



Body language can make all the difference between a dull, static presentation and a dynamic, engaging one. Of course, body language has many different elements, and so we've broken it down into five categories:

1. **Facial expressions**
2. **Eye contact**
3. **Posture**
4. **Gestures**
5. **Position and movement**

Some of these may seem like small details, but they have a big impact on how your presentation comes across. When your body language is working hand in hand with the other aspects of your presentation, such as content and tone of voice, then you're sure to win over your audience.

1) Facial expressions

People will travel half-way around the world to meet one another "face-to-face" for a reason – when it comes to interacting with others, what we do with our faces is vital. We may not usually control our facial expressions in any conscious way, but there are times when we have to think about what our face is telling others, such as when giving a presentation. Study-body-language.com has produced a [fun guide to facial expressions](https://study-body-language.com/facial-expressions/) and why they matter.

The first and most obvious thing to remember is to make sure that you are using your face at all. Giving a presentation with a blank face, without any particular facial expression is like speaking in a monotone – no matter how great your content is, your audience will not be engaged. Even some simple steps from the outset, such as opening your eyes wider, raising your eyebrows a little, and smiling, can make a huge difference in setting the tone for your presentation. You can also "reset" at different points during your presentation to make sure that you haven't fallen back into a dull resting expression and to re-engage your audience's attention.

Source: <https://etonx.com/how-to-use-body-language-during-a-presentation/>

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Of course, putting rehearsed facial expressions into your speech mechanically is never going to be effective, and what you do with your face should look natural. The important thing is to be attentive to what you're saying. If your facial expressions are in line with the tone of your words, then the information you are presenting will come across more clearly, and you will seem more sincere.

Remember that the expression you wear tells people a lot about how trustworthy you are. Don't forget that the size of the room and the audience matters too – a bigger crowd requires bigger facial expressions.

2) Eye contact

Having thought about what your face is doing in general, it's time to get even more specific and think about eye contact. This is crucial when it comes to communication.

Just as with facial expressions and the other parts of body language we'll be looking at below, the way in which you use eye contact and look at your audience depends on the size of the room and the audience. However, here are some general tips:

- **Make sure you look at everyone** – Staring at the same spot throughout a presentation is visually dull and unengaging for your audience. Make sure that by the end of your presentation you have made eye contact with everyone *at least* once – that might mean every individual if you have a small audience, or every section of a crowd if you have a bigger audience.
- **Don't be afraid of eye contact** – Prolonged eye contact can make people nervous, but that's because it's so powerful. You may be perceived as aggressive or bullying. A brief glance, however, suggests that you are monitoring their expression as you speak to them, and thus that you care about how your message is being received. While it may be tempting to find a spot to stare at on the back wall, it is always better to try and make a more personal connection with members of your audience.
But remember...
- **Don't stare** – No one wants to feel uncomfortable or that they are being put on the spot. Keep your gaze moving and engage as many people as possible.

Again, remember that different situations call for different approaches, but as long as you are consciously using eye contact, you'll be well on the way to making your presentation as involving as possible.

3) Posture

We've talked about facial expressions and eye contact, now it's time to look at the bigger picture: posture. Whether you're sitting or standing, the way in which you hold yourself is incredibly important and sets the tone for the whole presentation before it's even begun.

With this in mind, here are a few Do's and Don'ts when it comes to posture during a presentation:

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- **DON'T slouch** – In almost all presentation situations, your posture should be upright and open. This will make you *look* and *feel* more confident, and it will invite your audience in rather than pushing them away. If you are not sitting or standing upright it suggests that what you have to say is not particularly important to you. If you suggest to your audience that what you have to say is not really worthy of your attention they are unlikely to pay much attention either.
- **DON'T be tense** – It's important to look and feel relaxed during a presentation. If you're standing upright but look rigid, it won't make a good impression. No matter how nervous you may feel, a speaker who seems to be afraid of his audience will not win their trust. Pause and take a deep breath before you begin, and remind yourself to relax at different points throughout the presentation. Pausing and giving your audience time to think about what you have just said is a good thing to do anyway. You can take that time consciously to relax and re-set your expression and posture.
- **DO think about your audience** – A formal presentation to the board of a company is very different to an interactive talk with schoolchildren. While you still need to be upright, open and relaxed in all situations, remember that different situations require different levels of formality. Do you want to be interrupted if someone has a question for example, or will you only take questions at the end of your presentation? Adapt your posture to be more open or more formal accordingly.
- **DO be adaptable** – If you are sat down or have a lectern for your presentation, don't hold onto them for support or let them get in the way. You should have an open and communicative posture no matter what the specific set-up is. Be prepared to adapt to unexpected situations. If you are addressing a large audience or being recorded you may need to use a microphone – this may mean you have to remain at a lectern, or you have to hold a microphone in one hand, which can restrict your gestures. Try to find out beforehand, but if things are not as you expected, adapt quickly to make the best of the facilities provided.

In addition, Ethos3 also gives some [very helpful advice on how to improve your posture for a presentation](#).

4) Gestures

Varied facial expressions, eye contact and a good posture will put you well on the way to presentation success, but if you stand still without moving any other part of your body, it can create a very strange impression. On the other hand, over-rehearsed or exaggerated hand gestures can be off-putting and look unnatural.

A happy medium is needed. Remember that the purpose of using gestures when giving a presentation is to make your message clearer and more interesting. In short, your gestures should mean something. For example, if you are making a contrast between big and small, you can use hand gestures to represent this. If you are giving a numbered list, you can show the numbers with your hand so that both people's eyes and ears are engaged. Alternatively, if you want to address the audience directly, you can gesture towards them (but try not to point aggressively as though you're accusing them of something).

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If you have a PowerPoint slideshow or other visual aids, use gestures to draw people's attention to them. If you have a particular point which is one of the key messages of your presentation you may want to make your gestures more exaggerated as you work up to that point – in this way you can communicate to the audience which of the things you have to say matter most to you.

The Science of People blog's [article on hand gestures](#) gives some great insight into this aspect of presentation along with some further ideas. Remember that whatever happens, gestures should look relaxed and natural. If you are struggling with this, remember that practice makes perfect – film yourself presenting or ask your friends to give you feedback. Also, as with all the other aspects of body language we've been talking about, you'll need to adjust things depending on the size of the room.

5) Position and movement

This last area is more variable depending on the specific set-up of your presentation. It will be clear straight away whether you have any flexibility over where you position yourself or if movement around the space is even possible, but it's always worth considering.

For example, if you are giving your presentation on a big stage, a bit of movement around the space can help to create visual interest and keep different parts of the audience engaged. Likewise, if your presentation has interactive elements, you could move closer or slightly further back from the audience depending on whether they're involved or not. The golden rule is that any movement should be clear and directed – you should never look like you're just wandering around the stage. You may, for example, want to engage your audience early on in your presentation by moving to the front of the stage and asking them a question – “Who can tell me...”, “Put your hand up if you have ever...” – this not only enables you to make some judgements about how much your audience already knows about what you have to say, it also engages them and suggests that you care about their experiences. Most people are much happier if they feel a speaker is “talking to” them rather than “talking at” them with no concern for their opinions.

The five topics above give an overall sense of how you can use body language to make your presentation clearer, more engaging and more powerful. Remember that body language is not something you apply later to a pre-written script, but a core part of how you present. It should go hand-in-hand with every other aspect of the presentation, such as the content and the tone of your voice, to create a compelling overall experience for your audience. Good luck and happy presenting!

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