constructive Criticism**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/constructive-criticism.html) helpful.

Talking to Others and Following Their Lead

**Find yourself a confidence role-model.**

Ideally this will be someone that you see regularly, a work colleague, a family member or a friend - somebody with a lot of self-confidence who you'd like to mirror. Observe them and notice how they behave when they are being confident. How do they move, how do they speak, what do they say and when? How do they behave when faced with a problem or mistake? How do they interact with other people and how do others react to them?

If possible talk to them to learn more about how they think and what makes them tick.

Speaking to and being around people who are confident will usually help you to feel more confident. Learn from others who are successful in fulfilling the tasks and goals that you wish to achieve - let their confidence rub off on you.

As you become more confident then offer help and advice, become a role-model for somebody less confident.

Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence.

**Vince Lombardi** - Successful American Football coach.

*Generally people are attracted to confident people - confidence is one of the main characteristics of charisma. See our page:*[***What is Charisma?***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/charisma.html)*for a full explanation.*

Experience

**As we successfully complete tasks and goals, our confidence that we can complete the same and similar tasks again increases.**

A simple example of this is driving a car. Most people who have been driving for some time do so almost automatically - they don't have to think about which peddle to push or how to handle a junction in the road, they just do it. This contrasts to a learner driver who will probably feel nervous and have to concentrate hard. The learner lacks experience and therefore confidence in their ability to drive.

Gaining experience and taking the first step can, however, be very difficult. Often the thought of starting something new is worse than actually doing it. This is where preparation, learning and thinking positively can help.

Break roles and tasks down into small achievable goals. Make each one of your goals fit SMART criteria. That is to make goals Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timed. Our page [**Setting Personal Goals**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/setting-personal-goals.html) explains this in more detail.

Whatever you do, aim to become as good as you can. The better you are at doing something the more confident you become.

Be Assertive

**Being assertive means standing up for what you believe in and sticking to your principles.**

Being assertive also means that you can change your mind if you believe it is the right thing to do, not because you are under pressure from somebody else.

Assertiveness, confidence and self-esteem are all very closely linked - usually people become naturally more assertive as they develop their confidence.

*See our*[***Assertiveness***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness.html)*section and*[***Assertiveness Techniques***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness-techniques.html)*page for more information.*

Keep Calm

**There is usually a correlation between confidence and calmness.**

If you feel confident about a task then you will likely feel calm about doing it. When you feel less confident you are more likely to be stressed or nervous.

Trying to remain calm, even when you're under stress and pressure, will tend to make you feel more confident.

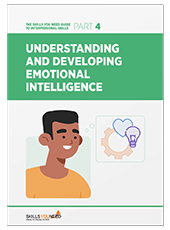
To do this it is useful to learn how to relax. Learn at least one relaxation technique that works for you and that you can use if you're feeling stressed. This may be as simple as taking some deliberate deep breaths both in and out. For more ideas see our page, [**Relaxation Techniques**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/relax.html).

Avoid Arrogance

**Arrogance is detrimental to interpersonal relationships.**

As your confidence grows and you become successful, avoid feeling or acting superior to others. Remember - nobody is perfect and there is always more that you can learn. Celebrate your strengths and successes, and recognise your weaknesses and failures. Give others credit for their work - use compliments and praise sincerely. Be courteous and polite, show an interest in what others are doing, ask questions and get involved.

Admit to your mistakes and be prepared to laugh at yourself!

[](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/shop/interpersonal-skills-guide.html)

Further Reading from Skills You Need

[**Understanding and Developing Emotional Intelligence**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/shop/interpersonal-skills-guide.html)

Learn more about emotional intelligence and how to effectively manage personal relationships at home, at work and socially.

Our eBooks are ideal for anyone who wants to learn about or develop their interpersonal skills, and are full of easy-to-follow, practical information.

Developing Your Self-Confidence Skills

**Self-confidence can diminish over time if you don't practise your skills or if you hit set-backs. As you become more self-confident you should continue to practise your skills to maintain and boost your confidence further.**

Set yourself '*confidence targets*' that require you to step out of your comfort zone and do things that make you feel a degree of nervousness or apprehension.

Potential confidence targets may include:

* **Start a task or project that you've been putting off for a long time.** Often we put off starting important tasks because they seem overwhelming, difficult or awkward to complete. Simply making a start on such a task can boost confidence and make you more inclined to complete it.
* **Make a complaint in a restaurant if there is a problem with your order.** If you would not usually complain about a problem then doing so is a good way to improve your confidence and assertiveness skills. Our page [**How to Complain, Effectively**](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/effective-complaints.html) can help with this.
* **Stand up and ask a question at a public meeting or in a group.** By doing this you are making yourself the centre of attention for a few minutes.
* **Volunteer to give a presentation or make a speech.** For many people speaking to a group of people is a particularly scary prospect. The best way to overcome this fear and gain confidence is with experience.
* **Introduce yourself to somebody new.** This could be somewhere where people have something in common - like at a party or a conference, making it potentially easier to have a conversation. Or you could talk to a complete stranger in a lift/elevator.
* **Wear something that will draw attention - such as a garish colour.** Personal appearance is an important factor in self-esteem and people with lower self-esteem tend to try not to be noticed. Make a statement and stand out in a crowd!
* **Join a group or class in your community.** You will potentially benefit in lots of different ways by meeting new local people and learning new things while improving your confidence.
* **Take an unfamiliar journey on public transport.** Travelling to a new place using an unfamiliar route and with random people will make most people feel at least slightly uncomfortable.

How do you feel about each of the ideas on the list above? Perhaps some gave you minor feelings of butterflies whereas others filled you with dread. Although the list uses common examples of potentially confidence-boosting tasks none may be right for you. Think of some confidence targets that are right for you - then start with easier ones and build up.

## **1. Become a self-critic.**

The very first and most important step for developing critical thinking skills is becoming a critic of your own thoughts and actions. Without self-reflection, there can’t be growth. You can break down your own thoughts by [asking yourself why](https://www.success.com/article/ask-these-6-questions-to-make-rational-decisions) you believe something. When you do this, you need to clarify your thoughts by assessing this information objectively and finding a solid logic to what you believe, rather than just a muddled idea. Why do I believe this? Can I think of examples in my life when this proved true or false? Am I attached to this idea emotionally? Why? When we self-reflect, we are able to observe how we respond to a situation, in our minds and out loud.

Another aspect of becoming a self-critic is [acknowledging your strengths](https://www.success.com/article/answer-3-questions-to-identify-your-strengths), weaknesses, personal preferences and biases. When you know this information, you can understand why you approach certain situations from a specific perspective, and then you can step around that viewpoint because you are aware of its presence.

## **2.**[Active listening.](https://www.success.com/article/9-tips-to-become-a-better-listener)

Thinking and listening are nearly impossible to do at the same time. To become a critical thinker, you need to be able to listen to others’ ideas, arguments and criticisms without thinking of your response or reaction while they are speaking. You can’t properly absorb the information someone is trying to convey to you if you don’t take the time to truly listen. [Listening allows us to feel empathy.](https://www.success.com/article/how-to-be-more-empathetic-in-conversations) We hear someone else’s story, struggles, ideas, successes and passions, and how they reached them. When we hear their perspective, we can take that information and analyze it. When we use active listening skills, we can fully understand what someone is trying to tell us because that conversation continues until all parties can reiterate what the other is trying to say

## **3. Analyzing information.**

Analyzing information is paramount for critical thinking. No one thinks critically at all times. Sometimes our joy, anger, sadness or other emotions are too great, and other times we struggle to focus on the central issue at hand. [To reach success](https://www.success.com/blog/5-daily-habits-of-highly-successful-people), we need to analyze the information before us, whether it is information in our mind or being shared by others. We can break it down by assessing what is being said, and ensuring that we clearly understand what it is that needs to happen. Then we can dissect and appraise all arguments, including our own, and think about how the decisions would impact others, as well as the bottom line. When we can step back and analyze an argument, it allows us to approach it from an objective viewpoint.

## **4.**[Nonviolent communication.](https://www.success.com/article/how-to-control-your-anger)

Critical thinking isn’t much help if you can’t communicate in a nonviolent, productive way. When listening and analyzing different arguments, you first need the ability to [recognize valid logic](https://www.success.com/article/7-big-fat-lies-that-critics-will-tell-you). Then you need to be able to communicate with other people in a productive way. The basis of nonviolent communication is compassion, observation and collaboration. When we approach any scenario with compassion, we are already in [a peaceful mindset](https://www.success.com/blog/how-to-find-peace-of-mind-in-4-simple-steps), rather than a defensive one. When we observe, we can observe our arguments and others without judgment and evaluation. We can detach our emotions from an idea. He doesn’t like my idea, so he must not like me. And collaboration naturally happens when everyone comes into the process with a compassionate, open mind, with the focus on solving the objective at hand rather than protecting anyone’s ego.

## **5. Developing foresight.**

The ability to [predict the future impact of a decision](https://www.success.com/article/5-ways-to-make-sure-you-dont-regret-your-next-decision) is foresight. Foresight is a critical component for success in all aspects of your life. When you move somewhere, you plan ahead to see what the job outlook is and the safety of a neighborhood. If you are moving a business, it is wise to examine the impact of that decision. Will it be too far for some of your talented employees to drive? Will you lose business because of the change? What will you gain? Every decision should be weighed carefully, with consideration of how the choice affects your bottom line, but also for the people who are working toward success alongside you.

Critical thinking requires the ability to reflect on one’s own beliefs, as well as someone else’s ideas, and then see the connections between those things. It requires the ability to actively listen to others, to assess, dissect and appraise arguments, and to separate intense emotions from the topic at hand

5. Start Strongly

**The beginning of your presentation is crucial. You need to grab your audience’s attention and hold it.**

They will give you a few minutes’ grace in which to entertain them, before they start to switch off if you’re dull. So don’t waste that on explaining who you are. Start by entertaining them.

**Try a story (see tip 7 below), or an attention-grabbing (but useful) image on a slide.**

6. Remember the 10-20-30 Rule for Slideshows

This is a tip from Guy Kawasaki of Apple. He suggests that slideshows should:

* Contain no more than 10 slides;
* Last no more than 20 minutes; and
* Use a font size of no less than 30 point.

This last is particularly important as it stops you trying to put too much information on any one slide. This whole approach avoids the dreaded ‘Death by PowerPoint’.

As a general rule, slides should be the sideshow to you, the presenter. A good set of slides should be no use without the presenter, and they should definitely contain less, rather than more, information, expressed simply.

If you need to provide more information, create a bespoke handout and give it out **after** your presentation.

7. Tell Stories

**Human beings are programmed to respond to stories.**

Stories help us to pay attention, and also to remember things. If you can use stories in your presentation, your audience is more likely to engage and to remember your points afterwards. It is a good idea to start with a story, but there is a wider point too: you need your presentation to act like a story.

**Think about what story you are trying to tell your audience, and create your presentation to tell it.**

Finding The Story Behind Your Presentation

To effectively tell a story, focus on using at least one of the two most basic storytelling mechanics in your presentation:

1. **Focusing On Characters** – People have stories; things, data, and objects do not. So ask yourself “who” is directly involved in your topic that you can use as the focal point of your story.

For example, instead of talking about cars (your company’s products), you could focus on specific characters like:

* + The drivers the car is intended for – people looking for speed and adventure
  + The engineers who went out of their way to design the most cost-effective car imaginable

1. **A Changing Dynamic** – A story needs something to change along the way. So ask yourself “What is not as it should be?” and answer with what you are going to do about it (or what you did about it).

For example…

* + Did hazardous road conditions inspire you to build a rugged, all-terrain jeep that any family could afford?
  + Did a complicated and confusing food labelling system lead you to establish a colour-coded nutritional index so that anybody could easily understand it?

*To see 15 more actionable storytelling tips, see Nuts & Bolts Speed Training’s post on*[*Storytelling Tips*](https://nutsandboltsspeedtraining.com/powerpoint-tutorials/storytelling-tips/)*.*

8. Use your Voice Effectively

The spoken word is actually a pretty inefficient means of communication, because it uses only one of your audience’s five senses. That’s why presenters tend to use visual aids, too. But you can help to make the spoken word better by using your voice effectively.

Varying the speed at which you talk, and emphasising changes in pitch and tone all help to make your voice more interesting and hold your audience’s attention.

*For more about this, see our page on*[***Effective Speaking***](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/effective-speaking.html)*.*

9. Use your Body Too

**It has been estimated that more than three quarters of communication is non-verbal.**

That means that as well as your tone of voice, your body language is crucial to getting your message across. Make sure that you are giving the right messages: body language to avoid includes crossed arms, hands held behind your back or in your pockets, and pacing the stage.

**Make your gestures open and confident, and move naturally around the stage, and among the audience too, if possible.**

10. Relax, Breathe and Enjoy

**If you find presenting difficult, it can be hard to be calm and relaxed about doing it.**

One option is to start by concentrating on your breathing. Slow it down, and make sure that you’re breathing fully. Make sure that you continue to pause for breath occasionally during your presentation too.