

# Project 5 - Your Body Speaks

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Body language is an important part of speaking because it enhances your message and gives you more credibility. It also helps release any nervousness you may feel. Stance, movement, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact help communicate your message and achieve your speech's purpose. Body language should be smooth, natural and convey the same message that your listeners hear. Read **Gestures: Your Body Speaks** (Catalog No. 201), which you received in your New Member Kit.

## OBJECTIVES:

- Use stance, movement, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact to express your message and achieve your speech's purpose.
- Make your body language smooth and natural.

Time: Five to seven minutes

**W**hen you talk to your friends or co-workers, you move your hands and arms, walk around, make eye contact and change facial expressions. These movements are called body language. Body language is as important in public speaking as it is in everyday conversation. Imagine a speaker who is sincere about her topic but stands stiffly before the audience during the entire speech, not moving or even looking at anyone as she speaks. Her words say she cares about the subject, but her body communicates otherwise. The result? Her audience doubts her message.

Not only does body language communicate confidence and power, it enhances your believability, illustrates and emphasizes the points you are making, and helps to release any nervous energy you may have. Body language is expressed in stance, movement, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact.

## Stance

Although you should move during a presentation, occasionally you'll stand still as you speak, usually during your opening and closing words or as you make an important point. The stance you assume while standing still is important because it indicates your confidence and comfort level. If you slouch your shoulders and fix your eyes on the floor, your audience thinks you're shy and weak. If you repeatedly shift your weight from one foot to another, you appear uncomfortable and nervous, and your audience may be distracted by your movement. But if you stand, straight - feet slightly apart and your weight evenly distributed on each foot - and look directly at your listeners, you convey confidence and poise.

## Movement

Movement during a speech provides variety for the audience. When you walk from one place to another, you attract listeners' attention and get them involved as their eyes and heads follow you.

Your movement from your seat to the lectern or podium is actually the beginning of your presentation and the first opportunity to use body language. You want to appear confident and eager to speak, so walk purposefully to the front of the room with your head up and shoulders back. Turn and face your audience directly, then begin speaking. When you've finished speaking, return to your seat in the same manner.

Any movement during your speech should be purposeful as well. Avoid pacing, fidgeting, swaying from side to side or bouncing up and down on your toes. These are nervous habits that distract the audience. Instead, deliver part of your speech from one spot, then move crosswise two or three steps as you transition to another point in your speech and deliver that point from your new location. Step toward the audience to emphasize important points. If you want to dramatize a specific point, use movement. For example, if you are describing a physical action such as throwing a ball or shivering from the cold, act out your description by moving your body appropriately. The movement should take place slightly before the verbal point it reinforces.

## Gestures

Gestures are the most expressive part of body language and consist of movements of the head, shoulders, arms, hands, or some other part of the body. Some basic gestures show:

- **Size, weight, shape, direction and location.** These physical characteristics call for hand gestures. "He went that way!" you may exclaim as you dramatically point out the direction.
- **Importance or urgency.** Show your audience how important your point is. Hit your fist into your open palm.
- **Comparison and contrast.** Move both your hands in unison to show similarities; move them in opposition to show differences.

To be most effective, gestures should be made above your elbow and away from your body, and they should be vigorous and definite to show conviction and enthusiasm. A sweeping wave of your arm to show distance and a rapid, repeated up-and-down-nod of your head to indicate approval will add more to your message than a half-hearted hand wave or a barely noticeable dip of your head. Gestures also should be full and varied rather than partial and repetitious - the same movement over and over is distracting. Make your gestures larger for large audiences to ensure that even people in the back of the room can see them.

Gestures can mean many things and these meanings may vary from culture to culture, so be sensitive to your audience. Generally, clenched fists show power or anger. If you want your audience to join you in fighting some injustice, for example, you could clench your fist as you urge them to take action. Opening your palms indicates generosity and caring, so you may display your open palms when describing how a kindly tourist helped someone in need.

In North America, a forefinger pointed toward the ceiling means people should pay attention to what you are saying. Folding your arms across your chest projects strength and determination. Clasping your hands together in front of your chest conveys unity. Of course, body language and its meaning will vary in different countries and cultures.

## Facial Expression

Your face unwittingly conveys cues about how your listeners are supposed to react or feel. If you are talking about a terrible automobile accident, yet you are smiling and nodding, your audience will be confused, not sad. Your facial expression must be consistent with the feelings or information you are communicating.

Your eyes, eye movement, eyebrows and mouth play vital roles in showing sadness, fear, happiness, anger, frustration, nervousness, excitement, boredom, interest, wonder, exhaustion, aggressiveness, confidence and uncertainty. When you show these feelings, your audience will emulate them. Show sadness by lowering your eyelids, turning down your mouth slightly, and bowing your head. Show surprise or disbelief by widening your eyes and raising your eyebrows. Smile broadly to show happiness.

## Eye Contact

Have you ever conversed with someone who did not look at you directly? The person looked over your shoulder, above your head, at the floor, or even at someone else - everywhere but at you. What did you think?

Most likely you doubted that person's interest, honesty and confidence. Or you may have felt excluded or ignored. Eye contact plays a major role in how people perceive one another, and as a speaker you should pay special attention to it.

In Western cultures, people more readily believe people who look them in the eyes while speaking. If you make *eye* contact with your listeners, they'll think you are sincere, credible, friendly and honest. These feelings have a great impact on your message and listeners' willingness to accept it.

Eye contact has another benefit. It allows you to establish a bond with listeners. By looking at them, you command their attention and they will have difficulty ignoring you.

As you speak, look at the people in the audience. Don't simply gaze around the room. Look directly at one person until you finish a thought, then move on to another person. Make eye contact randomly throughout the room and avoid moving your head from side to side like an oscillating fan. Look at people toward the back of the room as well as at those in front. Be careful that you don't look at someone too long - you could make that person uncomfortable. Also, looking at each person too quickly may make you appear nervous or deceitful.

If your audience is small, making eye contact is fairly simple, because you will be able to look at each member

of the audience at some point. But if the audience is large, you won't be able to do this. Instead, make eye contact with someone in each section of the room, front and back.

## Make It Natural

Body language should look natural and unrehearsed and be consistent with the meaning of the words being spoken. Using body language that is comfortable for you and enjoyable for the audience takes thought and practice.

After you have drafted your speech, read it and note any places where body language would be appropriate and help convey your message. Try several different ways of using your arms, hands and facial expressions.

Match your gestures to your words. You should be compelled to gesture and make facial expressions when your thought requires such action. This

means your gesture or facial expression should be done slightly before or as you speak, not afterward, to look natural.

Don't worry if at first your movements are stiff and awkward. Natural positions and smooth movements will come the more you rehearse your speech and become familiar with it.

If you have access to videotape equipment, use it in your rehearsals to help you improve. Rehearsing in front of a mirror also is helpful.

## Your Assignment

This project focuses on body language. You are to:

- Select a topic that facilitates the use of body language.
- Use stance, movement, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact to express your message and achieve your speech's purpose.
- Ensure that body language enhances and clarifies your words and helps the audience to visualize your points and overall message. The message your listeners see should be the same one they hear.
- Make your body language smooth and natural.

Be sure to incorporate what you learned in previous projects about purpose, organization and language and use appropriate suggestions from the evaluations you received. As you prepare your speech, review the Speaker's Checklist in Project 1 and ***Gestures: Your Body Speaks*** (Catalog No. 201), which you received in your New Member Kit. You may also refer to The Better Speaker Series program "*Using Body Language*" (Catalog No. 279).

## Evaluation Guide for

# Your Body Speaks

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE TO THE EVALUATOR:** *The speaker is to use stance, body movement, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact that illustrate and enhance his or her verbal message. Movement, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact should be smooth and natural. Body language should enhance and clarify the speaker's words and help the audience visualize the speaker's points and overall message. The message you see should be the same one you hear. The speech must have a clear purpose and appropriate organization. Also, the speaker must use words and arrangements of words that effectively communicate his or her message to the audience. In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this evaluation form by checking the appropriate space for each item. Add your comments for those items deserving praise or specific suggestions for improvement.*

### COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS

- Topic Selection: ☐ Facilitated body language  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Preparation: ☐ Excellent  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Manner: ☐ Confident, enthusiastic  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Nervous, tense
- Posture: ☐ Poised, balanced  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Gestures: ☐ Natural, evocative  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Body Movement: ☐ Purposeful, smooth  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Awkward, distracting
- Eye Contact: ☐ Established visual bonds  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Facial Expression: ☐ Animated, friendly, genuine  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Speech Purpose: ☐ Clear  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- Speech Organization: ☐ Logical, clear  
☐ Satisfactory  
☐ Could improve
- What could the speaker have done differently to make the speech more effective?
- What did you like about the speech?