



THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATION

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Body language is the unspoken part of communication that we use to reveal our true feelings and to give our message more impact. Communication is made up of so much more than words. Nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, gestures and posture all play their part.

A simple example of body language is a relaxed facial expression that breaks out into a genuine smile – with mouth upturned and eyes wrinkled. Equally, it can be a tilt of the head that shows you're thinking, an upright stance to convey interest, or hand and arm movements to demonstrate directions. It can also be taking care to avoid a defensive, arms-crossed posture, or restlessly tapping your feet. When we can “read” signs like these, you can understand the complete message in what someone is telling you. We'll be more aware of people's reactions to what we say and do, too. And you'll be able to adjust your body language to appear more positive, engaging and approachable.

The Science of Body Language

You've probably heard the statistic that only seven percent of a message is conveyed through words, and that the other 93 percent comes from nonverbal communication. This is often quoted out of context and is therefore misleading. It's taken from Mehrabian's Communication Model, which states that body language is more important than tone of voice and choice of words when communicating true feelings. But Mehrabian makes clear that his study dealt only with communications involving emotions and attitudes. So, it's not applicable in all cases.

However, it does help to explain why it's so tough to gauge sentiment when we can't see people – on email or messaging apps, for example. It's also part of the reason for the rise in use of emojis, even in business communication.

How to Read Body Language



Being aware of body language in others means that you can pick up on unspoken emotions and reactions. It's a valuable form of feedback, but it can easily be missed if you're not aware of what to look out for.

So, let's explore the most important nonverbal clues – some with negative interpretations, and others that are positive signs.

Negative Body Language Examples

If someone's exhibiting one or more of the following, negative behaviors, they'll likely be **disengaged, disinterested** or **unhappy**:

- Arms folded in front of the body.
- Minimal or tense facial expression.
- Body turned away from you.
- Eyes downcast, maintaining little contact.

Being aware of what these signals mean can help you to adjust what you say – and how you say it. You can show empathy for someone's unhappiness, for example, explain yourself more clearly, or work to calm a heated situation.

Tip:

If someone exhibits these signs during a negotiation, focus on engaging their interest and putting them at their ease. Then, if the negative behavior stops, you'll know that they're ready to negotiate with you effectively – and more open to persuasion. Other types of body language can indicate that someone's bored by what you're saying. This might be in a presentation, a team meeting, or even a one-on-one chat. Here are some of the most common signs of boredom;

- Sitting slumped, with head downcast.
- Gazing at something else, or into space.
- Fidgeting, picking at clothes, or fiddling with pens and phones.
- Writing or doodling.

Tip:

You can re-engage people by asking them a direct question, or by inviting them to contribute an idea. Additional signs of negative body language include:

- **Nail biting:** suggesting insecurity or stress.
- **Locked ankles:** also associated with anxious thoughts.
- **Rapid blinking:** which may indicate uncertainty or concern.
- **Tapping/drumming fingers:** often a mark of impatience or boredom.
- **Fidgeting:** more evidence that someone's disinterested or distracted.

Positive Body Language Examples



People also use their body language to convey positive feelings, such as **trust**, **interest** and **happiness**. Spotting these signs can reassure you that others are engaged with what you're saying and at ease with the situation.

What's more, by adopting these behaviors yourself, you can support your points, convey ideas more clearly, and avoid sending mixed messages.

Here are three specific ways to use positive body language to your advantage:

1. Body Language for a Good First Impression

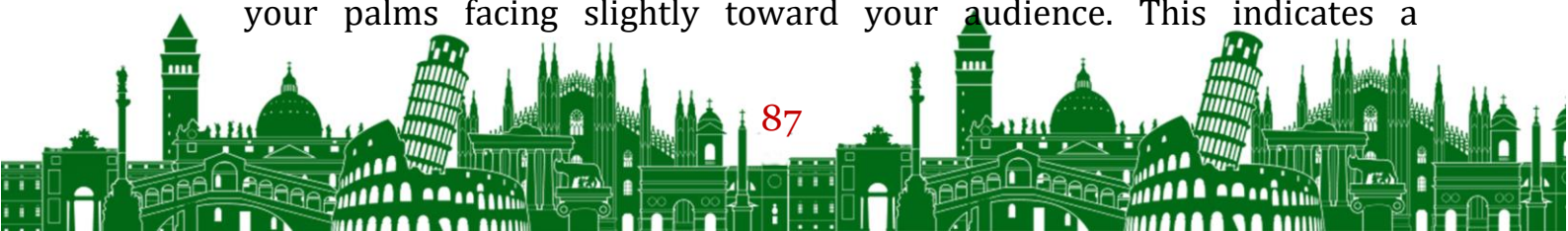
Your nonverbal signs play a big part in people's first impression of you. Here are ways to appear **trustworthy**, **engaged**, **confident**, and **calm**:

- **Have an open posture.** Be relaxed, but don't slouch. Sit or stand upright and place your hands by your sides. Avoid standing with your hands on your hips, as this can communicate aggression or a desire to dominate.
- **Use a firm handshake.** But don't get carried away! You don't want it to become awkward, aggressive, or painful for the other person.
- **Maintain good eye contact.** Try to hold the other person's gaze for a few seconds at a time. This will show them that you're sincere and engaged. But avoid turning it into a staring contest!
- **Avoid touching your face.** If you do this while answering questions, it can be seen as a sign of dishonesty. While this isn't always the case, you should still avoid fiddling with your hair or scratching your nose, so that you convey trustworthiness.
- **Smile!** Warm, sincere smiles are attractive, reassuring – and infectious!

2. Body Language for Effective Public Speaking

Positive body language can help you to engage people, mask any presentation nerves, and project **confidence** when you speak in public. Here are a few tips to help you do this:

- **Have a positive posture.** Sit or stand upright, with your shoulders back and your arms unfolded by your sides or in front of you. Don't be tempted to put your hands in your pockets, or to slouch, as this will make you look disinterested.
- **Keep your head up.** Your head should be upright and level. Leaning too far forward or backward can make you look aggressive or arrogant.
- **Practice and perfect your posture.** Stand in a relaxed manner, with your weight evenly distributed. Keep one foot slightly in front of the other to keep yourself steady.
- **Use open hand gestures.** Spread your hands apart, in front of you, with your palms facing slightly toward your audience. This indicates a



willingness to communicate and share ideas. Keep your upper arms close to your body. Take care to avoid overexpression, or people may focus more on your hands than your ideas.

In conclusion, body language is a range of nonverbal signals that you can use to communicate your feelings and intentions. These include your posture, facial expressions, and hand gestures. Your ability to understand and interpret other people's body language can help you to pick up on unspoken issues or feelings. You can also use body language in a positive way to add strength to your own verbal messages – both in person and on screen. This is particularly important when you're meeting people for the first time, speaking in public, or taking part in interviews or negotiations.

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