

# WHAT EVERY BODY IS SAYING

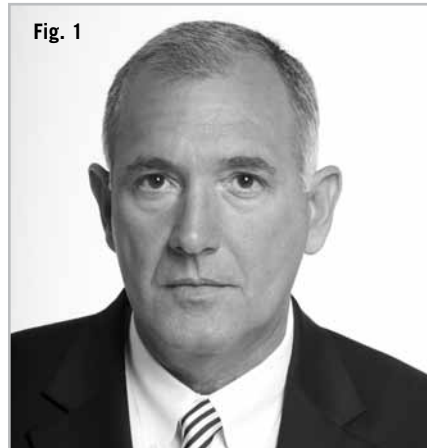
An Ex-FBI Agent's Guide  
to Speed-Reading People



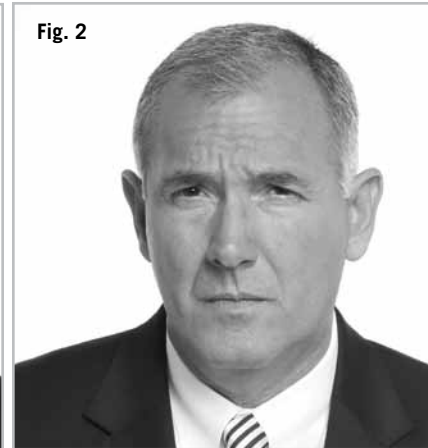
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*with Marvin Karlins, Ph.D.*



Note features of face when not stressed. Eyes are relaxed and the lips should be full.



A stressed face is tense and slightly contorted, eyebrows are knitted, and the forehead is furrowed.

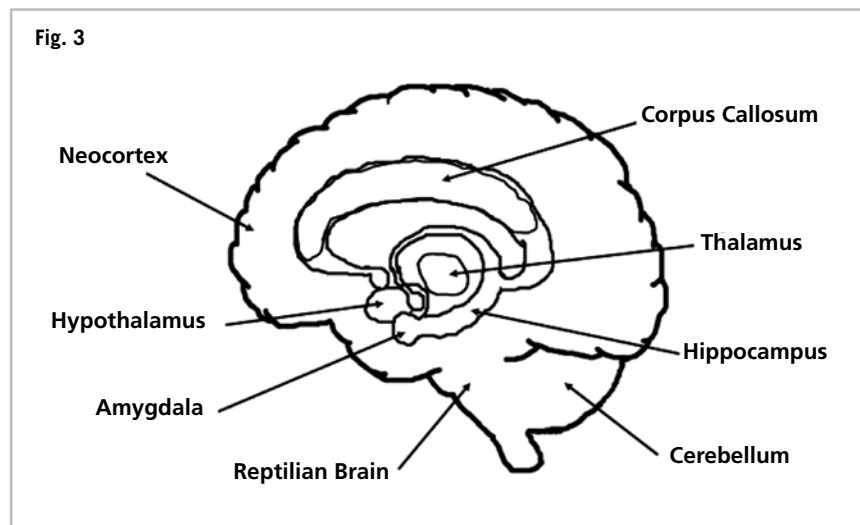


Diagram of the limbic brain with major features such as the amygdala and the hippocampus.



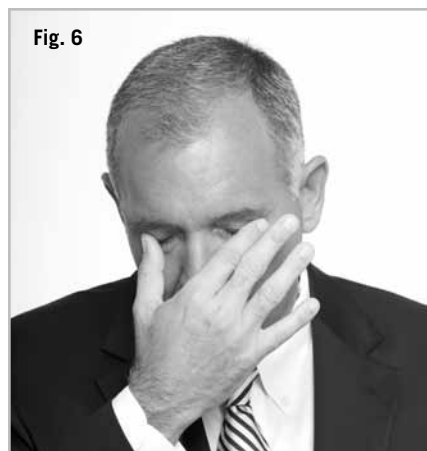
**Fig. 4**

The “turtle effect” (shoulders rise toward the ears) is often seen when people are humbled or suddenly lose confidence.



**Fig. 5**

People lean away from each other subconsciously when they disagree or feel uncomfortable around each other.



**Fig. 6**

Eye blocking is a very powerful display of consternation, disbelief, or disagreement.



Fig. 7  
Covering of the neck dimple pacifies insecurities, emotional discomfort, fear, or concerns in real time. Playing with a necklace often serves the same purpose.



Fig. 8  
Rubbing of the forehead is usually a good indicator that a person is struggling with something or is undergoing slight to severe discomfort.



Fig. 9  
Neck touching takes place when there is emotional discomfort, doubt, or insecurity.

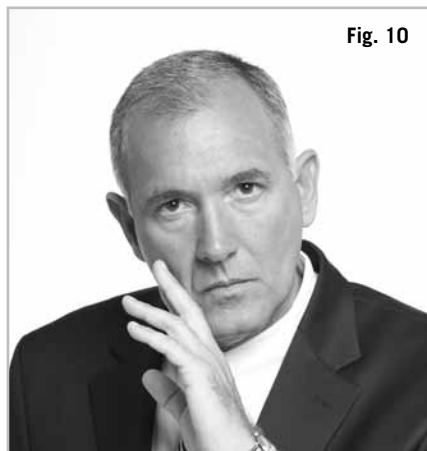


Fig. 10  
Cheek or face touching is a way to pacify when nervous, irritated, or concerned.

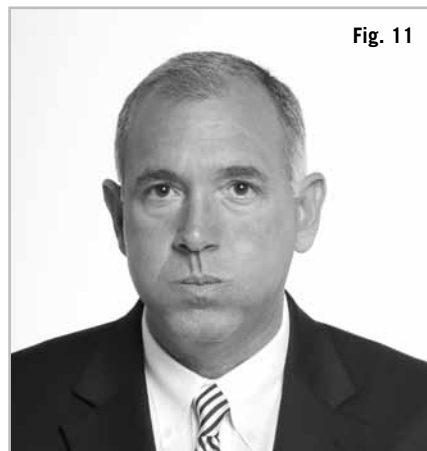
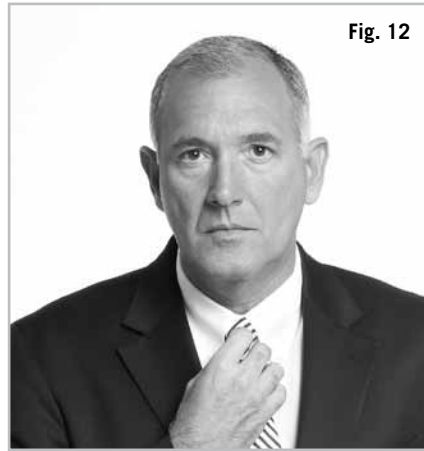
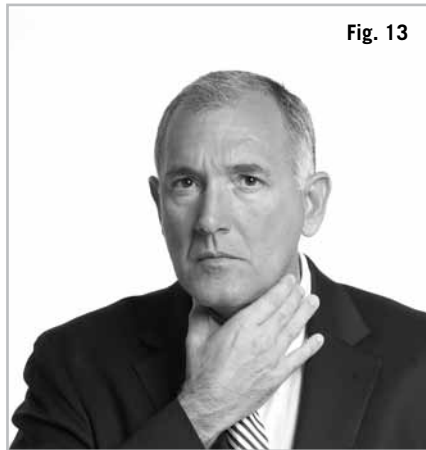


Fig. 11  
Exhaling with puffed out cheeks is a great way to release stress and to pacify. Notice how often people do this after a near mishap.



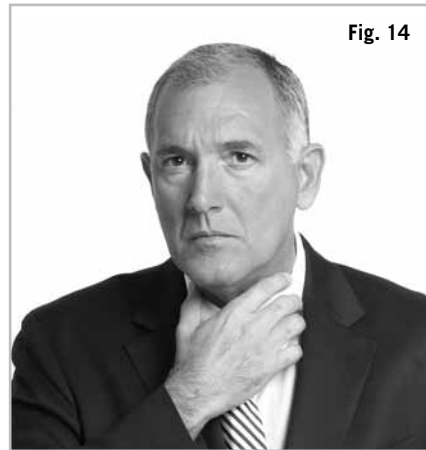
**Fig. 12**

Men adjust their ties to deal with insecurities or discomfort. It also covers the suprasternal notch.



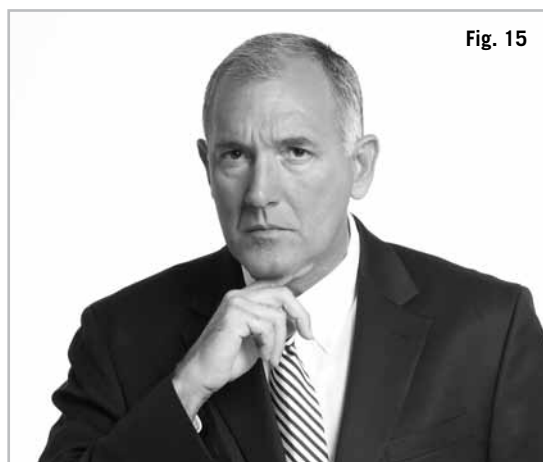
**Fig. 13**

Men tend to massage or stroke their necks to pacify distress. This area is rich with nerves, including the vagus nerve, which when massaged will slow down the heart rate.



**Fig. 14**

Men typically cover their necks more robustly than women as a way to deal with discomfort or insecurity.



**Fig. 15**

Even a brief touch of the neck will serve to assuage anxiety or discomfort. Neck touching or massaging is a powerful and universal stress reliever and pacifier.



**Fig. 16**

When stressed or nervous, people will “cleanse” their palms on their laps in order to pacify themselves. Often missed under tables, it is a very accurate indicator of discomfort or anxiety.



**Fig. 17**

Ventilating of the neck area relieves stress and emotional discomfort. Rodney Dangerfield, the comedian, was famous for doing this when he wasn’t getting any “respect.”



**Fig. 18**

Where one foot points and turns away during a conversation, this is a sign the person has to leave, precisely in that direction. This is an intention cue.



**Fig. 19**

Clasping of the knees and shifting of weight on the feet is an intention cue that the person wants to get up and leave.



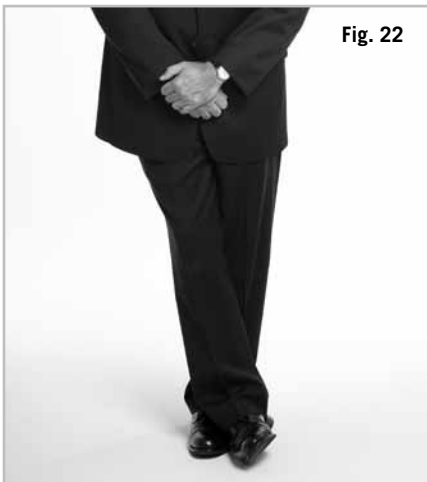
**Fig. 20**

When the toes point upward as in this photograph, it usually means the person is in a good mood or is thinking or hearing something positive.



**Fig. 21**

When feet shift from flat footed to the "starter's position," this is an intention cue that the person wants to go.



**Fig. 22**

We normally cross our legs when we feel comfortable. The sudden presence of someone we don't like will cause us to uncross our legs.



**Fig. 23**

When two people are talking and both have crossed their legs, this is an indication that they are very comfortable around each other.



In this photo the man has placed his right leg in such a way that the knee acts as a barrier between himself and the woman.



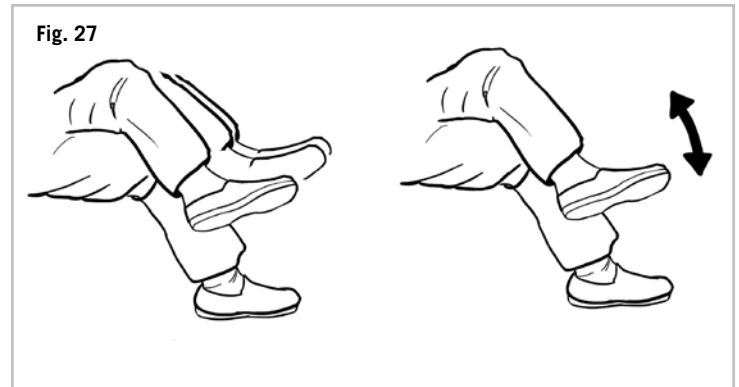
In this photo the man has positioned his leg so that the knee is further away, removing barriers between himself and the woman.





**Fig. 26**

When a person talks to you with feet pointed away, it is a good indication this person wants to be elsewhere. Watch for people who make formal declarations in this position, as this is a form of distancing.



**Fig. 27**

When a foot suddenly begins to kick, it is usually a good indicator of discomfort. You see this with people being interviewed, as soon as a question is asked they do not like.



**Fig. 28**

A sudden interlocking of the legs may suggest discomfort or insecurity. When people are comfortable, they tend to unlock their ankles.



**Fig. 29**

The sudden locking of ankles around the legs of a chair is part of the freeze response and is indicative of discomfort, anxiety, or concern.



**Fig. 30**

People lean toward each other when there is high comfort and agreement. This mirroring or isopraxis starts when we are babies.



**Fig. 31**

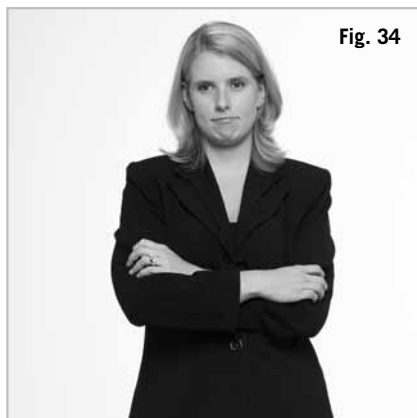
We lean away from things and people we don't like, even from colleagues when they say things with which we don't agree.



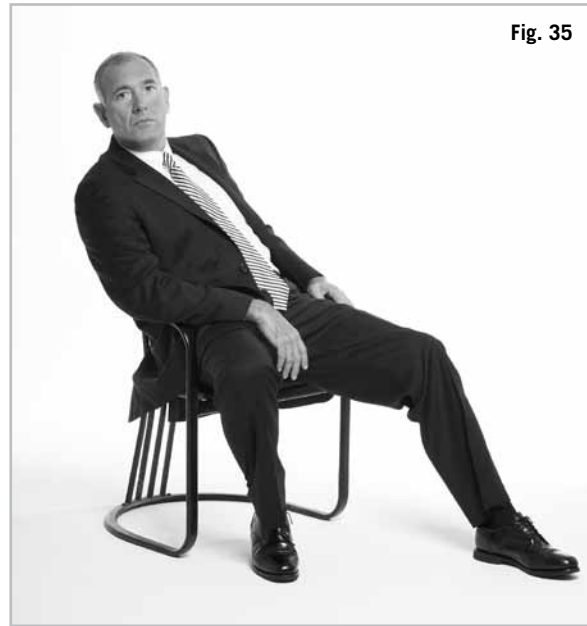
A sudden crossing of the arms during a conversation could indicate discomfort.



In public, many of us comfortably cross our arms while waiting or listening to a speaker. Around the house we rarely sit this way unless something is bothering us, like waiting for a late ride.

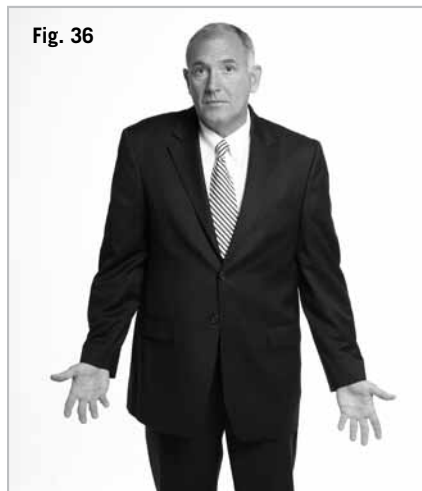


Crossed arms with hands tightly gripping the arms is definitely an indication of discomfort.



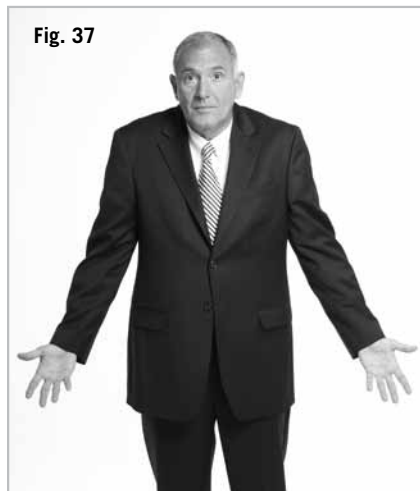
**Fig. 35**

Spreading out is a territorial display, which is OK in your own home but not in the work place, especially during a job interview.



**Fig. 36**

Partial shoulder shrugs indicate lack of commitment or insecurity.



**Fig. 37**

We use shoulder shrugs to indicate lack of knowledge or doubt. Look for both shoulders to rise; when only one side rises, the message is dubious.

**Fig. 38**



Shoulders rising toward the ears causes the "turtle effect"; weakness, insecurity, and negative emotions are the message. Think of losing athletes walking back to the locker room.

**Fig. 39**



Sometimes called the "regal stance," arms behind the back mean "don't draw near." You see royalty using this behavior to keep people at a distance.

**Fig. 40**



Arms akimbo is a powerful territorial display that can be used to establish dominance or to communicate that there are "issues."

**Fig. 41**



Women tend to use arms akimbo less than men. Note the position of the thumbs in this photograph.

**Fig. 42**

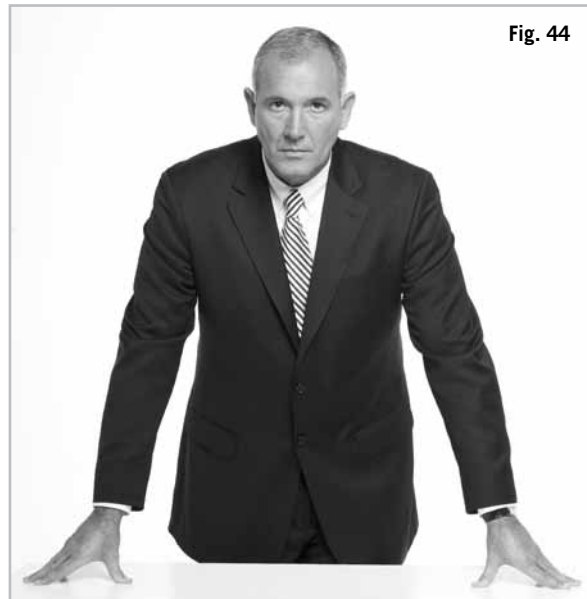


In this photo the arms are akimbo, but note that the thumbs are forward. This is a more inquisitive, less authoritarian position than in the previous photo, where the thumbs are back in the “there are issues” position.

**Fig. 43**

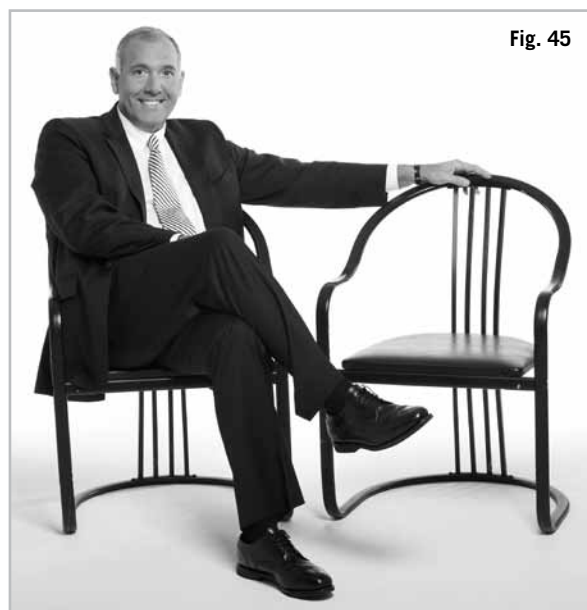


Interlaced hands behind the head are indicative of comfort and dominance. Usually the senior person at a meeting will pose or “hood” this way.



**Fig. 44**

Fingertips planted spread apart on a surface are a significant territorial display of confidence and authority.



**Fig. 45**

Arms spread out over chairs tell the world you are feeling confident and comfortable.

**Fig. 46**



Perhaps one of the most offensive gestures we possess is finger pointing. It has negative connotations around the globe.

**Fig. 47**



Self-preening is acceptable, but not when others are talking to you. This is a sign of dismissiveness.

**Fig. 48**

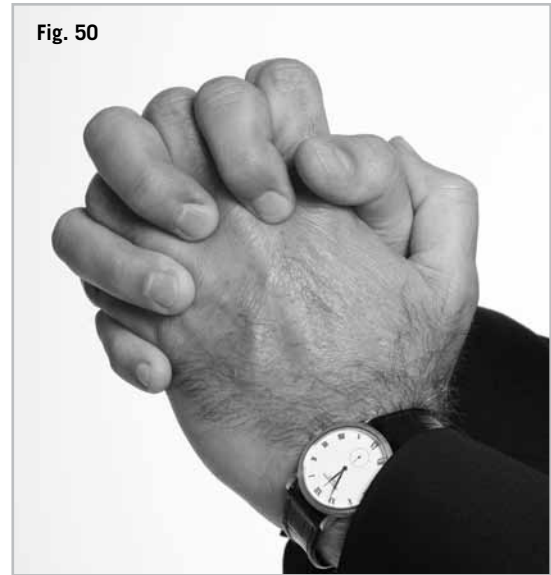


Nail-biting is generally perceived as a sign of insecurity or nervousness.





Steepling of hands, fingertip to fingertip, is one of the most powerful displays of confidence we possess.



Hand-wringing is a universal way of showing we are stressed or concerned.



Often seen with high-status individuals, the thumb sticking out of the pocket is a high-confidence display.



**Fig. 52**

Thumbs up is usually a good indication of positive thoughts. This can be very fluid during a conversation.



**Fig. 53**

The thumbs can suddenly disappear, as in this photo, when there is less emphasis or emotions turn negative.



**Fig. 54**

Thumbs in the pocket indicate low status and confidence. People in authority should avoid this display because it sends the wrong message.

**Fig. 55**



Often used as a sign of insecurity or social discomfort, thumbs in the pocket transmit this message readily and thus should be avoided.

**Fig. 56**



Using the hands to frame the genitals is often seen with young males and females during the courtship years. It is a dominance display.

**Fig. 57**

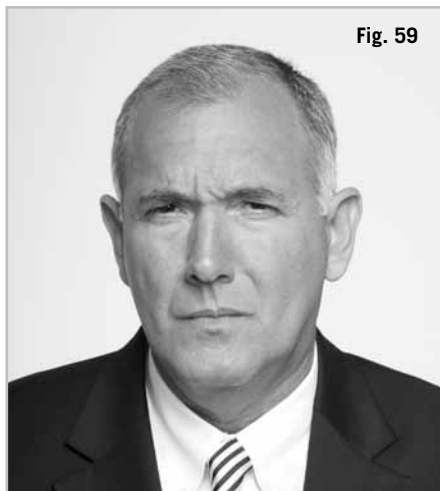


We often pacify anxiety or nervousness by stroking our fingers across the palm or rubbing our hands together.

**Fig. 58**



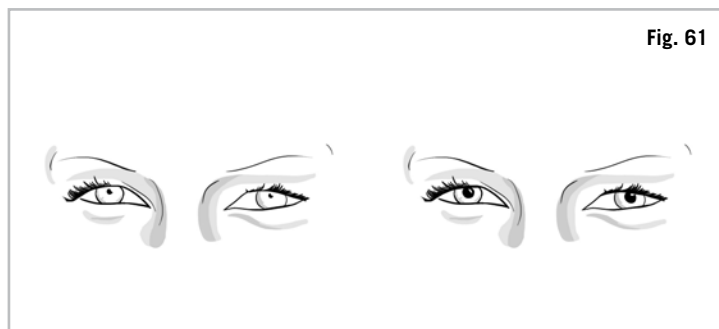
When the fingers interlace to rub up and down, as in this photo, the brain is asking for extra hand contact to pacify more serious concerns or anxiety.



Squinting, furrowing of the forehead, and facial contortions are indicative of distress or discomfort.



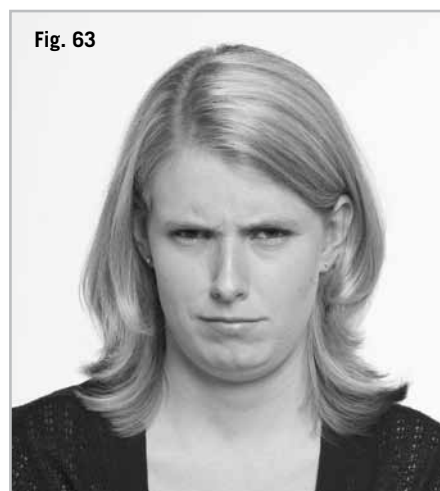
Head tilt says in a powerful way, "I am comfortable, I am receptive, I am friendly." It is very difficult to do this around people we don't like.



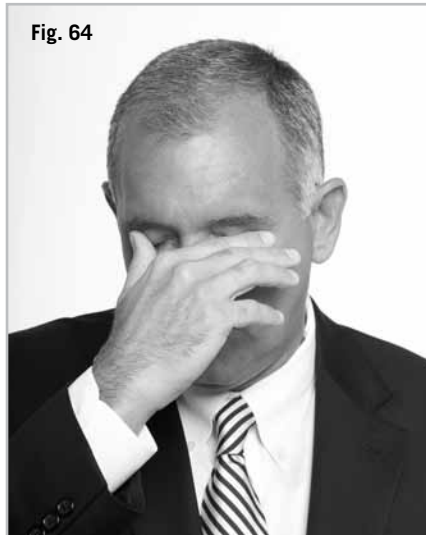
In this diagram you can see pupil dilation and constriction. From birth we find comfort in dilated pupils, especially those with whom we are emotionally attached.



We squint to block out light or objectionable things. We squint when we are angry or even when we hear voices, sounds, or music we don't like.



Squinting can be very brief—1/8 of second—but in real time may reflect a negative thought or emotion.



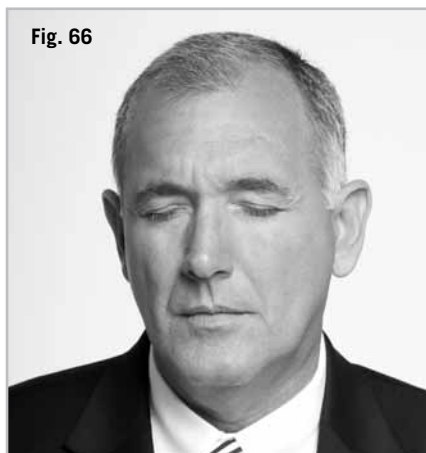
**Fig. 64**

Eye blocking with the hands is an effective way of saying, "I don't like what I just heard, saw, or learned."



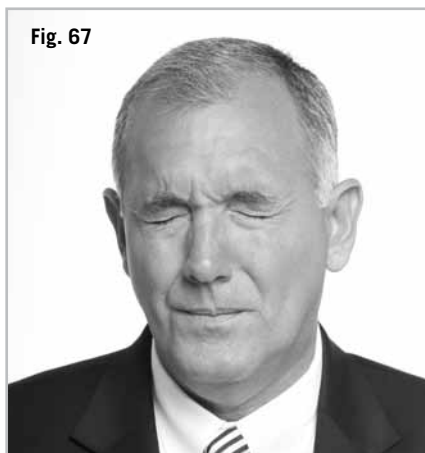
**Fig. 65**

A brief touch of the eyes during a conversation may give you a clue to a person's negative perception of what is being discussed.



**Fig. 66**

A delay in opening of the eyelids upon hearing information or a lengthy closure is indicative of negative emotions or displeasure.



**Fig. 67**

Where the lids compress tightly as in this photo, the person is trying to block out totally some negative news or event.

**Fig. 68**



When we are content, our eyes are relaxed and show little tension.

**Fig. 69**



Here the eyebrows are arched slightly, defying gravity, a sure sign of positive feelings.

**Fig. 70**



Flashbulb eyes can be seen when we are excited to see someone or are full of positive emotions we just can't hold back.

**Fig. 71**



We look askance at people when we are distrustful or unconvinced, as in this photo.

**Fig. 72**



A real smile forces the corners of the mouth up toward the eyes.

**Fig. 73**



This is a fake or “polite smile”: the corners of the mouth move toward the ears and there is little emotion in the eyes.

**Fig. 74**



When the lips disappear, there is usually stress or anxiety driving this behavior.



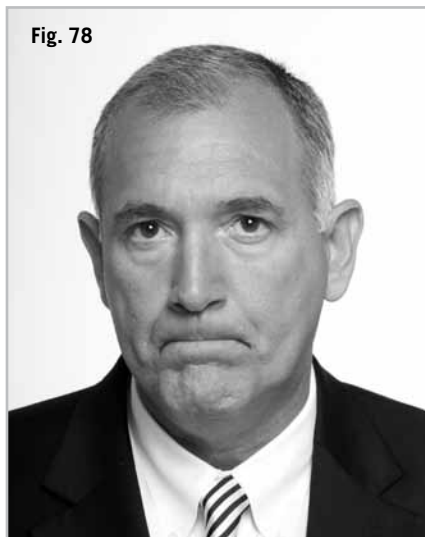
Note that when the lips are full, usually the person is content.



When there is stress, the lips will begin to disappear and tighten.



Lip compression, reflecting stress or anxiety, may progress to the point where the lips disappear, as in this photo.



When the lips disappear and the corners of the mouth turn down, emotions and confidence are at a low point, while anxiety, stress, and concerns are running high.





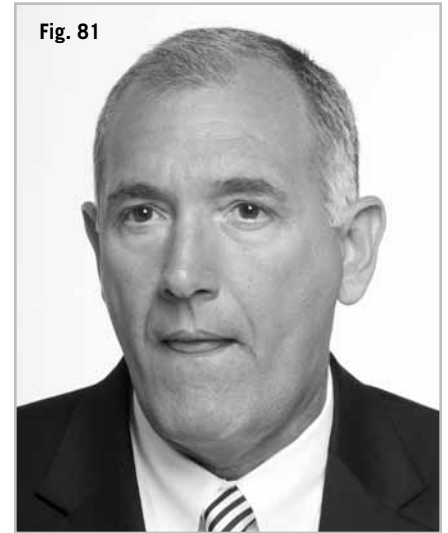
**Fig. 79**

We purse our lips or pucker them when we are in disagreement with something or someone, or we are thinking of a possible alternative.



**Fig. 80**

A sneer fleetingly signifies disrespect or disdain. It says "I care little for you or your thoughts."



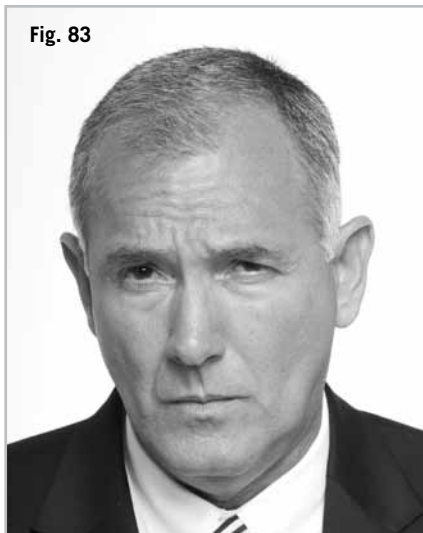
**Fig. 81**

Lip licking is a pacifying behavior that tends to soothe and calm us down. You see it in class just before a test.



**Fig. 82**

Tongue jutting is seen when people get caught doing something they shouldn't, they screw up, or they are getting away with something. It is very brief.



**Fig. 83**

A furrowed forehead is an easy way to assess for discomfort or anxiety. When we are happy and content, you hardly see this behavior.



**Fig. 84**

We wrinkle our noses to indicate dislike or disgust. This is very accurate but at times fleeting. In some cultures it is really pronounced.

**Fig. 85**



When confidence is low or we are concerned for ourselves, the chin will tuck in, forcing the nose down.

**Fig. 86**



When we feel positive, the chin comes out and the nose is high: both signs of comfort and confidence.

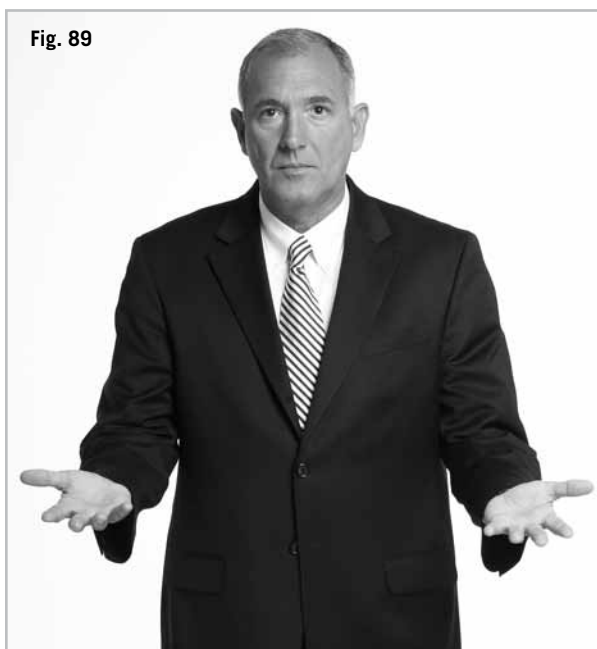
**Fig. 87**



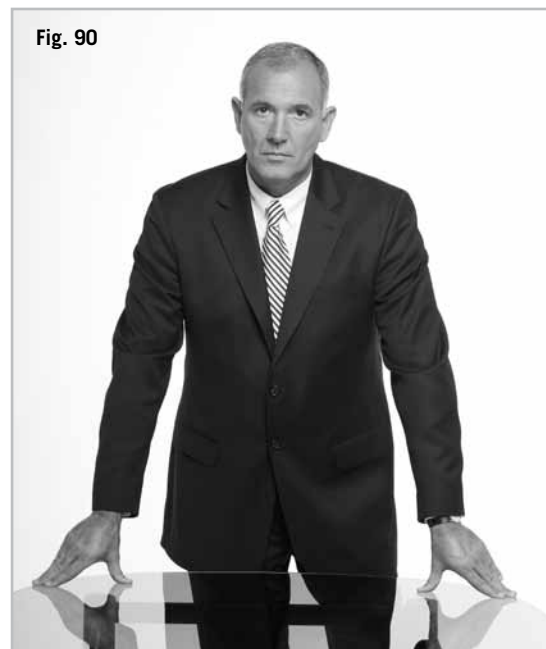
Here is an example of isopraxis: Both people are mirroring each other and leaning toward each other, showing signs of high comfort.



Sitting for long periods in a chair, as though flash frozen in an ejector seat, is evidence of high stress and discomfort.



The palms-up or "rogatory" position usually indicates the person wants to be believed or wants to be accepted. It is not a dominant, confident display.



Statements made palm down are more emphatic and more confident than statements made with hands palm up in the rogatory position.