

STRATEGY

12 things people decide within seconds of meeting you

[Shana Lebowitz](#), [Allana Akhtar](#), and [Caroline Hroncich](#) Updated Feb 10, 2020, 5:21 PM GMT+3



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Psychologists call it "thin slicing."

Within moments of meeting you, people decide all sorts of things about you, from status to intelligence to conscientiousness.

Career experts say it takes just *three seconds* for someone to determine whether they like you and want to do business with you. It also only takes three seconds for someone to decide if they are attracted to you, according to research from the University of Pennsylvania.

Fortunately, you have some control over the way others see you. For example, wearing tailored clothes and looking your conversation partner in the eye will generally create a more positive impression. But as for how aggressive you seem? That's largely determined by your facial structure.

Here, we've rounded up 12 assumptions people make about you — sometimes accurate and sometimes less so — based on first impressions. Read on to find out what signals you might be giving off.

Drake Baer and Yu Han contributed reporting on a previous version of this article.

People judge how much they should trust another person after only just meeting them.

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People may decide on your trustworthiness in as little as a tenth of a second.

Princeton researchers found this out by giving one group of 245 university students 100 milliseconds to rate the attractiveness, competence, likability, aggressiveness, and trustworthiness of actors' faces.

One hundred and twenty-eight members of another group were able to take as long as they wanted. Results showed that ratings of trustworthiness were highly similar between the two groups — even more similar than ratings of attractiveness — suggesting that we figure out almost instantaneously if we can trust someone.

People also judge your socioeconomic status just by looking at you.

lechatnoir/Getty Images

A small Dutch study found that people wearing name-brand clothes — Lacoste and Tommy Hilfiger, to be precise — were seen as higher status and wealthier than folks wearing nondesigner clothes when they approached 80 shoppers in a mall.

"Perceptions did not differ on any of the other dimensions that might affect the outcome of social interactions," the authors wrote. "There were no differences in perceived attractiveness, kindness, and trustworthiness."

Just status and wealth.

People determine how smart they think you are after just meeting you.

Dan Kitwood / Getty Images

A 2007 study led by Nora A. Murphy, a professor at Loyola Marymount University, found that looking your conversation partner in the eye might help encourage people to see you as more intelligent.

For the study, 182 college students were asked to discuss an assigned topic in pairs for five minutes. Partners then rated each other on how smart they seemed. Results showed that people were perceived as more intelligent when they held their partner's gaze while talking.

"Looking while speaking was a key behavior," she wrote.

Wearing thick glasses and speaking expressively could help, too.

Your appearance can also signal how dominant people think you are.

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Bald isn't just beautiful, it's powerful.

In a small University of Pennsylvania experiment, undergrads looked at 25 photos of men, some with shaved heads and others with full heads of hair. The students rated men with shaved heads as more dominant.

Two larger follow-up experiments with 344 and 552 adults, respectively, had similar results. Participants tended to rate bald men — those who'd had their hair either digitally removed or those with shaved heads — as more dominant.

Importantly, researchers found that it was specifically *shaved* heads that people seemed to associate with dominance — not just the lack of hair. So if it's starting to go, you might want to shave it.

If you want to look successful, get your clothes tailored.

Getty Images

A British-Turkish study of 274 people had them look at faceless photos of men in tailored vs. off-the-peg suits for five seconds. They tended to rate the guys in tailored suits as more successful.

"On the evidence of this study it appears men may be advised to purchase clothing that is well-tailored, as it can positively enhance the image they communicate to others," the authors wrote.

People aren't just judging your status — they're making assumptions about your earning potential, too.

PeopleImages/Getty Images

In a small 2011 study of college students who were shown photos of a male model dressed in either business or casual attire and then asked questions about how he'd perform in a variety of jobs, the participants tended to predict that the crisply dressed men would make more money and get promoted sooner.

People are looking to see whether you're adventurous during the first meeting.

Reuters / Anton Ferreira

People don't just read into who you are from your appearance: they're also looking at the way you move.

In a small study, a group of students were shown video clips of other students walking — some with looser gaits, some with tighter ones.

Just a few steps were needed to give the viewers a sense of the other person's personality. They tended to equate looser gaits with extroversion and adventurousness, while seeing the more clipped walkers as more neurotic. Interestingly, the participants were generally wrong in their assumptions.

People can tell if you have an aggressive personality just by your face shape.

Photographer is my life./Getty Images

Sometimes, first impressions can be totally wrong — other times they can be right on point.

A small Canadian experiment of undergraduate women found that they were able to accurately assess how aggressive 37 different men were after looking at a photograph of their faces for 39 milliseconds. The researchers measured aggression by having the men pictured play a computer game in which they had the option to steal points from another player.

Researchers also found a connection between men with larger facial width-to-height ratios (regardless of their expressions) and perceived aggression levels, and reasoned that it could be because angry expressions involve lowering the brow and raising the upper lip, which increases this ratio.

People may be able to tell how religious you are simply by looking at how you hold yourself.

Businessmen wearing Shinto vests offer prayers before the altar at the start of the new business year at Kanda Myojin Shrine in Tokyo January 6, 2014. About 3,000 company representatives visit the shrine during the first few days of the new business year, according to the shrine, to seek good luck and prosperous businesses. REUTERS/Toru Hanai

One study, led by Laura P. Neiman at the University of California at Berkeley, found that 123 undergrads could accurately assess 113 people's religiosity simply by looking at full-body photographs of those individuals. In this case, religiosity was measured by asking the individuals pictured as well as three people who knew them well to complete a questionnaire.

Those who appeared to be smiling, energetic, relaxed, and neat were judged to be more religious — and in fact, they usually were.

In just 50 milliseconds, most people can accurately predict if you consider yourself an extrovert.

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That's according to a small study led by German researchers in which people looked at photographs of hundreds of faces and rated the people pictured on different personality traits. The researchers say extroverts generally display more cheerful expressions in photographs, so they're easy to spot.

They write: "Many people attempt to express positive emotions by smiling, particularly when being photographed, but introverts seem to do so less frequently, less skillfully, and in more reserved ways than extroverts."

People make assumptions on your leadership ability just by looking at you.

Getty

Researchers asked undergrads to review headshots of close to 100 managing partners at top law firms and rate them on different personality traits, including dominance, facial maturity, likability, and trustworthiness.

The researchers combined the partners' scores on dominance and facial maturity to create a single "power" score, and combined their scores on likability and trustworthiness to create a single "warmth" score. People who scored higher on power tended to lead firms that were more profitable.

Even weirder? The same findings held true when participants looked at *college yearbook photos* of 73 of the managing partners, some of which were taken half a century earlier.

People can decide if they'd like to be friends with you a few minutes after meeting you.

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"Friendship chemistry" is a real thing.

Friendship chemistry — coined by researchers of a 2015 paper published in the Journal of Social Science — is defined as the initial connection between pals.

Those who are agreeable, or friendly; open to experience; and conscientious, or hardworking and organized are more likely to experience friendship chemistry, the researchers determined.

But if you want to make a lasting friendship it will take more than just a good first impression. It takes about 40 to 60 hours to form a casual friendship, 80 to 100 hours to be upgraded to being a friend, and about 200 hours to become good friends, one study found.