

Body Language:

Speak Volumes Without Saying a Word

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Believe it or not, most communication is nonverbal. Are you *really* saying what you think you're saying? If you often find that people misunderstand you, perhaps your body language is communicating different thoughts than what your voice is saying!

Adjusting your body language can strengthen your communications and help you make a better impression in all kinds of social and professional settings. Facial expressions, hand gestures, and posture all communicate certain meanings. ***When your body language agrees with your words, what you say is much more powerful.***

Whether you wonder what messages you're sending with your body language or you just want some tips to brush up on your communication skills, here are some techniques you can try.

General Principles

1. **Match up your body and speech.** To appear authentic, you want your body language and speech to be consistent. If you're telling someone you enjoyed the date but you're anxiously rubbing your forehead, you'll create some doubts.
2. **Mirror others.** *When people are on the same page, they naturally start mimicking each other's expressions and movements.* You can make it easier to connect with people by doing this intentionally. Do this sparingly, though; too much mirroring and your efforts will start to look like a comedy routine.
3. **Double check your assumptions.** As you become more knowledgeable about nonverbal messages, keep in mind that different causes can produce the same

behavior. You may want to use additional cues to discern their real meaning.

- For example, if someone is looking around the room while you talk, they may be bored with what you're saying. Or they may be too tired to concentrate on anything. Or maybe they're especially interested in the interior decorating! Asking them questions can lead you to the correct meaning of their body language.

Adjustments for Your Head

1. **Make eye contact.** While there are cultural differences, subtle eye contact is often interpreted as being friendly and honest. Look people in the eye when you're first introduced. As someone is talking, ***meet their eye from time to time to show interest***, while also looking away for appropriate intervals to avoid staring.
2. **Hold your head up.** Looking at the ground all the time may give people the impression you're depressed or trying to avoid them. Keeping your head up enables you to look more approachable.
3. **Nod judiciously.** Nod your head slightly to let someone know they have your attention and you agree with what they're saying.
4. **Smile. *A smiling face is your best asset, whether you're at a job interview or trying to resolve a family conflict.*** Our relationships become more harmonious when we reassure people that we like them. Smiling is a primary way to do this.

Adjustments for Your Body

1. **Work on your hand shake. *Palm to palm contact is the most important ingredient in your handshake.*** Ask a friend for their feedback to ensure your handshake

sends the message you want.

2. **Control your hand gestures.** Hand gestures can reinforce what you're saying and make your presentations more effective. Make your gestures with confidence so you look composed and engaged.
3. **Stand straight and relaxed.** Good posture has important health and social benefits. Press your navel against your lower back, open your chest and relax your shoulders. You'll come across as open and self assured.
4. **Keep your arms and legs open.** Crossing your arms and legs can seem defensive and distant. If you often adopt this position because your office is chilly, try wearing a sweater or a layer of long underwear instead.
5. **Slow down.** We can easily get caught up in rushing from one task to the next. Pausing briefly or intentionally slowing down your movements can help you feel more poised.
6. **Lean forward.** Inclining slightly toward someone is a great way to show that you like them and that you care about what they're saying. Just facing someone while they talk can help. When you're addressing a group, shift positions occasionally.
7. **Respect the personal space of others.** Be sensitive to their comfort zones. Back up a little if you sense that someone is feeling crowded.

Body language is an important interpersonal skill. By taking conscious control of your nonverbal communication, you help yourself to feel more confident and you put others at ease.