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Interpreting the Language of Non-Verbal Communication



Non-Verbal Signals are the Most Dynamic Elements of Communication

The language of non-verbal communication is fundamentally universal. We rely on it, but how well do we understand this shared language? Everybody we encounter delivers a cluster of non-verbal cues through their bodies. Yet, typically, we do not detect or comprehend much of it. This non-verbal language may be more complex and intricate than any verbal language, but the skills to interpret it are learnable. In this guide, we explore the fundamental principles of non-verbal communication how to interpret them. We also give you a few pointers on how to ensure that your body language does not conflict with your message.

Interpreting the Language of Non-Verbal Communication

Non-Verbal Signals are the Most Dynamic Elements of Communication

Beneath the surface of every conversation, we send out non-verbal cues or underlying messages through a mix of facial expressions, gestures, posture, body movements, vocal pitches and tones, mannerisms, habits, and idiosyncrasies. Even when we are silent or try to keep our bodies still, a keen eye can detect even the subtlest of our non-verbal behaviours. We call these wordless signals non-verbal communication or body language. These cues add other layers of meaning to what we say. Sometimes the layers of meaning, displayed by non-verbal cues, match and enhance what we say in words. Sometimes the non-verbal cues clash, contradict, detract from, or invalidate the spoken message. That is because our bodies communicate an honest language. That makes non-verbal communication the most dynamic elements of communication.

The majority of non-verbal communication cues, are persistent, instinctive, and in essence, incapable of lying. You see, many body reflexes are impossible or difficult to control because they are involuntary and instantaneous, acting on an impulse before it even reaches the brain. We may have mastered advanced language techniques, but just as some animals have different body language for different occasions – Jackdaws glare, a cat's fur stands up in a ridge along the spine, beavers slap their tail on water, the rattlesnake shakes his tail, and peacocks puts on an impressive visual display – our bodies continually impart information to indicate our different intentions. Through every second, we add layers of meaning to our words through the language of non-verbal communication.

Non-verbal communication surrounds us. Everybody we encounter delivers a cluster of non-verbal cues through their bodies. Yet, typically, we do not detect or comprehend much of it. This non-verbal language may be more complex and intricate than any verbal language, but the skills to interpret it are learnable.

In this guide, we will explore the fundamental principles of non-verbal communication. We will outline various non-verbal cues and how to interpret them. This guide is not intended to be an exhaustive treatise on the complexities of body language. Rather, it is written to help you recognize the amazing power of being able to interpret the various cues, and to add a word of warning not to rely on using contrived body language signals too much.

Learn the Language of Non-Verbal Communication

Body Language is the World's Original Shared Language

Non-verbal cues are the Most Dynamic Elements of Communication

- We rely on non-verbal communication
- Non-verbal communication is useful
- We rely on it, but how well do we understand this shared language

The Magnitude and Impact of Non-Verbal Communication and the Importance of Skills to Interpret the Cues

1. Everyone we encounter shares non-verbal communication cues
2. Non-verbal communication is in non-stop motion – persistent in communicating
3. Non-verbal communication has greater impact than words because it is naturally authentic and visual
4. Non-verbal communication is honest and reliable
5. Non-verbal communication is irreversible
6. Non-verbal communication can be ambiguous unless we determine underlying meaning from interpreting the cues.

Non-Verbal Communication Cues Form Partnerships to Delivery Meaning and Clarity

- The cluster does not appear through one channel
- Non-Verbal Communication Clusters Work in Unison
 - Look for context
 - Look for patterns of consistency
 - Look for congruence
- Pay close attention to the involuntary cues

Non-Verbal Communication does not Lie

- Negative and conflicting signals are more honest

Interpretation Occurs at Mind-Boggling Speed

What you Should Know about Your Own Non-Verbal Messages

- Non-verbal communication is fast
- Non-verbal body language is sensitive and insightful:
- People may see and hear more than you ever anticipated
- Most of us are unaware of how others perceive us
- Be a conscious observer of your non-verbal language cues
- Your body language may involuntarily affect your state of mind
- Engage an observer
- Avoid the "Comfort Excuse"
- Aim for Honesty
- Do not Rely on any Body Language that you Design or Calculate to use

Dealing with Obvious Negative Body Language in the Workplace

- Body language voted as the most negative, annoying, and offensive
- Ten common negative signals/complaints
- Looking like a liar
- The body language of Liars
- Liars display common cues
- Observing the Eyes to Determine Lying
- What to do when you see Unreceptive or Negative Body Language

Non-Verbal Communication is Influenced by Culture and Gender

- Cultural Expectations
- Gender Differences

The Fundamentals of Interpreting the Language of Non-Verbal Communication

Pay Close Attention

- Establish a baseline
- Concentrate on the speaker
- Trust your instincts
- Look for consistency
- Watch for congruent behaviours
- Tap into the non-verbal auditory cues
- Pay attention to the silence
- Observe the body zones to find unspoken meanings
- Practice

Common Non-verbal Cues and What they Mean

- Common emotions or attitudes and their signals
- Common gestures and what they usually signal
- Basic body zones and the interpretation of several prominent and universal cues
 - Facial expressions
 - Posture
 - Eyes
 - Mouth
 - Head movement and head position
 - Forehead
 - Hands
 - Hands with other part of the body
 - Arms
 - Legs and feet
 - Proximity and personal space (proxemics)
 - Audible signals
 - Mirroring – matching body language
 - Body language of seating position

Body Language is the World's Original Shared Language

Non-verbal communication surrounds us. People continuously communicate through their bodies. Social creatures that we are, it is not possible to avoid it. From the time we awake in the morning until we go to sleep, we send out signals that others read, interpret, and respond to while we are reading, interpreting and responding to theirs. Everybody we encounter delivers a cluster of non-verbal cues through their bodies – through gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, timing, posture, where or how they stand, along with a combination of over 1,000 other cues.



It does not matter where we live, what age we are, or what language we speak, the language of non-verbal communication is fundamentally universal. Consider how people use body language when communicating with a person in a foreign country. They may not share the same spoken language, but can use deliberate body language that is easy to interpret to wave hello or good-bye, to ask for clothing, food or shelter, or indicate the need for help. Think for a moment about how much a person is able to convey with just a facial expression. Through a smile, frown, grimace, pursing of the lips, eyes opened wide or squeezed shut, we can understand a wide range of emotions. Likewise, through our eyes or facial expressions, the other person can read our desire, happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, confusion, as well as decide if we can be trusted or believed. A good example of an overt deliberate universal gesture is the shoulder shrug which is a universal gesture that is used to indicate that the person does not know or understand what another person says or what is going on. These are but a few examples of universal body language that we pay attention to and usually easily understand.

Non-verbal cues are the Most Dynamic Elements of Communication

We Rely on Non-Verbal Communication

We all share layers of meaning without the use of words.

You might not realize it, but you communicate through non-verbal cues more than you do through words. We all do. In fact, we use non-verbal expressions to augment or even replace words we might otherwise say. We do not need to hear the words to recognize a smile of friendship, the tears of grief, or a triumphant salute.

Non-Verbal Communication is Useful

Throughout human history, before verbal communication emerged, we expressed our primary emotions - anger, fear, and love through non-verbal signals. That has not changed.

We use non-verbal signals as tools in communication. We use hand gestures to illustrate the size or shape of an object. Nonverbal communication is useful in a quiet situation where verbal communication would be disturbing. When we spot friends entering a lecture theater, we might stand up, smile, wave, and point to our seats to tell them know where we are seated and that we have saved seats for them. Crowded or loud places can also impede verbal communication and lead people to rely more on non-verbal messages. Getting a server or bartender's attention with a hand gesture is definitely more polite than yelling, "Hey you!"

Non-verbal communication is an essential tool for communicating emotions. Throughout human history, before verbal communication emerged, we expressed our primary emotions – anger, fear, and love through non-verbal signals. That has not changed. In fact, we have a limited vocabulary to express such emotions, so we rely on non-verbal communication to communicate emotions. And, we do it very well. It takes several elements of non-verbal communication to express one emotion. Take love. We express love through multiple sensory channels such as lots of lingering smiles, prolonged eye contact, mirroring, close proximity, increased touch, laughter, and time spent together.

It is the presence and the essentialness of body language and its associated layers of meaning that we see in another person's idiosyncrasies, smiles, facial expressions, gestures, body movements, and vocal tones that cause most of us to prefer talking to that person in person rather than over the phone.

We Rely on it, but how well do we Understand this Shared Language?

Yes, non-verbal communication is everywhere; everyone uses it and relies on it. However, that does not mean it is always simple to understand what others communicate through their non-verbal cues. Even though we depend on body language to communicate, it can be very complex to interpret, with all of its many functions and combinations coming at us in a steady flow.



Since as infants, we are born with the ability to communicate through body language, you would think that it would be easier to interpret. Yet, it is not.

As we advance through the toddler stage to puberty, year by year, we tend to stifle body language. Little children use overt body language. They hide behind mommy's skirt to seek a place of safety when they feel vulnerable. As they mature, children learn that certain body language behaviours, such as sucking their thumbs or cowering behind their parents, is unsuitable and they can no longer rely on the obvious body language patterns to soothe themselves or seek refuge.

Typically, we start to rely on emotional words to get our point across, often not realizing that instead of mommy's skirt or ever-ready thumb our bodies are still manifesting our deeply felt emotions in other non-verbal cues. Our bodies simply cannot stop doing so. When we feel insecure, uncomfortable, unconfident, or scared, we create other artificial barriers to help ourselves feel more secure – hugging ourselves, crossing our legs, holding a glass with two hands, placing a book in front of us, tugging on a sleeve, or stroking our arms.

A few recent studies indicate that our use of overt body language is tied directly to education, saying those who have a higher level of schooling also have a larger vocabulary so instead of using gestures to express themselves, they use words instead. Whether it is simply growing up or education, the less we try to use it, the less aware we are of body language or the power of non-verbal communication. Many become less aware, or even forget, that body language extends beyond how we position our bodies or use hand gestures. It encompasses all the involuntary non-verbal physiological reactions. We give off signals in our breathing patterns, perspiration, pulse, blood pressure, how the eyes focus, or blushing.

When we rely on words, we tend to overlook hundreds of subtle, imperceptible expressions, behaviours, and other involuntary changes communicated by the body. We overlook these changes in others and ourselves.

We may try to stifle body language, but our bodies continue to communicate. Our non-verbal signals materialize by the mere suggestion of an idea.

**No matter what words we choose to use, our inner thoughts
subconsciously ooze and flash to the surface in the form non-verbal cues.**

Our body language alerts the listener. While a part of the listener's brain focuses on decoding the spoken words, the listener is also, consciously and subconsciously, reading our non-verbal cues that speak the truth. Yes, even though these cues may appear for a fraction of a second, other people can perceive these flashes of insight that reveal our feelings, attitudes and moods. Others are able to form their own notions, impressions or judgments as to whether what we say matches our non-verbal cues.

Remember, non-verbal communication is a shared language, which means we have equal opportunity to detect and determine what another person's body is telling us. We know many of the signals intuitively.

**We all speak body language, but do
we know how to understand it.**

We also miss important signals because we lack the skills to interpret them correctly. It is like talking to someone in a dark cave and not being able to see the other person. Having non-verbal language interpretation skills is essential to communicating competently.

Good news! You can learn the skills to detect and interpret a person's non-verbal communication cues and improve the cues you send out.



The Magnitude and Impact of Non-Verbal Communication and the Importance of having the Skills to Interpret the Cues

There are several reasons why having these skills is essential, and each one points to the magnitude and impact of non-verbal communication on our lives. Here are only seven, and each illustrates how non-verbal communication takes precedence over verbal communication:



1. Non-verbal cues are the most dynamic elements of communication
2. Non-verbal communication is irreversible.
3. Everyone we encounter is sharing non-verbal communication cues.
4. Non-verbal communication is in non-stop motion and persistent in communicating.
5. Non-verbal communication has greater impact than words –naturally authentic and visual.
6. Non-verbal communication is honest and reliable.
7. Non-verbal communication can be ambiguous without determining underlying meaning.

1. Non-verbal cues are the most dynamic elements of communication

Our bodies are powerfully expressive tools. We communicate through non-verbal cues more than we do through words. We all do. Involuntary and unintentional cues are the most sensitive and insightful. We share layers of meaning without the use of words. It is how we connect with others.

Unintentional micro expressions and involuntary cues such as an eyebrow lift, pupils contracting, or a small tightness of the mouth can appear and disappear so quickly that we can easily miss seeing important data that adds layers of genuine meaning to the words.

We rely on body language to augment or even replace words we might otherwise say. We do not need to hear the words to recognize a smile of friendship, the tears of grief, or a triumphant salute. We use hand gestures to illustrate the size or shape of an object. When our vocabulary fails us we use non-verbal signals communication to express what we are feeling. Take love. We express love through multiple sensory channels such as lots of lingering smiles, prolonged eye contact, mirroring, close proximity, increased touch, laughter, and time spent together.

**Where
WORDS
FAIL**

**Body
Language
SPEAKS**

The interpretation of what all the cues mean may not always be accurate if you miss important signals.

Insightful moments for understanding and connection are always flashing before you when you are in the presence of another person. You should want the skills to understand what those messages mean.

2. Nonverbal communication is irreversible.

Written communications allow for correction, refinement, or retraction. When we make an oral statement, we can immediately explain our comments in the hopes of clarifying a point. The original statement may not disappear completely, but we do have alternatives to explain, rephrase, or correct something we wrote or said. Non-verbal communication cannot be separated from all the other parts of the communications. We cannot hit pause or rewind to review individual cues, because body language is fluid and happening all the time. It is so honest and reliable; we cannot erase it, fix it or alter it for future use. For that reason alone we certainly should not ignore it, either.

Neither should you.

3. Everyone we encounter shares non-verbal communication cues.

We express our individuality and give others impressions about us non-verbally through the way we talk, our facial expressions, our body movements, the way we carry ourselves, and outward appearances. Everyone we encounter passes along information about their confidence, level of comfort, sincerity, and the integrity of their message through clusters of natural non-verbal cues.

Did you know that in every human interaction, we consciously or subconsciously draw from over 1,000 non-verbal indicators to convey information apart from our words? Therefore, there are thousands of



combinations of cues. As observers, we know how to interpret many of the signals intuitively, but we also fail to notice many other signals that carry significant meaning.

There are four main reasons we miss them.

- Not all signals are as obvious as the ones in the photos above. Many non-verbal cues are micro expressions, which mean the cues are fleeting, lasting a fraction of a second or subtle and barely perceptible unless we know where to place our focus.
- We overlook many important signals because we do not recognize their significance in non-verbal communication.
- We miss several signals because we do not pay attention. Non-verbal indicators do not appear in isolation. Non-verbal communication involves the entire body.
- When a speaker knows he is emitting contradictory cues, he may try to disguise the cue or distract your attention from it.

How many of cues do you think you can identify? What might you be missing? Do you know how to interpret this universal language? Do you know what non-verbal cues you are revealing?

4. Non-verbal communication is in non-stop motion – persistent in communicating.

Non-verbal communication patterns never stop. We can stop talking to end verbal communication. However, we can never turn off non-verbal communication. It is persistent in wanting to communicate, and does so. Our posture, eye contact (lack of eye contact), or facial expressions are always communicating something about us, whether intentional or unintentional. Our bodies reveal non-verbal cues in a kind of continuous chatter that oozes out with every breath and in between breaths, too. Our bodies deliver a constant flow of information – that has to have an impact on communication, whether we realize it or not.

Non-verbal cues are always in motion, from one microsecond to the next, flowing constantly from one movement to another, through the space our body occupies, through every tiny interaction, through the silence, through what is “not said” and “how it is not said”.

**Our body conveys messages while we speak, while we listen,
while we observe, while we are with others or alone,
while we speak on the phone, or watch the news or movie alone.
Our bodies fill every moment with layers of meaning.**

Non-verbal language flows so constantly and so seamlessly, it actually regulates interaction because we manage conversations through nonverbal cues.

Additionally, in the constant influx, we subconsciously pick up on other signals and sense meaning that requires interpretation. Think about this: When people are comfortable around others it is because their brains are receiving signals of safety. If a person sends off signs of anger or intent to harm, we have a hair-trigger sensor in our brain that instantly tells us that person in front of us could be dangerous. Other people use similar instincts to determine if they should trust us. People can sense or read our non-verbal cues to know when our verbal and non-verbal communication signals align.

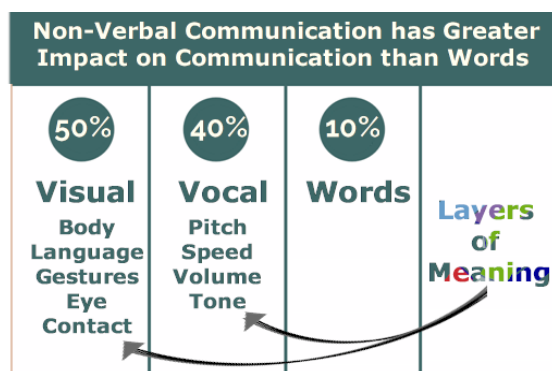
How well can you correctly identify the feelings behind facial expressions? How often can you detect a fleeting cue in the eyes or mouth? Imagine how many cues you may miss within this constant motion and influx. You can dismiss some signals too quickly because you may not have the skills to interpret one element or cluster of elements and differentiate their meanings. It takes skill and practice to detect all the nuances and micro expressions among the more obvious cues, especially when so many cues can come at you at any one time.

5. Non-verbal communication has greater impact than words because it is naturally authentic and visual.

Through their studies, researchers and experts in non-verbal communication claim that between 50% and 80% percent of all human communications are naturally non-verbal. Emerging science in the fields of psychology, anthropology, linguistics and sociology show that nonverbal signals are the most honest and reliable source of communication since they are subconscious. In other words, our bodies cannot lie and our non-verbal communication signals provide continuous layers of **real meaning**.

Nonverbal communication is not just authentic it is visually authentic. Imagery is more engaging and conveys so much more information than real words. Just, try describing a facial expression, or just a particular smile. Many words later, your description may not have as much impact as the image you recall of that smile. Images have the ability to convey abstract and complex concepts. Images convey layers of meaning, and are more enduring.

Because non-verbal communication is in constant flow, we are constantly receiving natural and visual input. Research indicates this input has a greater impact on communication than words. Let's break this down into percentages.



With only 10% of communication involving actual words, don't you think we should take the interpretation of non-verbal communication very seriously? What we understand (or fail to understand) through non-verbal communication has an effect on how we do business, stay informed, participate in the democratic process, partake in community affairs, respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others, and maintain personal relationships.

Wouldn't you want to understand the most important layers of meaning in all your communications?

6. Non-verbal communication is honest and reliable.

Nonverbal communication is more involuntary than verbal. The involuntary nature of much nonverbal communication makes it more difficult to control or "fake." Honesty has an enormous influence on communication. No matter what words we utter, our non-verbal cues reveal our true feelings or intentions. This may be the most important motive for learning the language of non-verbal communication. Research indicates that the signals sent out by our bodies are genuine because our bodies are incapable of lying. That makes body language more reliable and convincing than words.

Studying what is revealed or conveyed through body language is critical to truly understanding the whole context of any communication. No one likes to be deceived.

Learning the skills helps you ascertain if a particular kind of body language is a true signal, just a random event, or a misleading cue. By grasping the concept that your entire body can speak truthfully and clearly without words, you will become more aware of how your body language speaks for you and you can adapt your own behaviors to become more genuine.

7. Non-Verbal communication can be ambiguous unless we determine underlying meaning from interpreting the cues.

One of the keys of communication is not singling out one word as the whole meaning of the conversation. Words appear in sentences and the combination of words makes meaning clearer. Similarly, if we single out one cue for meaning, what we interpret will not be as reliable as the meaning we derive from a combination of non-verbal cues.

Non-verbal communication can be ambiguous and confusing, if we put too much emphasis on one or even two non-verbal cues, among all the other stimuli we receive. Our interpretations can be incorrect if we single out one cue without context, because one signal can be linked to multiple meanings. Tears, for example, can appear because a person is feeling sentimental, grief, pain, or happiness. The wetness in their eyes could be reflex tears because the person laughed hard and long, peeled an onion, or just come in from the wind.



In general, we exhibit more idiosyncrasies in our display of non-verbal communication than we do with verbal communication, which increases the ambiguity of non-verbal communication cues. When non-verbal communication is ambiguous, we narrow down the meaning by looking for context clues in other sources of information: the physical environment, other non-verbal signals, or subsequent wordage.

Resist jumping to conclusions about others, negative or positive, based on any single non-verbal cue. Study the person to observe other cues of the message so you can make sense of the first non-verbal cue you perceived or noticed.

The more skills you have the better you can decode the non-verbal cues. You attain mutual understanding, reduce defensiveness and the potential for conflict. You gain a clearer understanding and that makes you a better communicator on all levels.

Non-Verbal Communication Cues Form Partnerships to Delivery Meaning and Clarity

A non-verbal message rarely relies on one isolated cue to convey a message. Non-verbal communication signals always occur in a “cluster”. A cluster is a group of movements, postures and actions that partner up to corroborate, endorse or reinforce a common point (the message). Together the companion cues remove or minimize ambiguity.



The non-verbal cluster consists of any combination of compatible cues: conscious and subconscious, voluntary and involuntary, obvious, open, furtive, and minuscule.

A cluster can deliver a positive or negative message that matches or contradicts a person’s spoken words.

A cluster can match or contradict overt, contrived gestures to tell you the truth when a person is trying to mislead you.

From a cluster of three or more companion cues, you can usually derive more meaning. Although, it may require several cues to form an accurate judgement. Do you recall the non-verbal signals we channel to express love? The lingering smiles, prolonged eye contd, mirroring, close proximity, and increased touch, laughter, and time spent together comprise a cluster.

1. The Cluster does not Appear through just one Channel

One non-verbal cue always accompanies a cluster of other “companion cues”. The cues are multi-channeled through a person’s entire demeanor – facial expressions, head positions, posture, and any other part of the body that emits a signal that you can perceive or sense. When observing for non-verbal cues, you must be especially alert to the micro expressions that are involuntary and fleeting, because those non-verbal cues are the most revealing.

Since non-verbal communication is primary and takes precedence over verbal communication, learning to interpret and understand how different parts of the body react or change together during conversation is essential in recognizing various aspects of a communication cluster. Without interpretation skills, you have to hope to figure it all out and hope you understand it right.

We do not want to leave you stranded guessing, so in this guide, we included an extensive list of cues emitted by different parts of the body along with their meanings. However, it is not something you can absorb by reading through once. It may take some practice to figure out what a communication cluster is actually telling you.

2. Non-Verbal Communication Clusters Work in Unison

We inherently know how to interpret a great deal of non-verbal communication. We miss a great deal, too because we lack practice or do not pay attention. By focusing our attention differently, we can harvest information from clusters of clues we may not normally see or consider as forming a partnership.

For example, what does this cluster tell you?

- Nodding
 - Squinting
 - Putting index finger to lips
 - Tilting head slightly
 - Stroking chin
-
- slow head nodding, by itself, indicates attentive listening or that the person is agreeing with you.
 - fast head nodding indicates impatience.
 - a person might squint in order to see print that is too small.
 - squinting occurs from negative thoughts, negative sounds, or seeing objectionable sights.

However, in this example, when squinting and head nodding appear with the other three cues, the cluster indicates the person is evaluating.

As we have described in this example, this cluster of cues work in unison to convey a message that was different than one cue indicated. Your goal in communication is to decode the pattern of non-verbal behaviours to determine how they align or contradict someone's verbal message.

This perception may be especially important when another person tries to hide or mask emotions. If you suspect someone is deceitful because you see blinking, you should want to identify corroborating evidence before jumping to conclusions. You observe the person to find companion cues that form the cluster usually displayed by liars – false smile, change in breathing, fidgeting. Additional cues give you motivation to look for additional signals to corroborate your suspicion. If you do not find companion cues, someone who is blinking may not be telling a lie; they may just have the sun in their eyes.

Your ability to appropriately identify and interpret compatible clusters, depends on you **not making assumptions** based on one non-verbal cue. In any communication, there can be ambiguity. Contradictory signals can cause confusion. To make sense of it, you must consider these three things:

1. Look for Context
2. Look for Patterns of consistency
3. Look for Congruence

1. Look for Context

Look for context in the communication setting.
 Look for context in the interaction between other people.
 Observe the person to determine the relevance of cues.
 Look for context that is relevant to the present.
 Consider cultural context.

Observing several cues and interpreting them as a cluster of auxiliary cues may be difficult to understand out of context. Context plays a highly relevant role interpretation. You need contextual clues to help you understand what a cluster of cues or lack of cues means. You must consider what is going on around the cluster, what happened just before, where the person is located, what else is going on, etc. Is it a social or professional environment? Is the person tired, hungry or stressed? You have to figure it out what the signals mean based on your prior knowledge (or lack of information). Part of observing for context is being aware of the surroundings that might influence certain behaviours. Being observant is key:

Look for context in the communication setting: Interpersonal communication occurs within a specific communication setting that affects how the messages are produced, interpreted, and coordinated. There are obvious differences that can completely change the nature of any given signal. For example, full constant eye-to-eye contact is helpful for intimacy, but intimidating in a business environment, and considered aggressive within prison walls. Therefore, if you observe full constant eye-to-eye contact, consider other factors within the setting, before determining the meaning of the cue.

Look for context in the interaction between other people. Sometimes it is a particular situation, not the person, which produces certain non-verbal signals. A person may be confident, assertive and strong, but body language comes across as subdued or negative because of the presence of certain other people that causes stress: being in a strange new environment, being in a minority, being dominated by a person of authority in the room.



Observe the person to determine the relevance of cues. Say you are talking to a peer and your listener yawns. What might be the significance of that one signal? Is your listener: Unreceptive to your message? Sleep deprived? In need of additional oxygen? Without other clues, you may never know for sure. However, say you observe that your listener not only yawns, she frequently glances around the room with a bored look, adjusts her feet towards the door, and taps a pencil on the desk. From this cluster of nonverbal cues, you can assume that your listener is not receptive to what you said.

Look for context that is relevant to the present: We mentioned earlier that three non-verbal cues are usually enough to form a cluster. In some situations, you may need multiple cues. Since non-verbal communication is always in motion, you need to consider that a person can be experiencing multiple emotions at the same time. The non-verbal cues that are immediately visible may not have anything to do with the context of the present conversation. That is because a person does not always focus on the “now”. A person is capable of doing a task now, while thinking about or planning on doing something else in the near future. Our body language can subconsciously express those future thoughts or emotions. However, further observation usually reveals cues that are relevant to the present.

To illustrate this point let us look at two excellent examples of how a person experiences emotions that are not aligned with a current conversations:

Example #1: Say, you were in a thought-provoking conversation. Someone said just that one little thing that spurred you to have a brilliant idea about a project that had been consuming your time. You might have displayed an unexpected emotional cue that had relevance to your project, but your body language at that moment did not fit with the serious conversation. What did the other people watching you assume? If they continue to observe you, they will see other cues in your body language that fit the conversation because you were brought back to the present moment?

Example #2: If you are watching for a person's reaction to something that you say, and the person simultaneously remembers a moment of embarrassment, grief, or regret you may get multiple signals, some of them confusing. If the person is daydreaming, instead of paying attention to the immediate conversation, you could witness emotional cues coming from a person who is placing more emphasis on the future, or the past, while forgetting that they are actually living in the present moment.

In both examples, the emotions can be momentarily, yet send out confusing or ambiguous signals. That is why your goal is always to search out companion cues that form the cluster to gain clarity and meaning.

Consider cultural context: Another, aspect of context in interpreting cues may be cultural specific display rules. Culture can dictate how we meet and greet each other, how closely two people can interact, or when and to what degree a person displays particular emotions. Some forms of body language can mean different things to other cultures.

Apart from setting and culture, age, gender, and social status can influence how we send and interpret messages.

The point we are trying to make about context is that there could be countless reasons for one or two confusing micro expressions to appear. Before you judge what body language is telling you, ask yourself:

Are there external factors affecting the mood and condition of the individual concerned?
What other evidence am I seeing of this emotion?

Even with some supporting context, interpretation might still be difficult if your lack of knowledge or your predisposition presents a challenge to the interpretation. That is why you observe to see at least three or multiple cues in the cluster. That is why you should be careful not to jump to conclusions, and why you need the skills to recognize and interpret non-verbal communication.

2.
Look for
Patterns of
Consistency

Companion cues come through different channels. They form a partnership and work in harmony to repeat a consistent message.

Verbal communication is not enough to put things in the right framework of understanding. Different parts of the body work in unison to send out auxiliary cues that enable us to decode the emotion or intent conveyed by a person. If you can observe three or more gestures or expressions (including the micro expressions that can be subtle or barely perceptible) then you probably identified a non-verbal communication cluster which adds a layer of meaning to what is being said. Look for companion cues, coming through different channels. You will recognize how they partner up to work in harmony so that you know you are receiving a consistent message.

What the cues tell you may not be in agreement with the spoken words. The cluster may be delivering a message that contradicts or detracts from the words. No cluster of cues should ever be ignored. When there is inconsistency in the cluster of cues it is reason to search out even more corroborating cues that support each other.

3.
Look
for
Congruence

To avoid misjudging or misunderstandings, you must make sure that the non-verbal cluster matches or says the same thing as the words and tone of voice.

When someone says one thing, but his or her body language sends a different message, you want to be alert for other cues that may be incongruent, to avoid being deceived in some way. People may try to make a good first impression by making good eye contact and offering a firm handshake and broad smile. These deliberate cues could be very sincere, but they could also be superficial.

Other examples: Worry, surprise, or fear can cause people to raise their eyebrows in discomfort. If someone compliments your new hairstyle or outfit with their eyebrows raised, it could be a cue that the person is not sincere. Same when you see a slight negative shake of the head at the same time a person is saying "yes" and smiling as if in agreement.

Incongruent cues tell us something. They form their own partnerships, so we can find additional cues that match with the incongruent cue or cluster, but do not match the message or superficial body language. Through these incongruent non-verbal signals, we should be able to interpret what is being faked, and what is not.

Is there an easy flow of information back and forth? Do nonverbal responses come too quickly or too slowly? Does the person smile, laugh, or clap later than after everyone else? This is one reason to avoid a hasty analysis based on one or two isolated signals.

Non-Verbal Communication Cannot be Concealed – that is a Scientific Fact

Nonverbal communication includes intentional, unintentional, and involuntary cues. It is impossible for someone to control or suppress all outgoing signals. It is a scientific fact that the entire human body cannot lie. While you may consciously decide to stop sending verbal messages, your non-verbal communication always has the potential of generating meaning for another person. Do you know why?



Many of body reflexes are impossible or difficult to control because they are involuntary and instantaneous, acting on a human impulse before it even reaches the brain.

All, absolutely all the emotions you feel, you communicate through your body. Your brain receives information from several senses and sends out non-verbal communication signals before you are fully aware of what you are thinking or how you feel. Unintentional and involuntary cues never lie. They reveal your thoughts, mood, and true intent. These honest gestures happen so naturally and quickly, they are impossible to stifle. That means your body language can contradict what you say or how you think you want to react or what body language you contrive to hide your true feelings.

Take for example the face. We have several reliable muscles that we cannot voluntarily control, especially in the face. One is the “fear muscle”. It is a small twitch of the muscles between the eyes, that forces the eyebrows together to make a grin-like gesture that is impossible to stifle. This muscle reveals true emotion. Another very reliable indicator is the involuntary impulse of a person’s pupils; they dilate when they see something that excites them. Nobody can control that part of the eyes. You cannot stop your heart from beating or your face from flushing. That is why poker players wear sunglasses to mask their eyes or hoodies to cloak pulsations in their neck and the perspiration on their brow. No matter how hard we try to have it not happen, some aspect of our body language always gives away what is going on in the mind. It is extremely difficult to hide our pattern of thoughts because they ooze from body naturally.



We spend so much time focusing on the face. For that reason, people learn to control many of their facial expressions in order to hide their true intentions or emotions. Similar to donning a mask, they try to control their facial expressions in the presence of other people. A person may be able to disguise a part of the body or distract us from noticing fleeting, spontaneous, and contradictory body reactions. However, they simply **cannot control or hide all the parts of their bodies** that reveal true feelings or intent. They cannot hide the micro expressions that leak out from behind the mask. Eventually, some part of the person’s body will always reveal negative and contradictory tell-tale signs that expose the real meaning.

**Body
Language
Cues are
Insightful**

These cues may appear for a fraction of a second, yet they are charged with meaning, that others can perceive.

This bears repeating. Our bodies are powerfully expressive tools. They speak a language of their own saying much more than we realize, both when we want them to and when we're oblivious to it. The involuntary and unintentional cues are the most sensitive. You send out a continuous stream of insightful information. Others perceive these flashes of insight and can instantly sense your feelings, attitudes and moods. They consciously and unconsciously react to this information and their bodies in turn communicate their emotions that you consciously or intuitively interpret. This exchange is instantaneous and unremitting.

Essentially, through these sensitivities, we connect with other people.

These cues may be barely visible to the naked eye. Both unintentional micro expressions and involuntary cues (an eyebrow lift, a corner of a twitch, pupils contracting, a small tightness of the mouth, etc) can appear and disappear so quickly (some can be 1/30 of a second) that we can easily miss seeing important data that adds layers of genuine meaning to the words. The cues may be barely discernible if your view of the person is obscured. Yet, if you are alert enough, you often catch the signs early. If not, sooner or later, your instincts kick in and you know.

The interpretation of what the cues mean may not always be accurate if we miss important signals. Still, non-verbal body language can be used as a positive tool to help us understand how people really feel. Take the medical profession as an example. Nurses and doctors are astute at reading our non-verbal cues so they can probe a little deeper to treat our illnesses. Whether we are in the workplace or romantic encounter insight prepares us to respond appropriately and honestly. In an emotionally charged situation, another person's body language primes us to be in a position to act.

For example: When experiencing shame or embarrassment, a person automatically touches the side of the forehead and partially block the eyes, or if the emotion is extreme the person will go from a forehead touch to completely covering the forehead as a visor over the eyes. We see that body language and recognize that we should refrain from whatever we might have done to put that person in such a situation and we know it is time to back off.

Think of non-verbal communication cues this way: View a person's entire body as their personal animated billboard. You observe 100% of the billboard to gather all bits of information. Without this information you can misinterpret a person's meaning or true intent. The more you observe, the more you see, and the more you will understand and appreciate the person or message.

**Negative
Conflicting
Signals -
the Most
Honest**

A person may try to stifle negative or conflicting signals. Yet, deep down the subconscious has no choice in the matter. It must find avenues of releasing the truth via involuntary cues

In our society, people are expected to act positively, even when they are at odds with being in that frame of mind. We quickly learn how to display positive body language, especially in our faces, to disguise our feelings of being scared, sad, displeased, disappointed, bored, contradictory, or overwrought. When things are difficult we present ourselves so we do not appear rude, insensitive, weak, nervous or perplexed.

No matter how hard the person may try to make the conscious image more dominant, the subconscious finds its way to the surface. It must tell the truth! The subconscious releasing the truth through involuntary cues that appear some aspect of the person's body language. Think of the times you get a sense when someone is not trustworthy? Think about times you have been able to tell if a person seems emotionally aloof, cool, or disinterested. How long does it take you to determine when a person is calm or low-key versus melodramatic or panicky? Actually subconsciously you can detect some miniscule micro expressions that send you honest meaning.

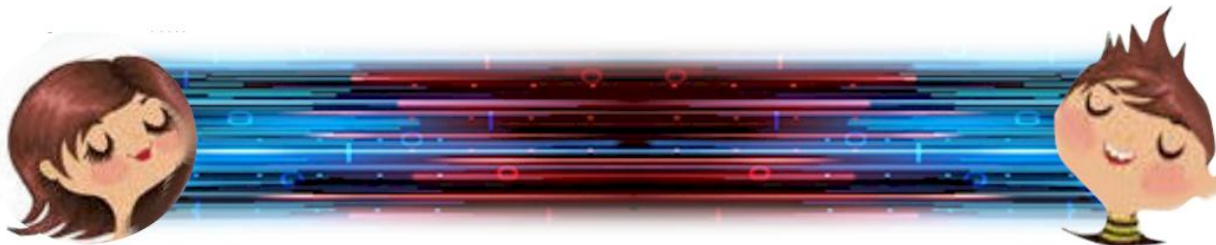
Involuntary cues can complement as well as contradict the spoken words. You discern this variance when you catch the non-verbal cues. If you only pay attention to obvious gestures and miss the involuntary cues, you can be fooled by another person's overt body language.

In any communication, non-verbal involuntary cues are the most significant because they are natural and genuine. In fact, if you ever find verbal language confusing, the non-verbal communication cues will unravel the words so you can decipher better meaning. These cues are a reliable indication of what lies beneath the surface of a person's behaviour pattern

**Interpretation
Occurs at
Mind-Boggling
Speed**

If non-verbal cues appear so fast, how quickly can a person interpret these unintentional or involuntary cues?
The answer is - astonishing or mind-blowing speed.

We said earlier that non-verbal communication is fast, appearing before we are even fully aware of what we think or feel. If your non-verbal cues appear so fast, how quickly can another person interpret your unintentional or involuntary cues? The answer is –at mind-boggling speed.



Research from Princeton showed that humans make initial judgments about a person's attractiveness, likeability, trustworthiness, competence and aggressiveness within 100 milliseconds or one tenth of one second of meeting someone. These initial judgments are based on exposure to a person's non-verbal communication signals. Furthermore, their studies showed that people can make accurate inferences about new people they meet with very little information. Many of us subconsciously develop first impression interpretation skills early in life.

It is astounding how fast our brains can decode expressions of body language and giving them adequate meaning.

We stated earlier that most of us know many of the non-verbal communication signals intuitively. That is true. Any innate skills that you may have stifled may just need to be reawakened which will happen with awareness, keen observation, and practice. Of course, the language of non-verbal communication is immense and none of us can ever learn or know enough. Yet, whatever seems daunting now, will become more intuitive as you hone your abilities. These are valuable skills that anyone can learn and hone.

What you Should Know about Your Own Non-Verbal Body Language

Remember – while you are interpreting, either consciously or unconsciously, the body language of other people, other people are constantly interpreting yours. Since words alone rarely reflect full or true meaning and motive, what you communicate through your facial expressions, tone of voice, where you stand, silence, the way you listen, react, move your fingertips, breathe or twitch your lips has significantly more insightful meaning.

People tend to pay more attention to how you say something rather than what you actually say. They are more impressed by the information they receive through your non-verbal communication you're your words.

They pay attention to what you are missing too. . Your body stirs, moves and sways in sync with your words; it continues to relay messages even when you stay quiet.

Your reactions to another person's body language and their reactions to yours contribute greatly to mutual assessment and understanding. Think about your last experience where no words were exchanged, yet you understood the feelings of another person in a single glance.

People may See and Hear more than you ever Anticipated

Typically, we are conscious of only a tiny fraction of the body language signals we are sending to others. Unfortunately, many people send confusing or negative non-verbal signals without even knowing it. When this happens, both connection and trust in a relationship can be damaged.

Consider what you may be conveying through your non-verbal cues. With every breath you take, your small or large non-verbal cues are busy telling the world something about you. Anyone listening or observing, who is adept at understanding the language of non-verbal communication, can determine the genuineness of your message. When your words, tone of voice, and body language tell the listener the same thing, chances are he or she is getting a genuine message of your emotions and intent. When you say one thing, but your body language shows a different pattern, the listeners are probably going to be on alert that you may be trying to deceive them in some way. Even when know what you are supposed to say or how you are supposed to react, when your non-verbal cues do not match your words, they can generate tension, mistrust, and confusion. Your non-verbal cues affect how others see you, how well they like and respect you, and whether or not they trust you. Never forget that others are diligent and attentive observers?

If you ever get lost in thought or forget this critical aspect of communication or if you are taking body language for granted, you may be sending the wrong signals. You might be saying very few words, but sending out thousands of nonverbal messages. Don't forget that your body language is reflected in how you interpret or fail to interpret both the non-verbal and verbal communication sent by others? Other people can tell how engaged or distracted you are by how your body language responds to their verbal and non-verbal communication.

If you rely on words as the basis of your interpretation, while you are checking for messages on your phone, planning what you are going to say, or thinking about something else entirely, you are certain to miss the genuine subtleties of communication. You will end up not fully comprehending a great deal of what is being communicated and that will be reflected in your body language or what you do next. Think how easy it might be for someone to deceive you if you are not tuned in to recognize the non-verbal signals.

Most of us are Unaware of How Others Perceive Us

Through testing, the Princeton researchers learned that people in their study were accurate at perceiving others, but most were inaccurate about how others perceive them. Sadly, this lack of awareness can hurt a person. Even on the phone, people may not see your smile, but it definitely comes through in your tone. Unhappy or annoyed feelings do as well. If you have not given that much thought, it could be that your non-verbal messages are sabotaging your relationships or career.

Ask trusted friends and family members to share which positive and negative displays of body language you use most often.

You can improve your outgoing non-verbal communication by learning to developing emotional awareness. When you can quickly identify your emotions and how they influence others, it helps you to display appropriate non-verbal cues to show others you understand or care. This also helps you to recognize the emotions of others and the true feelings behind the non-verbal cues they are sending.



Study “How to Become Skilled in Nonverbal Communication” by Toastmasters International

Be a Conscious Observer of Your Non-Verbal Language Cues

Learning the language of non-verbal communications includes studying your non-verbal language cues. By being a conscious observer of other people, you become more adept at spotting and interpreting contradictions or miscues in others. At the same time, you will increase your self-awareness and self-control of your own cues, so that you can minimize sending out confusing, contradicting, or negative non-verbal messages.

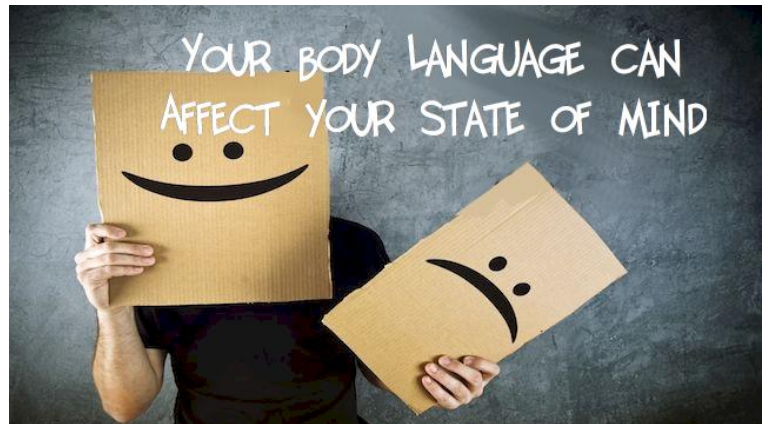
Engage an Observer

Are you involved in a business or community project that requires you to do a lot of speaking? Have you ever recorded a video of yourself to get a sense of how your non-verbal communication complements or detracts from your presentation? Do you have a good sense of how your audience responds to you? You could ask a coworker, trusted friend, or expert in non-verbal community to observe both you and your audience to learn more about how your body language affects your delivery of a message. They can note your gestures and how you emphasize certain points that enhance or detract from your presentation.

Your Body Language may Involuntarily Affect your State of Mind

Body language is not always kind, to others or to you. It is an integral part of who you are.

In the last few decades researchers have been studying embodied cognition which is the idea that our bodies are not only expressing our minds, but that the body can directly influence the mind in its own way. They engage in feedback from each other. Studies in this field reveal some remarkable insights:



- Sitting in a hard chair makes a people less willing to compromise than if they were in a soft chair.
- Holding a heavy clipboard causes a person to take their job more seriously.
- Holding a warm drink made people judge another as more generous and caring than those holding cold drinks.
- When a person slouches they can feel sad and depleted of energy; changed posture to an upright position caused an improvement in mood and energy.
- When they felt like quitting when faced with a set-back or difficult problem, individuals who crossed their arms boosted their attitude; they felt stronger and willing to work longer to find a solution.
- A person can pick themselves out of a negative mood and lower stress levels by simply smiling or creating ways to laugh out loud.
- Individuals that deliberately puff up their chests in powerful displays of establishing dominance, alter their levels of cortisol and testosterone. That automatically gives a boost to their confidence and self-assurance.

Much of our body language happens. We don't give it much thought; we just go along with it. However, looking at what the studies reveal, there are parts of our bodies that have the power to engage and alter our thoughts and these thoughts then feed emotions in a kind of feedback loop that influences our minds and moods and how we subsequently act. Our emotions are reinforced—perhaps even driven—by corresponding facial expressions or body positioning.

Recall moments when standing or sitting up straight helped you breathe and project a stronger voice. Maintaining a good posture might just make you feel more relaxed and confident.

Avoid the “Excuses”

People who are trying to protect their image – public figures, celebrities, politicians – are more aware of their body language. They try to avoid obvious gestures of discomfort, defensiveness or stress. But since, they cannot fully control body language and their emotions are revealed in more subtle cues they claim they use certain postures because they feel comfortable doing so. It is likely more possible that the reason they feel good or comfortable, is because that body language actually reflects their authentic inner mood, not because they choose to display it. So remember, body language might make you feel good, but it might keep others away.

Ask yourself the following questions regarding your own body language:

1. Do my gestures, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues match the image of how I would like to be described?
2. Do they match the feeling I want to convey?
3. What can I do to strengthen or clarify my communication?

Many people do not realize that they send out negative overt cues. You see, we are creatures of habit. We get used to sitting the wrong way or making the wrong gestures. We are also prone to imitating the body language of others and may not realize that how some behaviours affect our coworkers or family.

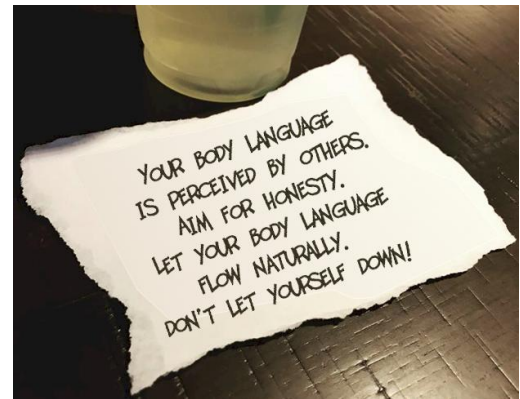


We all know someone who imitates the body language of celebrities or facial expressions they see on internet images. As an example: Thanks to several popular sitcoms, several celebrities close their eyes to demonstrate their frustration, irritation, and impatience. Actors exaggerated this facial expression for the benefit of the camera. The exaggeration is also a way to distract the viewer from authentic cues. Due to its overuse in comedy, people began to copy-cat these kinds of facial expressions as a tool of communication. However, in real life, sometimes it can be difficult to tell when it used for comedic purposes or actual frustration.

Images we see on the sitcoms and most on the internet are posed. The emotion we are copying is not real. Those adept at interpreting body language can detect that the emotion is faked in an image or in real life. These are just a couple reasons why it is so important to be conscious of our gestures because even if we aren't, others will be.

Aim for Honesty

Many people suggest that you can use body language to your advantage. To a limited extent, you can. You can establish good eye contact to convey conviction. When you meet someone for the first time, you can show respect with a firm confident handshake. You can make a conscious effort to control your body language to avoid sending negative signals that put others on the defensive. In difficult conversations, you can maintain a relaxed open posture and use receptive signals while you attempt to understand what others are saying and why.



To improving your nonverbal communication skills:

- Be mindful of the non-verbal behavior you are displaying.
- Adapt your non-verbal behaviors to your purpose.
- Adapt your non-verbal cues to the situation.
- Eliminate nonverbal behaviors that distract from your verbal message.
- Align your non-verbal and verbal cues.
- Embrace the tough realities and aim for honesty.

There is a lot less stress in being your authentic self and letting your body language flow naturally.

Do not Rely on any Body Language that you Design or Calculate to use

It is simply not possible for to control or suppress all your outgoing signals. When you put too much energy into body language or try to fake it, your calculated non-verbal pattern gets tangled up with your involuntary, genuine cues. The deliberate cues come across as insincere and phony; they overtly contradict the natural signals your body is conveying. At the very least, the mixed signals confuse others. Anyone listening or observing, who is adept at understanding the language of non-verbal communication, can determine the authenticity of your message. Even those not adept at interpreting non-verbal language can sense the disparity between the true and fake cues.

Designing how you will use body language can be a recipe for disaster if you are not being genuine. Social creatures that we are, we humans have a variety of emotions and attitudes. If you try too hard to apply the same gestures, such as looking joyful or friendly all the time you will appear fake or one-dimensional. When you try to impress people with overt repetitive gestures, they will often become suspicious, and it lowers trust between yourself and other people. Trying to force gestures in order to impress others or create some specific reaction in them, you inevitably sacrifice your own credibility. Remember it is what you do not say that counts.

Obvious Negative Body Language in the Workplace

A keen understanding of how you use and interpret body language helps you to cultivate trusting relationships and communicate more effectively. This is important in a workplace where people are all different and the dynamics are always changing.

Some forms of positive body language are conscious like standing up straight, smiling and offering to shake hands. Given this awareness of what constitutes good body language, people can still portray overt non-verbal communication cues that are less than positive, even when they can consciously control them.

To others in the workplace, negative body language is obvious and quick to spot. Unfortunately many people are simply not aware that negative behaviours can offend and alienate people. In the workplace, we need the cooperation of others, so we should seek to become more considerate and adaptable when using body language. People who exhibit undesirable body language in the workplace, should consider putting in an extra effort to fix these missteps and keep them in check.



VOTED MOST NEGATIVE, ANNOYING AND OFFENSIVE

From a recent survey, thirty seasoned entrepreneurs and more than four hundred of their employees and managers shared what non-verbal communication signals they deemed the most difficult to deal with in the workplace. These were things they experienced on a daily basis. Their responses included descriptive words

to describe the effect of these signals: tactless, awkward, improper, damaging, impolite, lack of respect. We narrowed the list to the ten that most frequently mentioned. We present them in no particular order. However, number 10 “Looking Like a Liar” actually encompasses four critical body language cues and deserves particular attention.

1. Furrowed Brows, Scrunched-Up Face

This complaint comes as no surprise. Most of us do not realize that we furrow our brows and scrunch-up our faces in reaction to things. We do it a lot. Again, this type of body language copy-cats overt exaggerated behaviours that were contrived for Hollywood cameras. In workplace conversations, however, this kind of reaction comes across as intimidating and hostile; it puts people on the defensive, and then they are less likely to speak openly.

2. Lack of Response

When people are speaking they like eye contact. A nod or smile indicate the listener is paying attention. It is a form of respect.

When you are in a conversation, make sure others know that you are listening. You do not have to agree with someone to show them basic respect.

3. Overacting

Respondents cited overacting as a common drawback to communication and difficult to deal with in the workplace. Exaggerated gestures can imply that the person is stretching the truth. Exaggerated nodding, for example, sends a signal that one is experiencing anxiety about approval.

Two types of overacting were cited:

- a) **Expansive gestures:** None of us wants to speak to a statue. Neither do we want to deal with a person who constantly over-emphasizes or over-acts body language in order to add emphasis to words or get attention. This includes how we move our arms wildly or too frequently, or how we lean or manipulate our torso into action, or employ our hands. Some expansive gestures may help you express your thoughts more effectively. In fact gestures in moderation can indicate passion, either positive or negative. However, exaggerated movements may not match the words or other non-verbal cues. Inconsistency in body language can send a false message. For example, people tend to perceive heavy nods as an attempt to show the individual agrees with or understand something that they actually do not understand.



Do not imitate sitcom actors who exaggerate movements for the benefit of a camera. Use expansive gestures sparingly and only when it serves a purpose. Try to catch yourself in the act of putting on a show with your body language. Then block yourself from making these false signals.

- b) **Overplaying a role:** Social beings that we **are** we tend to like to be around friendly happy people. However, our respondents stated that some coworkers overacted the role of being friendly or overjoyed at absolutely everything. They affect repetitive gestures, which they apply in several situations, some of which were blatantly unnatural.

If you try too hard to apply the same gestures, such as looking joyful or friendly all the time you will appear pompous, phony, or one-dimensional. Often the natural body language contradicts the friendly gestures, anyway.

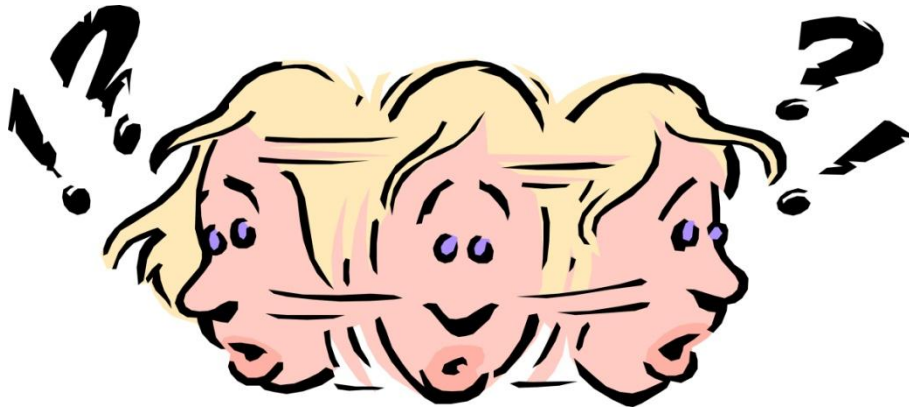
This example stands out: Every morning David came into the office smiling. To each individual, he raised his hand in a wave, greeted them with a warm hello, followed by a friendly-sounding, "How are you?" Yet, David never established good eye contact, because he continued to walk as he uttered the last couple words of his greeting. He never paused to get a response. His words, smile, and wave started out friendly enough, but David strode off with a smile still pasted on his face, indicating no genuine interest in the people or their response.

- c) Expressing a repetitive or overplayed attentive attitude all the time can cause others to dismiss it easily as shallow.

If you think you have perfected an approach or attitude that makes an impression, maybe you should rethink what you are doing. Your coworkers may not be impressed at all.

4. Looking around the room

We have all been in a conversation with someone who spent a lot of time looking around the room. They act like they are scouting the area to see who they can talk to next or catch someone else's eye – basically they appear to be looking for something better to do.



Do not be that person. Make sure that your head and torso are facing the speaker. Do not watch others to see what they are doing or how they are reacting. Treat everyone you talk to with respect. Listen with respect.

5. Staring at a Phone

Phones are everywhere. Still, managers and colleagues listed “checking their phone every few moments” as rude body language. On the job, people are paid to concentrate on the task at hand. At business events or meetings, employers expect their people to engage with clients. Neither co-workers or clients are impressed when people stare at their phone in anticipation of an alert.

Staring at your phone is akin to watching the clock while talking to someone. It is a clear sign of disrespect, impatience, and inflated ego. It sends the message that you have better things to do than talk to the person you are with and that you are anxious to leave them. Put your phone away to minimize distractions. If you cannot hide your phone, do not stare at it. If it is important to your job, check it at appropriate intervals. If not, ignore it during working hours.

6. Fidgeting and Picking

When people are nervous or stressed out, their body sends out a signal to do something, anything. So, they fidget or pick at things. They might play with their clothes, hair, jewelry, phones; pick at their nails or portfolios; clench and unclench their hands; or shift their weight from foot to foot. This constant fidgeting sends out poor vibes to everyone who is trying to listen or concentrate. When someone is speaking, this body language draws attention away from whatever is being said.

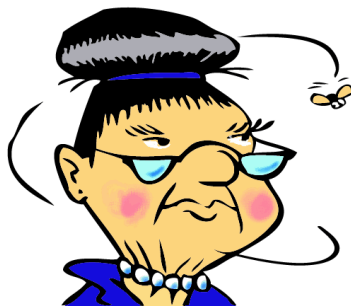
When you catch yourself fidgeting or picking at things, refocus your energy by folding your hands in your lap and taking some deep and conscious breaths to relax. Picture something that is pleasing to counter the stress.

7. Slumping, Slouching

A slumped posture shows a lack of energy and confidence. Slouching is also a sign of disrespect. It communicates that the person is bored and has no desire to be where they are. Employers would like their customers to see a certain amount of get-up-and-go or passion in the people that represent the company. Employers would like to know their employees are engaged in whatever they are doing. Maintaining good posture commands respect and promotes engagement from both ends of the conversation.



You would never tell your boss or a client, "I don't understand why I have to listen to you," but if you slouch, you don't have to say anything because your body language speaks loudly and clearly.



8. Not Smiling Enough, Scowling

Scowls turn people away, because they feel judged. People who do not smile enough seem less friendly, less cheery. It is not natural for everybody to smile without a real reason. But, did you know that smiling has been proven to make us feel happier and has power to make others feel-good? MRI studies have shown that the human brain responds favorably to a person who is smiling, and this leaves a lasting positive impression.

Scowling or having a generally unhappy expression sends a message that you are upset by those around you, even if they have nothing to do with your mood. Make a habit of greeting someone with a genuine warm smile (not faked, because the other person will know). Smiling suggests that you're open, trustworthy, confident, and friendly. The more you are able to smile, the more composed you will feel and you will undoubtedly be more pleasant to work with.

9. Too Weak or too Strong a Handshake

Handshakes are often the first impression someone has of you. For men or women, a weak handshake signals being unprofessional, inexperienced, uncertain, or lacking commitment. Too much force can be a bone-crusher that comes across as aggressive. A two-handed shake can be interpreted as untrustworthy in a business meeting. Hand pumping makes other uncomfortable. Finger handshakes are taboo.



Learn what a good handshake should be. Your customers will appreciate it. Note that in certain cultures a weak handshake is a sign of respect and a firm handshake is aggressive.

10. Looking Like a Liar -

We tend to be watchful for deceitful behaviors in others. In less than a tenth of a second, we take in several signals that we process instinctively. We can sense when someone is lying before we can logically decode specific signals in our brains.

In a constant struggle to get ahead, please people, or appear like super-beings a person can send off non-verbal cues that are similar to those displayed by liars. A first impression like that is difficult to erase. It makes it difficult for that person to have influence over others if any of these four behaviours send the wrong message:



- a) **Avoiding Eye Contact:** Avoiding eye contact makes others feel ill at ease or ostracized. We all know someone who tends to talk to the floor. Inability to make eye contact can mean a person is lying. It can also mean that a person is unprepared and feeling uncomfortable. For our respondents, avoiding eye contact makes it look like the person has something to hide and that arouses suspicion.

Lack of eye contact can also indicate a lack of confidence and interest, which you never want to communicate in a business setting. In conversation, keep your eyes on the level of the other person's face. This is respectful eye contact. When you break eye contact, as you should every few seconds, try looking slightly off to the side, without head movement. Avoid scanning the room.

- b) **Self-soothing gestures:** Our anxiety manifests itself in how we touch our face or rub the skin of our arms and hands. Both can be soothing behaviors when we feel ill at ease. We all engage in "self-soothing" gestures that are evocative of when we were babies and needed mom or dad to gently rub our backs or massage our little fingers to calm us. They send signals of low self-esteem, doubt or deceit.

As an adult, you may have advanced biting your nails or cracking your knuckles to lower your anxiety. Still, you may use self-soothing gestures to seek comfort: playing with your hair, rubbing the backs of your arms, biting the inside of your cheeks, or rubbing the tops of your thighs. Before you make an entrance into any event or conversation that might make you feel nervous or uncomfortable, calm or self-soothe yourself in private by listening to your favourite song or rubbing the back of your neck and arms.

- c) **Hiding Your Hands:** We have dedicated regions in our brains that allow us to instantly recognize where a person's hands are in relation to their body. Because people are nervous or uncomfortable they do things with their hands that make them appear like they are searching for distractions and have something to hide. It only takes 3-5 seconds for an observer to process that type of behavior and think an individual is acting dishonestly.

If you hide your hands in your pockets or under a table, the observer is unable to gauge your intention. If you suddenly realize that you have no idea what to do with your hands, the best choice is keep your hands visible and relaxed and expressive of your engagement. Sit with your hands visible, but still. Avoid making a fist, tapping your fingers on a surface, doodling or playing with an object. If you are standing do so with your hands hanging loosely by your sides. It is a good neutral position. Standing this way may feel weird or forced at first, especially if you are a naturally restless person, but it will probably feel easier and more natural with practice. Try practicing in front of a mirror.

- d) **Faking happiness:** We often pretend to happy. We try to hide our negative emotions like fear, jealousy, or sadness by feigning that we are cheerful or delighted. We cannot tell our coworker that we are envious of that promotion she received or our neighbor that we are offended we did not get an invite to their daughter's wedding. Instead we paste a smile on our faces and fake happiness. What we rarely realize – and we should make it a priority to take seriously – is that real happiness and fake happiness look different on our faces. Genuine happiness engages the face in an undeniably distinct way – the cheeks, wrinkles, jaw line, side eye muscles, wrinkles, brightness of the eyes, even the crow's feet look different. If you fake happiness, the other person knows nearly 100% of the time how you really feel.

Honor your authentic emotions and do not hide behind fake happiness. If you are not happy about something, it is much better to let the other person know. You do not have to be rude or hurtful; just take an honest engaging approach, using careful language. Let's go back to the example of the promotion to illustrate this point. You might say, "I'm disappointed I didn't meet the criteria, but I'm pleased it went to someone I know and respect."

To be mentioned in the survey, the behaviours must have been persistent and exasperating. We could infer that several seem voluntary and controllable rather than fleeting and subconscious. It highlights the fact that most of us are unaware of how others perceive us through our negative displays of body language.

In the examples cited, coworkers are forced to second guess what individuals might be communicating through these types of behaviours. Negative non-verbal communication in the workplace affects other employees and the overall environment that allows businesses to thrive. Think how unkind these body language behaviours are to the individuals who practice them. Their own body language may be affecting their own thoughts and moods, even sabotaging their well-being and careers.

If you are in a workplace environment, you must accept that body language always reveals the truth. We cannot say it enough. Opt for honesty.

The Body Language of Liars

Number 10 is such a biggie, it requires its own section. It appears that we human beings lie a lot.

We spin “little white lies” to be likable, to appear more competent, or to spare people’s feelings. Twisting the truth is considered part of being a polite. Most of us have good instincts when it comes to recognizing liars, but we tend to talk ourselves out of believing or acting on what instinct tells us. Who wants to call someone a liar for saying “What a cute baby!”

However, when a colleague is lying, manipulating the facts, and possibly affecting our work and business, what do we do? None of us likes to be deceived. We do not want lies to escalate to the drama caused by corrupt behaviour, crises or scandal. Since we cannot always pick our clients or who we work with, we can get stuck with some immoral people who create a myriad of problems in the workplace through dishonesty.

We meet different kinds of liars:

- Divorcing parents that are secretive with their children;
- The manager who has signed a confidentiality or non-disclosure agreement and simply cannot be forthright;
- The person who feigns physical illness to mask emotional problems;
- The college roommate that cheats on an exam.
- The polished performer who can be entertaining at neighbourhood BBQ’s with those larger-than-life stories;
- The tattletale who uses the office elevator to the boss something is off kilter in her department
- The malicious gossipmonger who simply has to relay his or her version of the latest squabble...

In more refined categories of liars, we encounter pathetic liars, narcissistic liars, and sociopathic liars.

- Pathetic liars just want to be liked. They exaggerate their abilities, make excuses so as not to appear incompetent, and frequently change their minds to be in agreement with group-think. They create deceptions to avoid a difficult conversations or conflict.
- Narcissistic liars are driven completely by ego and the need for attention. In defending their ego they are quick to criticize others, place blame, or scapegoat coworkers. They create a web of lies to deny responsibility for their actions.
- Sociopathic liars are fascinated with evil and are driven to harm others. They routinely create mayhem, misunderstandings, and generally like to make life awkward and difficult for others. They do it on without conscience and often without reason. They just have fun torturing other people. Their callousness can manifests in their version of retributive justice, acting out of spite or revenge.



It is indeed a long list. Yes, we human beings lie a lot.

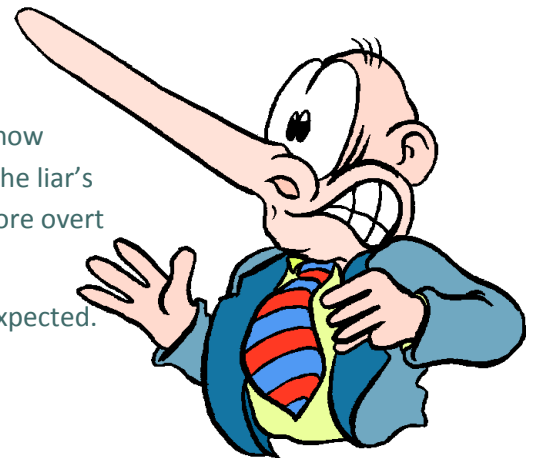
In fact, a psychological study at the University of Virginia indicates that the frequency of lying may be likened to brushing your teeth. Most people lie to someone else at least once or twice a day. That means that over the course of a week, they lie to 30 percent of the individuals they interact with. Is lying just a bad habit? Is it necessary to survive? Is it a bid for attention? What makes a person lie instead of telling the truth.

We are not all narcissists or sociopaths. The fact is, most liars think they are home-free and get away with lying. They do not truly understand these four fundamental truths:

- 1) We cannot convey trustworthiness verbally. To convince others that we are trustworthy it must come from what we do and from our tone of voice.
- 2) Unconscious involuntary body language always leaks out.
- 3) Non-verbal communication cannot lie.
- 4) We know.

No matter what kind of liar you deal with if you are like most of us you get a sense that the person cannot be trusted. You intuitively know that their subtle non-verbal cues are not aligned with their words. The liar's nose does not grow in front of your eyes. Yet, you may be seeing more overt warning signs that the individual may be dishonest:

- Behavioral pause or delay when an immediate response is expected.
- Clearing the throat prior to responding.
- Hiding the reaction of the mouth or eyes.
- Grooming or tidying behaviors (e.g., straightening a tie or skirt, suddenly repositioning paperwork on the desk; these distractions can alleviate the anxiety of lying)



You cannot fix the deceptive person. However, you can lessen the impact of their deviousness and contain the damage by learning how to identify and then deal with liars.

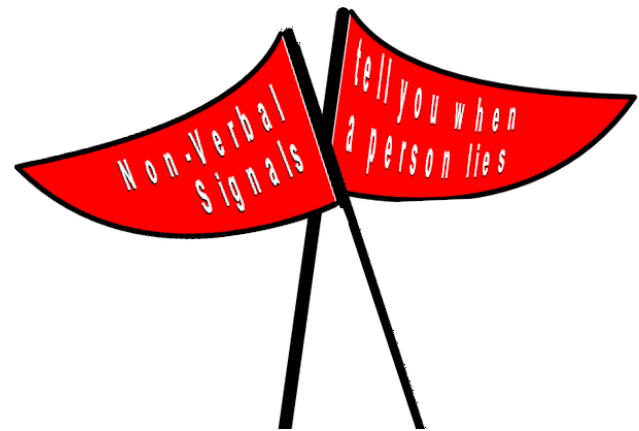
First however, you have to be absolutely certain that the person lied before making such an accusation. You may not be able to trust a potential liar so you have to check the facts to determine the source and gravity of the lie. You need to consider your motivations, as well as the consequences, before calling someone a liar.

Spot a Liar like a Professional Interrogator

Professional interrogators have different motivations than entrepreneurs, co-workers, or parents for determining who is lying. They need more than instinct so they became experts in body language. They understand a great deal about deception and the liars who package it. They know the physiological changes that happen in the body when a person lies.

1. They know that liars waste a lot of energy.
2. They know liars display common cues.

Science proves that it takes a lot more mental energy to lie than to tell the truth. When a person tells the truth, he or she actually uses six centers of the brain. When a person lies, fourteen centers of the brain are activated. There is so much mental activity going on that there is an automatic secretion of adrenalin which forces the liar's body to react or move and give away clues. After a lie has been told, especially serious lies, the liar has a lot to deal with – the emotional consequences of guilt, anxiety, and fear of being found out. Whether the person is an inept liar or one who has polished their act, the non-verbal language cues always eventually appear.



You may not need the interrogator's keen skills, but their insights will be extremely helpful.

First, the interrogator engages in strategic interplay. They may make small talk to establish what the person's normal speaking patterns, gestures and honest physiological reactions look like. They encourage the person to talk. As further questioning progresses and hints about evidence may be revealed, the interplay changes in the person's body language and the interrogator know what "red flags" (non-verbal clusters) to look for.

Watch for these cues displayed by incompetent liars:

- a. Liars tend to use overt gestures with both their hands after they speak as opposed to during or before a conversation. Usually their palms face away from you.
- b. A pause or delay in responding to you is evident.
- c. Lying causes a spike in anxiety which produces fluctuation in the nervous system and a chemical reaction that prompts:
 - Liars to feel cold or itchiness or tingles in their body.
 - Sweat may appear on the forehead, cheeks, or back of the neck.
 - You may see more hand-to-face activity as the liar's autonomic nervous system tries to address that blood is draining from the face, ears and extremities.

d.

The Eyes are Very Telling

The intensity of the lie can cause any one of these reactions.



- e) Liars display grooming behaviours, such as lip licking or touching their face and hair. Sometimes the grooming behaviour is a devious attempt to hide the mouth or eyes from revealing too much.
- f) Breathing changes because lying causes changes to heart rate and blood flow.
- g) Sometimes a liar will clear his throat prior to speaking.
- h) The liar may have trouble speaking as the mucous membranes in the mouth dry out.
- i) The liar may speak more slowly, make grammatical errors or stutter.
- j) The false smile is always a betrayal.
- k) When a liar roll lips inward till they almost disappear it can indicate lying by omission.
- l) Fidgeting – liars worry that you will not believe them so they release nervous energy – wringing of hands, moving side to side, tapping their fingers, pulling on their ears or shuffling their feet. Shuffling the feet is a common because the liar feels vulnerable and the body wants to flee.

Keep in mind that a small cluster of any of these non-verbal signs is not foolproof indication of lying.

When you are untrained in understanding non-verbal language behaviours, your interpretation can be impeded by not having a good baseline to start. Your perceptions may not be accurate. Many of these signs can also be indications of nervousness which might be evident for other reasons than lying. If someone is uncomfortable in a chair or has ADHD, he may fidget; if someone is nervous, her voice may crack. Pursed lips might mean the person does not want to engage in the conversation at hand. A person with PTSD That is why develop interpretation skills requires practice.

Here are some things to be watchful for when dealing with a competent liar:

Competent liars are more aware of body language. They try to polish or practice their behaviours. However, the signals of lying manifest in different ways. You see, liars have a dilemma. They can never be sure that they haven't been discovered for their deceptions. They do not know what evidence the spouse, boss, or interviewer has against them.

- a. Rather than stuttering, the competent liar sounds slick and contrived, like he has rehearsed the script to memory. Truth tellers can rely on their memories, they do not need to prepare a speech.



- b. Rather than too little eye contact, with a competent liar you are likely to see too much. The person is actually staring at you with as much as 90% eye contact.
- c. The practiced liar may put his hands behind his back, in his pockets or significantly reduce hand gestures by clasping one hand in the other.
- d. If there is opportunity a liar may try to violate your personal space by greeting you with a two-handed handshake, putting an arm around you or touching you in some way.
- e. Generally, a competent liar will try to act more familiar with you than he has the right to, based on how well he knows you.

Please note that psychopaths, don't demonstrate these behaviors because they don't feel nervous or guilty about lying. Other skills are necessary to determine who is psychopathic.

Observing the Eyes to Determine Lying

Competent or not, there are some cues in the eyes that will help you gauge whether a person is lying or not. Please note that directions left or right are specific to the individual who is generating the signals.

Looking right – generally indicates the person is creating, fabricating, guessing, lying, or storytelling. “Creating” in this instance is basically making things up and saying them. Depending on the context, this can indicate lying, such as when the person is supposed to be recalling facts. However, in other circumstances, for example, storytelling to a child, this would be perfectly normal. Looking right when stating facts does not necessarily mean lying – it could, for example, mean that the person does not know the answer, and is talking hypothetically or speculating or guessing.

Looking left – generally indicates the person is recalling information or retrieving facts. Recalling and then stating 'facts' from memory in appropriate context, often equating to telling the truth. Whether the 'facts' (memories) are correct is another matter.

Looking right and up – indicates visual imagining, fabrication, lying. Related to imagination and creative (right-side) parts of the brain, this upwards right eye movement can be a warning sign of fabrication if a person is supposed to be recalling and stating facts.

Looking right sideways – indicates the person is imagining sounds. This signal can include a person imagining or fabricating what another person has said or could say.



Looking right and down – indicates the person is accessing feelings. This can be a perfectly genuine response, or not. It is a creative signal but not a fabrication; it can signal that the person is self-questioning their feelings about something. Having context and recognizing other signals are important for interpreting more specific meaning about this signal.

Looking left and up – indicates the person is recalling images of truthfulness. This is related to accessing memory in the brain, rather than creating or imagining. It is a reassuring sign, if signaled when the person is recalling and stating facts.

Looking left sideways – indicates the person is recalling or remembering sounds. This is not fabricating or imagining. It could indicate recalling what has been said by another person.

Looking left down – indicates silent self-talking or rationalizing, thinking things through by self-talk. This self-talk is concerning an outward view, rather than the inward feelings, typically in trying to arrive at a view or decision.

What to do when you see Unreceptive or Negative Body Language

We should love non-verbal communication because we can actually see it. We should like it because we know it is usually authentic emotion or intent. Therefore, we should have little doubt about understanding what we are witnessing.

Or should we? Because we jump to the conclusion it is about us, we are often incorrect in interpreting cue.

We may be good at noticing the non-verbal cues, but we may not be so good noticing all of them. We may not be so good at translating whether the authentic emotion or intent pertains to us, to others in the room, or something else entirely. Because we jump to conclusions, we are often incorrect when we assign thoughts and motives to people. We assume that their body language pertains to us, when it does not.



Why do we do that?

From the time we are born, we begin to interpret everything as if it is about us. When we see another person tap a foot, frown, sigh, or make an abrupt gesture, we assume that person is thinking or feeling negatively toward us. It could be the case. However, we are often wrong. We make a self-interested assumption and spin a story about how that person is impatient, unenthusiastic, unhelpful, unfeeling, or just generally critical of us.

What happens when you do that?

- That assumption takes you out of the present moment and into story land valley.
- You lose your ability to notice what is happening in the present moment.
- You lose your ability to observe for context, consistency, or incongruence.
- You completely miss the other important signals that add meaning or insight.
- As importantly, you lack the ability to adapt and connect with the person.

Everybody has things going on in their lives. The attitudes and emotions that people show in the office or in your home may revolve around something totally unrelated to you. When you detect negative non-verbal communication it is not only a harsh assumption, it is a selfish habit that is difficult to abandon. A good communicator and interpreter of non-verbal communication will detect non-verbal signals without making assumptions and look for context and consistency to seek truth and meaning.

Instead of making an assumption, here are some things to try instead:

1. First and foremost: Say to yourself, “I am not a mind reader!”

Accept that you cannot possibly know exactly what is going on with another person’s emotions and attitude. Whatever you detect may be just a tiny sliver of what is actually going on. You may actually have missed other important signals. Other things can easily contribute to the non-verbal signal you detect – sleep deprivation, too much caffeine, hormones, anxiety over children, or an experience at lunch. In the workplace, the personality, experiences and beliefs of our coworkers may not be so obvious.

2. Never make it about YOU!

Most likely it is not about you. It is not personal. You see, other people, they were children too. They got into the profound habit of being concerned with their own lives and thoughts. Therefore, they are probably less concerned about you (positively or negatively) than you might think. Chances are what they were displaying is about some inner thought or remembering that had to do with them, not you. When you make it personal, future communication will be strained. Try it, “making it about others” and you will find that your conversations will become less painful and more productive.

3. Do not overthink it:

The attention needed to understand the reason and meaning of a gesture might be better spent on the positive aspects of the conversation.

4. Choose not to give others anything to misinterpret:

What does your body language say about you? Since others often subconsciously mirror the body language of others around them, might the other person be mirroring you? Is it possible that your tone of voice or body position is sending out a confusing or negative message and the person is responding to your non-verbal language?

- a. Choose your words carefully so that your message is clear.
- b. Aim for honesty. If you are not sincere when you communicate, your body language will be incongruent to your words and send conflicting signals to others.
- c. Clear out the verbal and non-verbal static that detracts from your message.
- d. Make sure you always have an open body posture.
- e. Whenever you have an option prepare ahead, so that you can arrange seating that promotes engagement. Ensure your office conversations are not always across a desk.

4. Seek clarity:

Whenever it is necessary to know, find out the root cause of the non-verbal signals you are seeing.

- a. Pay attention to other signals that might provide insight.
- b. You can ask the person directly to tell you what the furrowed brow or long sigh meant.
- c. If you are not comfortable with the direct approach, you can adjust your approach to see if that leads to a shift in the other person's non-verbal cues.
 - Take the initiative and change your posture or position. Since others often subconsciously mirror the body language of others around them, assume your next position will help others to change their posture as well.
 - If you are standing and the other person is sitting, choose to sit a comfortable unthreatening distance away.
 - If you are sitting on opposite sides of a desk or table, suggest that you move to sit in chairs that are at an angle to each other so there is no barrier between the two of you.
- d. Engage the other person. Suppose you are in a intent conversation about a work project and you expect the other person to engage, but you notice he is holding a closed tense unreceptive body position. You do not want a confrontation. Your objective is to respectfully neutralize the situation and get your listener to change his body position to an open position. You do not necessarily have to say anything. You could engage him directly by offering him an object or paper to examine. You could ask him if he has any questions or concerns, which allows him to voice his doubts or objections. Any one of these actions will send him a message that you care about what he thinks, so the conversation can proceed more smoothly.
- e. Depending on the situation or relationship, you may want to address the message you interpret, rather than the non-verbal behaviour. You might say, "I get the impression you're uncomfortable with this," or "I am sensing some resistance," or even, "What do you think?"

The key is to be aware, take a measured approach, and be open to understanding what the non-verbal cues mean.

Non-Verbal Communication is Influenced by Culture

While some differences occur across cultures and situations, those differences are actually miniscule in the whole scheme of interpreting non-verbal communication. Most body language is innate or genetic and therefore universal. Cultural differences do not relate to basic emotions such as fear, love, and intimacy, which are essentially true to all people. Certain cues are the same in all people: happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, surprise, anger. All cultures recognize laughter to express joy and tears to express grief. Those are easiest to understand.



When it comes to the differences in non-verbal communication influenced by cultural it is certainly is helpful to be aware of what other differences can exist. When interacting with other cultures, you should not assume North American gestures or expectations are the same. You can make a point of becoming knowledgeable and more aware.

You can learn the basic differences in body language in how people meet and greet each other. For example, in Japan instead of offering a handshake on introduction, the male bows from the waste. You can take extra care to control how you use and interpret very culture-specific gestures that may be obvious in one culture and mean something

different in another culture. Here's a prime example. In western cultures, we usually are saying "okay" when we place a thumb and forefinger into a circle while raising the other three fingers. If you look on Wikipedia, you will find nearly one hundred cultural references and meanings for this one gesture.

Cultural Expectations

It is more difficult to learn and understand some non-verbal cues influenced by deeply rooted cultural expectations. A culture may have different norms in touching preferences or how closely two people can interact. Certain cultures also determine whether natural expressions are permitted, inhibited or exaggerated, which can be confusing if one is not knowledgeable about these types of certain accepted behaviors. For example, certain cultures permit open public weeping from grief whereas others inhibit these natural gestures. Some cultures try to hide their disgust. Some cultures tend to use more gestures when they speak.

When it comes to cultural expectations we will explore social priorities, motivation, time orientation or use of time, and give you some examples.

Cultural Priorities

Both verbal and non-verbal communication is influenced by cultural priorities involving honesty, business and social protocols, norms and traditions, family relationships, etc. What shapes one culture and drives the motivations of its people can be drastically different and therefore less easy to comprehend by another culture. Even minor differences manifest different emotions which result in non-verbal communication signals that another culture might find ambiguous or perplexing. Some examples of cultural differences in priorities are:

- a. Comfort in doing business in a casual way versus using lots of rituals and ceremonies.
- b. Openness and integrity in verbal communication (saying what you mean and meaning what you say) versus caution or evasiveness.
- c. Motivation towards achievement and power versus a motivation of belonging.
- d. Identity rooted in primacy of family versus identity rooted in oneself and personal accomplishments.
- e. Belief that people are basically good (empower him/her to perform) versus belief that people are basically bad (emphasis on control and monitoring of people).

Use of Time



A culture's use of time can create differences in non-verbal communication behaviors. In countries, such as Canada and the USA, most people have a monochronic orientation to time. Time is viewed as a commodity that can be spent or wasted, budgeted or saved. People schedule events in advance, have set beginning and ending times. Meals, leisure time, family activities, even self-reflection revolve around what the clock reads.

In countries like Spain and Mexico, people have a polychronic orientation to time. They do not necessarily adhere to a fixed schedule: appointments or schedules may overlap; people may miss appointments or deadlines without offering an apology. Their colleagues and fellow citizens do not expect one; changes and plans are judged according to their fit with history and customs, and relationships.

Monochronic cultures are frustrated when people from polychronic cultures cancel appointments or close businesses for family obligations or traditional holidays. Conversely, people from polychronic cultures feel that societies that adhere to their strict schedules do so at the expense of personal relationships.

Motivations

Cultural expectations and priorities influence a person's motivations. Some cultures are oriented to place value on action, accomplishments, achieving personal goals and improving one's standard of living. These cultures follow external standards of measurement and are motivated by promotions, raises, bonuses and recognition. A culture that places value on working for the moment and job satisfaction is not motivated by future rewards, and therefore, will display different non-verbal reaction cues in discussions revolving around the future in general and personal success more specifically. How different cultures use time can place emphasis on doing tasks differently, with a priority on relationship building rather than on meeting deadlines.

Culture Specific Gestures

Hand and body gestures are the easiest element of non-verbal communication to control, but we have to be careful how we use and interpret these gestures because they can be very culture-specific. What may be obvious in one culture can mean something different in another culture.



Here are some examples of culture specific gestures:

- a. In Japan instead of offering a handshake on introduction, the male bows from the waist. The depth of the bow determines the amount of respect shown, but this depth is incredibly difficult to judge without experience. Business cards should be exchanged at the first possible opportunity. The card received should be held in both hands, examined carefully and then stored, preferably in a wallet, on the upper half of the body. Holding a person's identity in one hand is considered too casual and disrespectful. The trouser pocket is a rude place.
- b. In the Netherlands, people touch the temple with the index finger in order to indicate someone (or a specific action) is smart or intelligent. Touching the forehead with the index finger means someone (or an action) is stupid or crazy. In Russia, these meanings are reversed.
- c. Though not universally consistent, in some areas of China people stick their tongues out to display surprise.
- d. In some cultures, it is disrespectful to look an elder, or person of a rank above you, in the eyes. It is a sign of respect to drop your eyes. Whereas in other cultures not meeting somebody's gaze is commonly considered to be a negative sign.

- e. Some cultures do not recognize the nod of the head as an agreement unless it is accompanied by an utterance indicative of assent or understanding.
- f. When most of us shake our head from side to side we are communicating “No”. However, in a few southern European Countries such as Albania, Greece, or Bulgaria, a person gives a single nod upwards to indicate 'no' and shake their head when gesturing 'yes.' When you see the head shaking gesture, look for other clues, such as the configuration of the mouth or the position of the eyebrows as well as the context of what was going on to determine the true meaning of the gesture in that instance.
- g. Hand gestures that are acceptable in one culture may be very different, even offensive in another. In western cultures, usually we are saying “okay” when we place a thumb and forefinger into a circle while raising the other three fingers. A search on Wikipedia, results in about one hundred cultural references and meanings for this one gesture. Here are but a few examples:
 - (1) In Japan, this is reputedly the sign for wealth or money.
 - (2) In Arabic countries, it is intended as a type of curse or threat.
 - (3) In France, it means “nothing” as in zero.
 - (4) In Brazil, Greece or Turkey it takes on a vulgar connotation.
 - (5) Among Hindus and Buddhists it is a symbol of inner perfection.

You could spend an enormous amount of time researching the complex cultural meanings of any gesture. Gestures made by manipulating the hands could easily have a parallel meaning in sign language.

Though not gender specific, please avoid the common view that all weak handshakes are a sign of a weak or submissive person or that a firm handshake is a sign of a strong solid person. The handshake is a widely misleading and misinterpreted gesture. Caution is required in reading this signal.

Strength of a handshake is not by itself an indicator of positive 'good' mood or personality. Weak handshakes can be due to various aspects of personality, mood and so on. People who use their hands in their profession, for example, musicians, artists, surgeons can have quite gentle sensitive handshakes. Strong but passive people can have gentle handshakes. Old people can have weak handshakes. A weak handshake might be due to arthritis. Young people unaccustomed to handshaking can have weak handshakes. Firm handshakes may be a sign of outward confidence, which could also mask deceit or a weak bullying nature..

The point is we need to be careful when using or interpreting any gesture when interfacing with people we do not know well. Keep an eye out for a confused, shocked, or angry look on the face of the other person. If you see that, then you might have to explain what you wanted to convey verbally.

Non-Verbal Communication is Influenced by Gender Differences

Most non-verbal cues are universally consistent between genders. However, men and women have different ways of transmitting and receiving body language signals due to innate hormonal, biological and cultural differences. Additionally, studies show that men and women show different patterns of brain activity, indicating how messages are absorbed through the complex connections between both hemispheres of their brain.

When we interact with the opposite sex, we need to take these types of behaviours into account, and never assume.



Research conducted at the University of Pittsburgh points to some important distinctions between men and women. Before we cite any examples, we should point out that the research did not imply that all men do something and all women do something else. It simply pointed out some general behavior pattern differences that may not hold fast in every case or for every pairing of males and females.

Example #1 – Head nodding

In the research, an audience made up of an equal number of men and women observed a conversation between a woman and a man. During the conversation, the woman nodded her head several times. Eighty percent of the males in the audience assumed she was in agreement with the statements made by the man. However, the men were right only 25% of the time.

What is the distinction?

- a. Actually, one in three women will use a head nod before you begin to speak. She is not agreeing, she is actually nodding to indicate she is ready to listen; you have permission to speak your mind. She also nods to show attentiveness.
- b. During conversation, a woman nods to show understanding.
- c. For women understanding is not an indication of agreement. For a male, understanding and agreement are almost the same things. To highlight the difference, Bill Acheson, the researcher from University of Pittsburgh, quips, "if you draw a map of the average female mind, understanding is in the upper left corner and agreement is in Boca Raton, Florida; there is no connection."

Further statistical research seems to indicate that head nodding is the number one source of misunderstanding between women and men in the workplace and in interpersonal relationships.

Example #2 – Peripheral vision and perception

Interestingly, experts in non-verbal communication agree that women tend to have better perception and interpretation skills than men do. It may be because women have wider-ranging peripheral vision while men have a sort of "tunnel-vision". Men see things in front of them and over long distances, such as spotting targets. In women, peripheral vision extends 45 degrees to each side, above and below. A woman may look like she is studying a person's face when she is actually able to study a wider area.

The Fundamentals of Interpreting Non-Verbal Cues

Understanding the language of non-verbal communication is more than just knowing the theory – you have to be constantly aware of the signals people are giving. That means, to get a clear picture and understanding of the layers of communication you must not only listen to what is being said, you must also pay close attention to the person to catch as many of the nuances of non-verbal communication as possible.



Remember body language is always in motion.
The person is continuously adding layers of meaning to what they are thinking and feeling subconsciously.

Non-verbal communication cues are charged with meaning. Everyone you meet is continuously adding layers of meaning to what they are thinking and feeling subconsciously. Even in silence some part of that person's body is sending you a message.

- You have to understand how different parts of the body work in unison to send signals.
- You must learn to interpret body positions, gestures, and all the relative nuances to ascertain meaning from the unspoken cues.

A person's body is a powerfully expressive tool. Many non-verbal communication cues seem obvious, especially when written down in simple language such as "shoulder shrug", "a left turn of the head" or "blinking eyes". Some body language cues may be barely discernible (pupils dilating) or appear for a fraction of a second (twitch or tightness of the mouth). You have to be alert and know what to look for. Cues can appear in combination with other cues. Even when cues are obvious they can be entirely missed if your attention is distracted.

Where should you focus your attention?

1. Establish a baseline
2. Concentrate on the speaker
3. Trust your instincts
4. Look for consistency
5. Watch for incongruent behaviours
6. Tap into the non-verbal auditory cues
7. Pay attention to the silence
8. Observe the body zones to find unspoken meanings
9. Practice

Let's review each of these nine points as they relate to how you should pay attention.

1. Establish a baseline for the individual:

The first step in decoding an individual's consistent behavior is to discern their baseline (normal) behavior so that you can recognize when that person deviates from their normal composure. You need a baseline from which to start, to avoid making the incorrect assumptions. Some individuals are naturally quieter than others are; some more animated in actions or speech; some have a specific way of engaging with others. Knowing how to read body language also includes judging each sign you see by the context of the situation and that person's individual quirks.

Say, a student habitually likes to sit with her arms folded because that is a comfortable position for her. That body position is a baseline from which to interpret her other body language. An observant teacher would not suddenly think it is a negative signal when the girl suddenly folds her arms to relax in her favourite position. If someone is always jumpy, jumpiness does not indicate anything unusual.

Of course, it is much easier to determine a baseline for a person with whom you already have a relationship. You can tell if someone you work with is suddenly experiencing stress or discomfort because you know what his or her normal behaviours look like.

Here's another example. You know your boss likes to think on her feet. Her desire to pace or walk around the office could be her desire to fuel the conversation with movement. However, if your boss suddenly stops moving, it is a cue that something has changed in her emotions or intent. When uncharacteristic body language cues emerge, they give you a possible glimpse into the person's subconscious thinking.

To establish a baseline for people you meet for the first time, you should observe six patterns of behavior. Rate each behavior on a scale from 1-10. As the conversation advances, you can determine how these patterns change. If a person's behavior jumps from one extreme to another, pay attention:

- 1) Eye Contact – when you meet a person, you usually establish eye contact first. Observe the type of eye contact he or she makes. Is it direct? Avoided? Maintained?
- 2) Posture – what is the person's posture when you first take notice – relaxed, tense, erect, leaning, or swaying? Note the head position as part of the posture. Gradual changes in posture are to be expected as a person becomes more comfortable in the surroundings. Take note of how it changes and what is happening when posture noticeably shifts.
- 3) Animation – observe the level of animation in an individual's face, tone of voice, and their gestures. Rate the level of animation displayed while listening as well as speaking. Make note if an individual's animation behaviours appear more pronounced around specific individuals or when specific subjects are discussed.
- 4) Gestures – obviously, gestures are evident in animation. Pay attention to whether gestures are generally open or closed. Where does the person normally keep his or her hands? How often do you see a smile? Do you sense the gestures are faked or genuine?

- 5) Rate of Speech – listen to how fast or slow the person talks. Is the speech pattern consistent each time? For example does the person’s rate of speech change when answering a question as opposed to reiterating something already stated.
- 6) Space – observe how much distance the person generally maintains from others. Note what kind of difference there is between strangers or familiar persons.

Research indicates that normal behavior patterns are worthy of our attention, because when they change there is usually a reason. Behaviours change when another person enters the room. They will change within 3-5 seconds of a question being asked or an issue being discussed. From your baseline, you can note what aspect of a discussion created the shift in the baseline pattern. Your ability to spot these changes in behaviour will set you apart from your peers.

The ability to establish a baseline is an underrated and indispensable skill which will set you apart from your peers. Without it, you cannot effectively interpret body language.

2. Concentrate on the speaker

Some subconscious gestures are very slight and fleeting, lasting a fraction of a second. That makes micro expressions very difficult to spot. Because a person cannot control micro expressions, they have significant usefulness to anyone paying attention to the fine distinction of their presence. Micro expressions expose a person's true emotions. You should also be able to discern non-verbal cues both before and after the words are conveyed.

Even obvious signs can be missed – especially if they are disguised or displayed in a situation when other things distract you. It is only through a keen observation of the whole body, with emphasis on catching micro expressions, that you get honest non-verbal indicators. The quick cues are honest signals because they happen without the person’s intent.

Body language that lingers may be there because the speaker wants you to see it, in an attempt to hide their true intent. Remember the person may be practiced in contrived body language and deliberately distracting your attention in overt actions. The speaker and a partner may have rehearsed how to cleverly manipulate where you place your attention. That is why you must concentrate on the speaker.

If you are close enough, observe the eyes and pupils of the person. You have a significant advantage by checking for that clue.

Where possible, pay attention to the artifacts that surround the person. It gives you better awareness of the person. What a person has in close proximity – from office furnishings, clothes, jewelry, briefcases, purses, eyeglasses, magazines, or sometimes other people – communicates something about a person’s sense of self or at least the sense of self they want to communicate. If anything this knowledge allows you to more accurately adapt your messages and reactions.

3. Trust your Instincts

You may not realize it but you are always unconsciously processing the subtle non-verbal signals of communication. It is how you are able to sense someone is dishonest or something is out of kilter. When words and nonverbal cues are misaligned, your natural instincts kick in and you experience psychological discomfort. That discomfort probably means something. Do not dismiss what your instinct tells you.



Instinct is different than what your brain tells you. Your brain is constructed to find information you think *should* be there, rather than looking at information that is *actually* there. Your instinct is not looking for the “should be” it is sending you signals about what is actually there. When you have preconceived notions because you want something to be true, you can easily try to dismiss your instincts. You can force your brain to look for hints that contradict your intuitive feelings. When you do this, you cloud your perception and smother your intuitive powers. Trust your instincts. Let your instinct guide you to interpret the non-verbal signals that speak the truth.

As you hone your ability to detect and interpret non-verbal signals in communication, your instincts will become even sharper.

4. Look for Consistency

Look for patterns in a person’s behavior. To be consistent, non-verbal communication should reinforce what the person says. Your aim should always be to piece together the strong signals to support or invalidate a message. All the cues have a pace and intensity, too. If you notice one strong involuntary cue, you should watch for other cues that support an interpretation. Gestures that appear close together strengthen your interpretation. The cluster of non-verbal cues offers more evidence for a reliable meaning.

Do you recall, what was said about negative and contradictory body language being reliable? In fact, some experts, based on lots of experience, use that as a guideline in interpreting body language, especially when they get mixed messages. When they see positive language, accompanied by negative cues, they discount the positive and pay closer attention to the negative signals. Also, they like to focus on negative micro expressions or gestures that happened first, flashed quickly, or occurred close together.

5. Watch for Incongruent Behaviours

Congruency is a clear comparison between two communication channels, verbal and nonverbal. When people believe what they are saying, you see it corroborated in their body language. Their gestures and expressions are in alignment with what they say. There are many reasons why people do not always say exactly what they mean. Here are just four such reasons: language barriers, not wanting to offend or frighten others, inappropriate place or timing, keeping state secrets. When a person does not have a legitimate reason to deflect from the truth you will see signs in their body language. When you hear the person says one thing but you see or sense that his or her body language conveys something else, take note of the mismatch, because when one part of body language is out of step with the others, it sends a warning signal that something is wrong, even if you cannot consciously identify what it is. Consider all the factors, other people in the room and make an informed interpretation.

6. Tap into the Non-Verbal Auditory Cues (Paralanguage)

Words on their own are robotic monotonous sounds without the vocal nuances we use to express our thoughts and feelings. Think of auditory cues as the expressive aspects, acoustic properties or vocal qualities of voice and how these signals convey additional meaning through volume, pitch, cadence, nasality, speed, timing, pauses, tones, inflections, swallowing, sighing, crying, laughing, breathing, and the nasalized or guttural utterances that come from the nose and throat. These cues contribute to the emotional quality of the statements and give you clues as to the emotions and attitude of the speaker.

Think how another person's tone of voice indicates strain, warmth, confidence or sarcasm. A person can make a sarcastic statement and then repeat the exact words with different emphasis on some words to turn it into a question or a compliment or invitation. When a speaker uses a grunt, moan, gasp, yawn, groan, clearing of the throat, ahem, or uh-huh to modify what he or she say, it adds a sub-text or give clues to how a piece of information is meant to be interpreted. A speaker can enhance a message through speaking in a loud or soft voice, by using pauses, breathy intonations, or by holding a long drawn out syllable. Do you hear your own your tone of voice, and how it changes when you project interest, boredom, or anger?

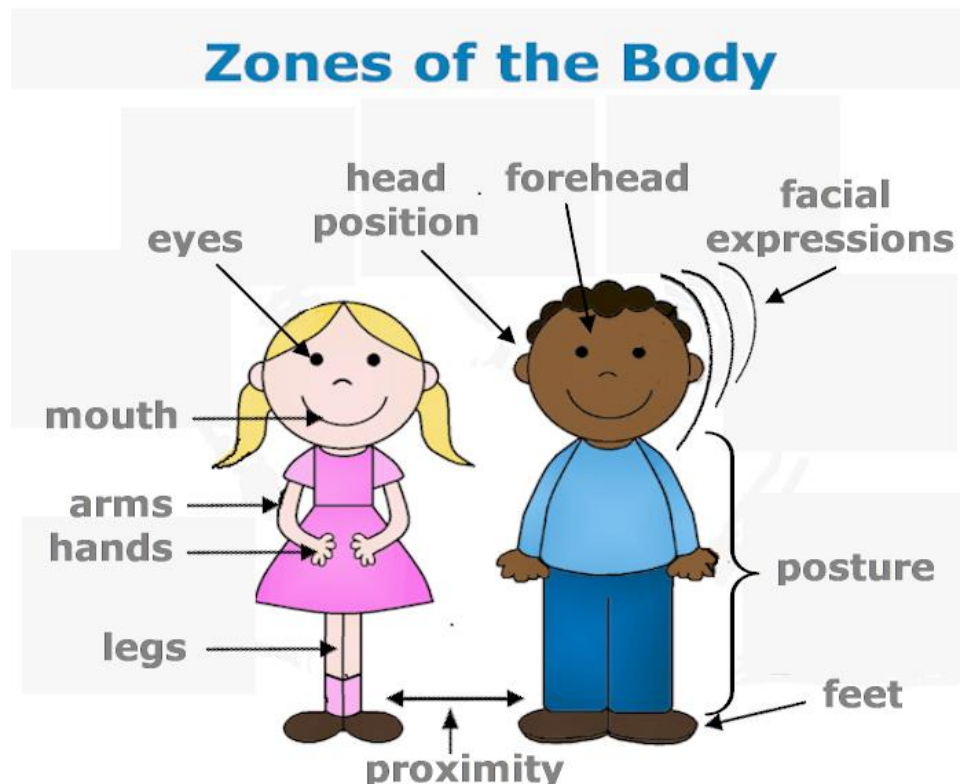
7. Pay Attention to the Silence:

If communication is simply about conveying a message, then sometimes silence does that better than any words. Silence can be for dramatic effect, to build suspense before revealing something of significance. Silence can be a moment for contemplation, or a moment for the speaker to regain some emotional control. There might be an awkward gap if the speaker becomes confused or just does not know what to say.

Of course, silence can mean something entirely different if the conversation was a game of one-upmanship, rather than an exchange of ideas. The key to understanding silence is to grasp the implications of the message prior to the pause, as well as what clue you might have about what to expect after the silence ends. Communication has timing and place – is there an easy flow of information back and forth?

8. Observe the Body Zones to find Unspoken Meaning

To master the art of nonverbal communications, you must be able to decode signals transmitted from different zones of the body: facial expressions, posture, eyes, mouth, head position, forehead, hands, arms, feet and legs, and proximity. When observing people, you should not tell them that you are observing different parts of their body to gauge their emotions. It would not only annoy them it would most certainly cause immense difficulty. You have to learn to do it discretely.



9. Practice: Practice is so crucial to reading what is being transmitted through another person's non-verbal communication cues. Every time you interact with someone, take a second to observe things to establish a baseline. Observe the behavior patterns, make note of cues that stand out. Pay extra attention to what your instincts are telling you and relate that to what you are seeing and hearing. After an encounter, take a few extra moments to process and reflect on what you observed and what you learned.

Common Non-Verbal Communication Cues and What they Mean

The skills required to interpret non-verbal communication cues are learnable. All of the non-verbal communication categories or zones of the body have endless subcategories, which you can study intensely if you want to become an expert. You can study the science behind each signal.

Interpretation of non-verbal communication can be a very complex process. There is no foolproof “thesaurus” of non-verbal cues or instruction book on how to interpret them. With so many cues and so many combinations, and so many differences in context as well as people, there is no definitive list.

Much of the language of non-verbal communication you already know. You’ve known a lot of it since you were a child. It is naturally fluid for you to understand it: you don’t hit pause and rewind, you simply and quickly understand what you see. Whatever you might still need to learn is actually fairly simple and common sense once you know the cues. With time and practice interpreting this second language will seem to flow naturally, too.

To make it as easy as possible for you to learn, we are providing two charts:

Chart #1: Common emotions or attitudes with a list of the tell-tale signs that demonstrate that behavior pattern.

Chart #2: Common gestures and what they usually signal.

Chart #3: Basic body zones and the interpretation of several prominent and universal cues.

Please note: Left and right as noted on the charts are for the person giving the signals and making the movements. These interpretations are not specific to flirting, courting, dating, and mating cues, which have different translation signals, gender differences, and environmental influences.

Chart #1 – Emotions and Attitudes - the non-verbal communication cues to watch for:	Chart #3– Body Zones, Proximity, Mirroring, Seat Positioning
1. Dominance, Power 2. Submission, Nervousness 3. Disagreement, Anger, Skepticism 4. Boredom, Lack of Interest 5. Uncertainty, Indecision 6. Suspicion, Dishonesty 7. Evaluative 8. Confidence, Cooperation, Honesty	1. Facial Expressions 2. Posture 3. Eyes 4. Mouth 5. Head Movement and Position 6. Hands 7. Arms 8. Legs and Feet 9. Proximity and Personal Space 10. Mirroring – Matching Body Language Signals 11. Body Language of Seating and Positioning
Chart #2 – 50 Common Gestures and What They Mean	

Chart #1 – Emotions and Attitudes

Dominance, Power ○ Feet on desk ○ Piercing eye contact ○ Hands behind head or on hips ○ Palm-down handshake ○ Steepling of the fingers ○ Standing while other is seated	Disagreement, Anger, Skepticism ○ Red skin ○ Finger pointing ○ Squinting eyes ○ Frowning ○ Turning away ○ Crossing arms or legs
Submission, Nervousness ○ Fidgeting ○ Minimum eye contact ○ Hands to face, hair, etc. ○ Palm-up handshake ○ Throat clearing	Evaluative ○ Nodding ○ Squinting ○ Putting index finger to lips ○ Tilting head slightly ○ Stroking chin
Confidence, Cooperation, Honesty ○ Leaning forward ○ Opening arms and palms ○ Maintaining great eye contact ○ Keeping feet flat on floor ○ Smiling ○ Moving with counterpart's rhythm	Uncertainty, Indecision ○ Cleaning glasses ○ Looking puzzled ○ Putting fingers to mouth ○ Biting lip ○ Pacing back and forth ○ Tilting head
Suspicion, Dishonesty ○ Touching nose while speaking ○ Covering mouth ○ Avoiding eye contact ○ Moving away ○ Crossing arms or legs	Boredom, Lack of Interest ○ Avoiding eye contact ○ Playing with objects on desk ○ Staring blankly ○ Fidgeting, picking at clothes, fiddling with objects, doodling ○ Looking at watch, door, phone, etc ○ Sitting slumped, with heads downcast
Disengaged, Disinterested, Unhappy ○ Arms folded in front of the body ○ Minimal or tense facial expression ○ Body turned away from you ○ Eyes downcast, maintaining little contact	Discomfort ○ Clenched jaw, tightened neck, ○ Furrowed brow ○ Unsteady Eye Contact ○ Scratching themselves ○ Shifting Hips ○ Self-Soothing Gestures ○ Backing Away
Aggression ○ Clenched fists ○ Flared nostrils ○ Tightening of the jaw ○ Hands on hips ○ Head and chin up ○ Redness in face (do not confused with blushing) ○ Stiff arms and body	Relaxed ○ Body is loose ○ Arms move freely and sway with any motions ○ Open posture ○ Breathing steady and slow ○ Smiling coordinates with the eyes ○ No tension in the forehead

Chart #2: 50 Common Gestures and what they Usually Signal

1. Palms up shows openness and vulnerability.
2. Palms down shows dominance and authority.
3. Hands in the pockets with thumbs out signals dominance.
4. Thumbs in the pockets with fingers pointed down gives a weak impression.
5. Thumbs in pockets with fingers fanned out is a flirty mating signal.
6. Pointing with index finger signals aggression.
7. Pointing at someone with the thumb shows a lack of respect.
8. Pointing with the whole arm signals control.
9. Weak hand shaking signals weakness and being unreliable.
10. Shaking hands with palm slightly down signals a desire to dominate.
11. Shaking hands with the palm slightly up signals submissiveness or vulnerability.
12. Hand shaking that is painfully hard comes across as aggressive. To be in control squeeze the hand 10% harder than the other person.
13. Hands formed into a pyramid signals confidence.
14. Touching the tip of the nose indicates the possibility of dishonesty.
15. Scratching the side of the nose shows some anger.
16. Covering the mouth while speaking could indicate lying.
17. Scratching the neck during a conversation indicates the person probably disagrees.
18. Trembling hands show nervousness.
19. Showing the wrist is a sign of comfort and safety.
20. Washing the hands in front of the body shows excitement or nervousness.
21. Rubbing the eyes shows the person does not want to see the truth, probably disagrees.
22. Rubbing the forehead or touching the face gently is a self-comforting gesture.
23. Standing with feet wide apart shows dominance.
24. Standing or leaning on something with one leg straight and the other leg crossed in front with the tip of the toe touching the floor displays safety.
25. Rubbing hands on the thighs shows the person is anxious.
26. Sitting with hands on knees and leaning forward signals a desire to leave.
27. Pointing feet toward an exit could mean wanting to leave.
28. Standing and using one foot to tap the floor shows an upbeat attitude.
29. An asymmetric smile signals arrogance.

30. A symmetrical smile is a more genuine and usually signals happiness. Especially with wrinkles in the eyes.
31. Lips pressed tightly together shows outrage, annoyance, or anger.
32. Lips briefly pressed together is a sign of stress or pressure
33. An upper lip twisting upwards on one side and wrinkling the nose shows disgust.
34. High eyebrows and a stiff, broad mouth signals fear.
35. Pouting lips might indicate disagreement.
36. A body folded in like a turtle shows confidence is gone.
37. The upper body leaning away from the other person indicates lack of comfort.
38. Leaning on a surface with the chin resting on one hand shows boredom.
39. Running fingers between the neck and collar shows the person feels badly and wants to calm down
40. Sitting heavily leaned back in a chair signals the person does not take the situation seriously.
41. Facing someone with arms up and outstretched as if to receive a hug displays vulnerability and security with the other person.
42. Open body language along with a sudden lowering of the chin with arms folding in front indicates the person feels that they are stepping into something sensitive. Especially, if the arms are squeezing hard.
43. Raising the nose up is a signal of arrogance, pride and superiority.
44. Imitating someone's posture is a sign of rapport and safety in the company of that person.
45. Raising the chin is a positive sign indicating alertness or pride.
46. A lowering of the chin can indicate a negative mindset.
47. A chin angling downward can be a sign of sadness or depression.
48. Pinching the bridge of the nose while listening means the person is trying to focus intently on the incoming message. Closed eyes at the same time signals that the person is trying to block out other confusing signals to internalize the incoming message. If the person removes eyeglasses to pinch the bridge of the nose it is an amplification of the signal. An alternate reason for pinching the bridge of the nose is that the incoming data is jarring or difficult for the person to deal with at the moment. The gesture is a defensive one where the person is protecting the neck, mouth, and nose areas all at once.
49. Breathing shallow slow breaths and all of a sudden taking in a huge breath and letting it out slowly signals a change in mental attitude – likely expressing the lowering of overall tension.
50. Touching the side of the forehead and partially blocking the eyes with an appropriate facial expression with a slightly downward body movement indicates shame or embarrassment.

Chart #3 – Body Zones - interpretation of several prominent and universal cues

1. Facial Expressions
2. Posture
3. Eyes
4. Mouth
5. Head Movement and Position
6. Hands
7. Arms
8. Legs and Feet
9. Proximity and Personal Space
10. Mirroring – Matching Body Language Signals
11. Body Language of Seating and Positioning

Please note:

- A. Left and right as noted on the chart is specific to the person giving the signals and making the movements.
- B. Unless it is a universal signal, these interpretations may not be specific to every culture
- C. These interpretations are not definitive to cues used in flirting, dating, courting, and mating, which are distinct situations and have different translation signals due to such things as cultural and gender specificity or environmental influences.

Facial Expressions

The face is the best indicator of a person's emotions. In fact, it is the primary means of conveying social information between humans. Facial expressions convey seven distinct basic and universal emotions: disgust, sadness, happiness, fear, anger, contempt and surprise. It is interesting to note that five out of the seven are negative emotions. These facial expressions are the same across all cultures and ages and are the easiest to read.

A person's face, especially the eyes, creates the most obvious and immediate cues that lead to the formation of impressions and have a significant effect on interpersonal communication. Voluntary facial expressions are created by the person to imitate the instinctive involuntary expressions. Voluntary facial expressions are often socially conditioned and easy to interpret, but can be contrived and controlled which is evident if one knows what to look for in the non-verbal cue. Involuntary facial expressions are believed to be instinctive and cannot be controlled. Although people try very hard to control their facial expression, you can still pick up on important nonverbal cues if you pay close attention.

The vast majority of involuntary facial displays of emotion are bilateral, meaning they show up on both sides of the face equally. Since the vast majority of facial expressions display emotions bilaterally, if you see one side of a person's face is more active than the other side, he or she might be faking the emotion.

Attitudes are also readable in facial expressions. Think about it. Besides deciphering their emotions, you can tell if a person is really interested, emotionally present, or masking attentiveness. You can tell if a person is calm or emotionally overwrought, watchful or melodramatic.

There is a strong consistency in how people move their facial muscles to express 21 other categories of emotion – happily surprised, happily disgusted, sadly fearful, sadly angry, sadly surprised, sadly disgusted, fearfully angry, fearfully surprised, fearfully disgusted, angrily surprised, angrily disgusted, disgustedly surprised, appalled, hatred, awed. These facial expressions include subtle combinations of the "basic seven". The subtleties appear in the corners of the mouth or the outer edge of the eyebrow, raised cheeks, open mouth and how these features stretch to different limits. These can often appear as micro expressions that are not visible for long.

Happily surprised – marked by wide-open eyes, raised cheeks, and a mouth that was both open and stretched into a smile.

Happily disgusted – combines the scrunched up eyes and nose of disgusted with the smile of happy. This is an emotion that may be felt when something "gross" happens that is also incredibly funny.

Not all facial expressions make the researchers' lists of basic, universal expressions, or categories of emotions as cited above.

The snarl – characterized by a raised upper lip, lowered eyebrows, flared nostrils, and teeth showing. Snarls rarely happen alone; people usually snarl at others to send an aggressive warning to them. The snarl is unique because it is basically the disgust and anger emotions combined into one.

Contempt – a negative emotion (similar to hate, is a feeling of dislike, disrespect, or offensiveness towards someone). It is also a universal micro expressions that some researches put on the list with the other six basic universal cues. However, unlike the other six this is only one that is asymmetrical.

Feeling shame or embarrassment – a universal behavior humans do when they feel ashamed or embarrassed. The facial expression is always accompanied by the person touching the side of their forehead and partially blocking their eyes.

Discomfort – raised eyebrows often signal discomfort. There are three main emotions that make your eyebrows go up: surprise, worry, and fear. If somebody raises her eyebrows and the subject of discussion is not one that would logically cause surprise, worry, or fear, there is something else going on. This should not be confused with an eyebrow flash, which is a quick raising and lowering of the eyebrows that usually only lasts a fraction of a second. It is commonly used between people who know each other to indicate familiarity, or used as a sign of attraction and interest.

There are many others and common terms that relate to some of these facial expressions are : grin, smirk, beam, sneer, pursed lips, pout, frown, sticking tongue out, wide-eyed, squint, wink, dirty look, wrinkles nose, long face, blank expression, grimace, wince, quizzical, bleak, brooding, bug-eyed, cheeky, deadpan, downcast, etched, haunted, pained, radiant, sour, taunting, wild-eyed, wistful, wolfish.

Read the sections pertaining to the eyes, mouth, nose, eyebrows, forehead, etc. to learn the specifics of facial expressions.

Posture

A person's posture, standing or sitting, conveys their overall attitude, confidence and physical well-being. Consider how your perceptions of people are affected by the way they sit, walk, stand up, hold their head and shoulders, enter a room, or statically hold themselves when they speak or listen. Posture denotes if one is striding in confidence, slithering among a crowd, or seeking refuge to feel better. We get messages when we see slouching, hunched shoulders, swaying or how a person leans toward or away from another person. When you talk to people do you notice if their bodies are relaxed or stiff and immobile? Are their shoulders tense and raised, or at ease? Through posture you can see to what degree their bodies are open and inviting or closed.

Good healthy posture does not mean that the body is straight up and down since the natural spine has curves, but it does mean that the spine is aligned. If you were to draw a line from top to bottom through the ears, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles the line would be perpendicular to the floor. This is called the neutral position because the body is able to maintain this posture without stressing joints, muscle and bones. What it really means is that the weight of the body is held by the bones and not by the muscles. A good posture promotes breathing, circulation and balance. The health benefits are beyond the scope of this guide. Persistent improper posture can lead to general discomfort, long term damage, or even deformities. While there are medical reasons for holding good posture, there are certainly non-verbal reasons for keeping a good level body.

Holding good posture shows the world that one is in control, confident and powerful. Poor posture reflects poor self image and negative feelings, it can be temporary state when we feel down, or it can be the result of bad habits accumulated over years.

- Standing at attention is a sign of respect
- A tall, straight and open torso shows confidence and ease.
- A hunched torso can mean tiredness, timidity or defensiveness.
- Open posture – the trunk of the body is open and exposed – conveys friendliness, openness, willingness, readiness to listen. In an open posture, you might expect to see someone's hips directly facing you. If seated, he or she will likely sit with hands apart on the arms of the chair.
- Closed posture – the person positions his or her body (hips) at a slight angle from the person with whom they are interacting. Sitting, the person will try to hide the truck of their body by hunching forward, keeping the arms and legs crossed – conveys unfriendliness, hostility, anxiety. perceived as lazy, passive and indecisive
- Sitting up straight – indicates a person is focused and paying attention to what is going on.
- Sitting with the body hunched forward – can imply that the person is bored or indifferent.
- Hunched shoulders implies the person is lazy, passive and indecisive.

To maintain perfect posture:

- Stand upright, shoulders relaxed yet up and back.
- Plant both feet firmly on the ground, distributing the weight evenly between both heels.
- Align your neck with your spine with your head back and level. Don't let your head droop and 'lead' you.
- Push your buttocks forward slightly to shift your weight onto your hips and legs without becoming overly rigid.
- Keep your midsection tight to assist your back and keep your torso straight and upright. You do not want to be so tense that you can barely move.
- Your chest should be open, but not puffed up.
- Open your chest and breath deep into your abdomen.
- Keep your arms to your sides with your fingers loose.
- You should have a very slight tension in your abdomen and buttocks muscles to keep your composure.
- Shorter people can look taller, even when seated, by maintaining an upright posture.

We normally attribute negative ideas to people with poor posture:

- Having rounded shoulders denotes a person is inactive in the conversation
- Leaning away or even closing the body off denotes the same.
- People that slump over or habitually lean on their elbows while seated or against a wall come off as lazy and careless or sloppy.
- People with poor posture often come across as lacking confidence.
- Having too rigid a posture come across as stiff, awkward, stressed, nervous and uncomfortable.

Body orientation, leaning towards or away is a subset of posture. Leaning towards another person conveys useful meaning, because the torso carries a large portion of body weight and leaning requires balance as well as control when it is a subtle effort. However, when the brain requires the person to evade other people the body will hardly realize the effort.

- Distancing through posture might be just a few inches.
- Weight unevenly distributed across the legs can show that a person is ready to leave a conversation. Usually accompanied by a slight bend in the body toward the desired exit direction, usually a door, or hallway.
- Shifting weight toward the speaker indicates interest in the conversation or speaker.
- Shifting weight slightly to the side to display interest or connectivity to someone to that direction.
- Interest-driven body orientation while seated places the weight on the knees, and the direction of the lean can be more dramatic or obvious. Reading this posture can tell you when it's time to wrap things up or tell others when you would prefer to end the conversation. Simply by orienting your body away from the salesman who rang your doorbell can show the salesman that you are serious about your disinterest in whatever he is selling.

Read the sections pertaining to the head, arms, legs, etc. to learn more specifics on posture.

Eyes (including eye lids and brow)

The eyes are a very potent in human communications. The eyes can indicate thought processes or cognitive function. This is the one highly developed awareness that we all have. It is intrinsic to human nature to be able to read people's eyes without knowing how or why. We may not be able to see the detail of person's eyes, but we can detect whether another person's eyes are focused on us or not, even at incredible distances. Eye contact shows interest – both positive and negative – and we can detect those feelings at a distance too. We detect awkward or secret glances and sense someone looking at us even when our back is to them.

The eye is extremely flexibility. The eye lids blink, widen and close; the pupils enlarge or contract, the eyes move right and left, up and down, glaze over in a blank stare, zero in with a piercing stare, or moisten long before tears come. The eyes coordinate movement and meaning with the eye lids and eye brow. We may not be able to describe these eye signals in words, but we know what they mean. We know what emotions or intentions are displayed when we see them.

We can detect recognition or notice when the speaker is monitoring others in the room to gauge feedback. We can monitor the feedback of others when we speak to gauge our effectiveness.

It is important not to read too much into a lack of eye contact, since it is common for many people to glance away when they are thinking. However, look for how the eyes move and focus.

What does it mean when eyes look left and right? First let's point out that left and right are for the person giving the signals and making the movements. Eyes tend to look right when the brain is **imagining or creating**, and left when the brain is **recalling or remembering**. This relates to right and left sides of the brain – in this context broadly the parts of the brain handling creativity/feelings (right) and facts/memory (left).

Raised eyebrows often signal discomfort. There are three main emotions that make your eyebrows go up: surprise, worry, and fear. If somebody raises her eyebrows and the subject of discussion is not one that would logically cause surprise, worry, or fear, there is something else going on.

An eyebrow flash is a quick raising and lowering of the eyebrows that usually only lasts a fraction of a second. It is commonly used between people who know each other to indicate familiarity, or used as a sign of attraction and interest.

Non-Verbal Cue	Possible meaning(s)	Detailed explanation
looking right (generally)	creating, fabricating, guessing, lying, storytelling	Creating in this instance is basically making things up and saying them. Depending on the context, this can indicate lying, such as when the person is supposed to be recalling facts. However, in other circumstances, for example, storytelling to a child, this would be perfectly normal. Looking right when stating facts does not necessarily mean lying – it could, for example, mean that the person does not know the answer, and is talking hypothetically or speculating or guessing. Looking right and down indicates accessing feelings, which again can be a perfectly genuine response or not, depending on the context, and to an extent the person.
looking left (generally)	recalling, remembering, retrieving 'facts'	Recalling and then stating 'facts' from memory in appropriate context often equates to telling the truth. Whether the 'facts' (memories) are correct is another matter. Left downward looking indicates silent self-conversation or self-talk, typically in trying to arrive at a view or decision.
looking right and up	visual imagining, fabrication, lying	Related to imagination and creative (right-side) parts of the brain, this upwards right eye-movement can be a warning sign of fabrication if a person is supposed to be recalling and stating facts.
looking right sideways	imagining sounds	Sideways eye movements are believed to indicate imagining (right) or recalling (left) sounds, which can include for example a person imagining or fabricating what another person has said or could say.
looking right and down	accessing feelings	This is a creative signal but not a fabrication – it can signal that the person is self-questioning their feelings about something. Context particularly – and other signals – are important for interpreting more specific meaning about this cue in the eyes.
looking left and up	recalling images truthfulness	Related to accessing memory in the brain, rather than creating or imagining. A reassuring sign, if signaled when the person is recalling and stating facts.
looking left sideways	recalling or remembering sounds	Looking sideways suggests sounds; looking left suggests recalling or remembering – not fabricating or imagining. This, therefore, could indicate recalling what has been said by another person.
looking left down	self-talking, rationalizing	Thinking things through by self-talk – concerning an outward view, rather than the inward feelings view indicated by downward right looking.
direct eye contact (when speaking)	honesty - or faked honesty	When the speaker makes direct eye contact it is generally regarded as a sign of truthfulness, however, practiced liars know this and will fake the signal.

direct eye contact (when listening)	attentiveness, interest, attraction	Eyes, which stay focused on the speaker's eyes, tend to indicate focused interested attention too, which is normally a sign of attraction to the person and/or the subject.
widening eyes	interest, appeal, invitation	Widening the eyes generally signals interest in something or someone, and often invites a positive response. Widened eyes with raised eyebrows can otherwise be due to shock, but aside from this, widening eyes represents an open and welcome expression. In women especially, widened eyes tend to increase attractiveness, which is believed by some body language experts to relate to the eye/face proportions of babies, the associated signals of attraction, prompting urges to protect. offer love, care.
darting eyes	insecurity about what is happening	Eyes that dart from side to side might look like the person is scoping out other areas of the room, but it usually indicates that the brain is looking for an escape route.
rubbing eye or eyes	disbelief, upset, or tiredness	Rubbing eyes or one eye can indicate disbelief as if checking the vision; or upset, in which the action relates to crying, or tiredness, which can be due to boredom, not necessarily a need for sleep. If the signal is accompanied by a long pronounced blink, this tends to support the tiredness interpretation.
eye shrug	frustration	An upward roll of the eyes signals frustration or exasperation as if looking to the heavens for help.
pupils dilated (enlarged)	attraction, desire	The pupil is the black centre of the eye that opens or closes to let in more or less light. Darkness causes pupils to dilate. So too, for some reason does seeing something appealing, attractive, or exciting. The cause of the attraction depends on the situation. In the case of sexual attraction, the effect can be mutual – dilated pupils tend to be more appealing sexually than contracted ones, Resist the temptation to imagine that everyone you see with dilated pupils is sexually attracted to you.
blinking frequently	excitement, pressure, condescension	Normal human blink rate is considered to be between six and twenty times a minute, depending on the expert. If you observe someone going from a normal 15 per minute rate to 30 to 40 blinks a minute, that person is likely under a great deal of pressure or stress, but is often trying to hide that fact. Blink rate can increase to up to a hundred times a minute. Blink rate is not a reliable sign of lying. In Western culture, extended blinking can be as sign of condescension when a person also raises the head slightly and looks along the nose, revealing their belief that his or her importance has not been recognized. There are some situations where a person's habitual blink rate will be different from the standard rate. These would include wearing contact lenses, allergies, some foreign particle in the eye, and diseases: such as Schizophrenia (faster blink rate) or Parkinson's disease (slower blink rate).

blinking infrequently	various	Infrequent blink rate can mean different things and so offers no single clue unless combined with other signals. An infrequent blink rate is probably due to boredom if the eyes are not focused, or can be the opposite – concentration – if accompanied with a strongly focused gaze. Infrequent blink rate can also be accompanied by signals of hostility or negativity and is therefore not the most revealing of body language signals.
eyebrow raising (eyebrow 'flash')	greeting, recognition, acknowledgement	Quickly raising and lowering the eyebrows is called an 'eyebrow flash'. It is a common signal of greeting and acknowledgement and may be perhaps genetically influenced as a sign of submission, since it is prevalent in monkeys (body language study does not sit entirely happily alongside creationism). Fear and surprise are also signaled by the eyebrow flash, in which case the eyebrows normally remain raised for longer until the initial shock subsides. The only culture that does not use the eyebrow lift is Japanese where it is considered improper or impolite and has sexual connotations.
arched eyebrows	intrigue	Arched eyebrows could mean that the person is interested or intrigued by the topic.
lowered eyebrows	aggression	Lowering the eyebrows is how humans show dominance or aggression to another person.
winking	friendly acknowledgement, complicity (e.g., sharing a secret or joke)	A wink is quite an intimate signal, directed exclusively from one person to another. It is associated with male flirting, but it can also signal a shared joke or secret. It is strange that a non-contact wink can carry more personal implications than a physical handshake and, in many situations, more than a kiss on the cheek. A wink is given additional spice if accompanied by a click of the tongue.
squinting	feel threatened or unhappy	Eye squinting can sometimes occur in just a fraction of a second before disappearing. A person squints to prohibit distasteful images or even thoughts from being received at full view. A person will not only squint from seeing objectionable sights, but also negative thoughts or sounds. Eyes can also be squinted in order to help a person see print that is too small. Thus, at times, squinting forms a functional purpose not exclusively driven by emotion.
narrowing eyes	distaste, anger, contempt physical pain	Narrowing eyes indicates contempt, distaste and anger. Narrowing the eyes is often due to physical or emotional pain. Often seen with wincing.

Mouth

Pay special attention to the mouth. Besides its importance in speech, it performs a central role in facial expressions. It is tremendously flexible and has more visible moving parts than other sensory organs, which means it has the potential to perform more variety of signaling. Unlike the nose and ears, which are generally only brought into action by the hands or fingers, the mouth acts quite independently, another reason for it deserving separate detailed consideration.

A simple smile can be a powerful indicator of a person's sincerity. There are different types of smiles. There are happy smiles, shy smiles, warm smiles, and ironic smiles. They can be genuine or fake. A genuine smile engages the whole face, producing creases around the eyes and mouth, whereas a fake smile only uses the mouth. Genuine smiles convey confidence, cooperation, and honesty. A fake smile is used to convey agreement, understanding or pleasure but suggests that the person smiling is actually feeling something else. Another common expression is the "half-smile" that only engages one side of the mouth. It can be a marker of sarcasm or uncertainty, often used when a person is hiding dissatisfaction behind a fake smile. A relaxed mouth reveals relaxation and a positive frame of mind, while pursed tight lips often indicate disapproval. How a person covers the mouth or touches the lips with the hands or fingers may tell you when an individual is lying.

Non-Verbal Cue	Possible meaning(s)	Detailed explanation
pasted smile	faked smile	A pasted smile is one that appears quickly, is fixed for longer than a natural smile, and seems not to extend to the eyes. This typically indicates suppressed displeasure or forced agreement of some sort.
tight-lipped smile	secrecy or withheld feelings	Stretched across the face in a straight line, teeth concealed. The smiler has a secret they are not going to share, possibly due to dislike or distrust. Can also be a signal of rejection.
twisted smile	mixed feelings or sarcasm	Shows opposite emotions on each side of the face.
dropped-jaw smile	faked smile	More of a practiced fake smile than an instinctive one. The jaw is dropped lower than in a natural smile, creating the look of a smile.
smile - head tilted, looking up	playfulness, teasing, coy	Head tilted sideways and downwards so as to part hide the face, from which the smile is directed via the eyes at the intended target.
bottom lip jutting out	upset	Like rubbing the eyes can be an adult version of crying, so jutting or pushing the bottom lip forward is a part of the crying face and impulse. Bear in mind that people cry for reasons of genuine upset, or to avert attack and seek sympathy or kind treatment.
laughter	relaxation	In terms of body language, genuine laughter is a sign of relaxation and feeling at ease. Laughter can extend to all the upper body or the whole body. The physiology of laughter is significant. Endorphins are released. Pain and stress reduces. In addition, vulnerabilities show and can become more visible because people's guard drops when laughing.

forced laughter	nervousness, cooperation	Unnatural laughter is often a signal of nervousness or stress, as an effort to dispel tension or change the atmosphere. Artificial laughter is a signal of cooperation and a wish to maintain empathy.
biting lip	tension	One of many signals suggesting tension or stress, which can be due to high concentration, but more likely to be anxiousness.
teeth grinding	tension, suppression	Inwardly-directed 'displacement' sign – a stress signal typically prompted by suppression of natural reaction due to fear or other inhibition, for example biting fingernails, picking at finger(s) or thumb.
chewing gum	tension, suppression	As above – an inwardly-directed 'displacement' sign, due to suppression of natural reaction. Otherwise however can simply be to freshen breath or as a smoking replacement.
smoking	self-comforting	Smoking obviously becomes habitual and addictive, but aside from this, people put things into their mouths because it's comforting like thumb-sucking is to a child, in turn rooted in baby experiences of feeding and especially breastfeeding.
thumb-sucking	self-comforting	A self-comforting impulse in babies and children, substituting breast-feeding, which can persist as a habit into adulthood.
chewing pen or pencil	self-comforting	Like smoking and infant thumb-sucking, the pen is the teat. (Remember that next time you chew the end of your pen)
pursing lips	thoughtfulness, or upset	As if holding the words in the mouth until they are ready to be released. Can also indicate anxiousness or impatience at not being able to speak, or quite differently, can indicate upset, as if suppressing crying.
tongue poke	disapproval, rejection	The tongue extends briefly and slightly at the centre of the mouth as if tasting something nasty. The gesture may be extremely subtle. An extreme version may be accompanied by a wrinkling of the nose and a squint of the eyes.
hand clamped over mouth	suppression, holding back, shock	Often an unconscious gesture of self-regulation – stopping speech for reasons of shock, embarrassment or for more tactical reasons. The gesture is reminiscent of the 'speak no evil' wise monkey. The action can be observed very clearly in young children when they witness something 'unspeakably' naughty or shocking. Extreme versions of the same effect would involve both hands.
nail biting	frustration, suppression	Nail-biting is an inwardly-redirected aggression borne of fear, or some other suppression of behaviour. Later nail-biting becomes reinforced as a comforting habit, again typically prompted by frustration or fear. Stress in this context is an outcome. Stress doesn't cause nail-biting; nail-biting is the outward demonstration of stress. The cause of the stress can be various things.

Head Movement and Position

The position of the head is vital in communication because it tells its own kind of story. Because it is the vault that holds the all-important brain, the head is vulnerable and tends to lead body direction – intent at self-protection. Due to a very flexible neck structure the head can turn, jut forward, withdraw, tilt sideways, forwards, backwards which offers a good indication of a person's likes and dislikes, how interested a person is in listening to another person talk, or how uncertain or suspicious he or she might be.

Slow nodding or tilting the head sideways indicates that the person is interested in what others are saying and wants them to continue talking. Fast nodding indicates the listener is impatient; the person has heard enough and may desire to speak. Tilting the head backward is a sign of hesitation, suspicion, or skepticism. Lowering the head is a subservient or insecure movement. This movement is often accompanied by a more closed off or weak posture. When the head moves from a lowered position to straight or even slightly raised, maybe even snapping back up, this is a sign of sudden interest. You can determine who is influential or has significant standing in a room by how often people look toward him or her.

The head is a mosaic of ears, eyes, nose and face, which means as a whole, it has more complex and visible muscular effects than any other area of the body. The forehead itself gives off countless signals. The head – when our hands interact with it – is dynamic and busy, communicating all sorts of messages – consciously and unconsciously. It is an important skill is to be able to piece together the signals given off the many different parts of the head. Each movement or part movement or combination of movements of these different parts has a meaning.

When athletes do something great, the first thing they usually do is tilt their heads back to look straight up. This is a sign of joy, happiness, and relief. There are instances where a person might look upward out of frustration, but that head movement is usually accompanied by other frustration indicators that happen just before.

Non-Verbal Cue	Possible meaning(s)	Detailed explanation
head nodding	agreement	Head nodding can occur when invited for a response, or voluntarily while listening. Sometimes, nodding is confusingly also referred to as 'head shaking up and down'. Head nodding when talking face-to-face one-to-one is easy to see, but do you always detect tiny head nods when addressing or observing a group?
slow head nodding	attentive listening	This can be a faked signal. As with all body language signals, you must look for clusters of signals rather than relying on one alone. Look at the focus of eyes to check the validity of slow head nodding.
fast head nodding	hurry up, impatience	Vigorous head nodding signifies that the listener feels the speaker has made their point or taken sufficient time. Fast head nodding is rather like the 'wind-up' hand gesture given off-camera or off-stage by a producer to a performer, indicating 'time's up - get off'.

head held up	neutrality, alertness	High head position signifies attentive listening, usually with an open or undecided mind, or lack of bias.
head held high	superiority, fearlessness, arrogance	Especially if exhibited with jutting chin.
head tilted to one side	non-threatening, submissive, thoughtfulness	A signal of interest, and/or vulnerability, which in turn suggests a level of trust. Head tilting is thought by some to relate to 'sizing up' something since tilting the head changes the perspective offered by the eyes and a different view is seen of the other person or subject. Exposing the neck is also a sign of trust.
head forward, upright	interest, positive reaction	Head forward in the direction of a person or other subject indicates interest. The rule also applies to a forward-leaning upper body, commonly sitting, but also standing, where the movement can be a distinct and significant advancement into a closer personal space zone of the other person. Head forward and upright is different to head tilted downward.
head tilted downward	criticism, admonishment	Head tilted downwards towards a person is commonly a signal of criticism or reprimand or disapproval, usually from a position of authority.
head shaking	disagreement	Sideways shaking of the head generally indicates disagreement but can also signal feelings of disbelief, frustration or exasperation. Obvious of course, but often ignored or missed where the movement is small, especially in groups seemingly reacting in silent acceptance.
pronounced head shaking	strong disagreement	The strength of the movement of the head usually relates to the strength of feeling, and often to the force by which the head-shaker seeks to send this message to the receiver. This is an immensely powerful signal and is used intentionally by some people to dominate others.
head down (in response to a speaker or proposition)	negative, disinterested	Head down is generally a signal of rejection (e.g. of someone's ideas), unless the head is down for a purpose like reading supporting notes. Head down when responding to criticism is a signal of failure, vulnerability (hence seeking protection) or feeling ashamed.
head down (while performing an activity)	defeat, tiredness	Lowering the head is a sign of loss, defeat, shame, etc. Hence the expressions such as 'don't let your head drop', and 'don't let your head go down', especially in sports and competitive activities. Head down also tends to cause shoulders and upper back to slump, increasing the signs of weakness at that moment.

chin up	pride, defiance, confidence	Very similar to the 'head held high' signal. Holding the chin up naturally alters the angle of the head backwards, exposing the neck, which is a signal of strength, resilience, pride or resistance. A pronounced raised chin does other interesting things to the body too - it tends to lift the sternum (breast-bone), which draws in air, puffing out the chest and it widens the shoulders. These combined effects make the person stand bigger. An exposed neck is also a sign of confidence. 'Chin up' is for these reasons a long-standing expression used to encourage someone to be brave.
active listening	attention, interest, attraction	When people are listening actively and responsively this shows in their facial expression and their head movements. The head and face are seen to respond fittingly and appropriately to what is being said by the speaker. Nodding is relevant to what is being said. Smiles and other expressions are relevant too. The head may tilt sideways. Mirroring of expressions may occur. Silences are used to absorb meaning. The eyes remain sharply focused on the eyes of the speaker, although at times might lower to look at the mouth, especially in male-female engagements.

Forehead

The forehead works in conjunction with other parts of the face and head.

A wrinkled forehead is always seen with raised eyebrows. If you try to wrinkle your forehead without raising your eyebrows, you will see it is difficult or impossible to do. The normal interpretation of wrinkled forehead is surprise or skepticism. It is physically possible to wrinkle only one side of the forehead, but it takes so much effort that you rarely see that gesture. However, just as it is possible to lift one eyebrow more than the other, so too is it possible to have more wrinkles on one side of the face.

To catch the proper interpretation of a raised forehead, look at the mouth. If the mouth is wide open in the shape of an "O" then you can be sure the forehead is signaling surprise. If the lips are pursed or clenched, then the forehead is projecting skepticism or anger. Some hairstyles can obscure the movement of the forehead. Still, you can use the bangs to make a determination. Note the position of the bangs to start. If a person's bangs move down to hang to the tops of the eyebrows or lower into the region of the pupils, you can infer how much the person raised a forehead.

Hitting the forehead with open palm usually is a sign of exasperation, normally with one's self. The gesture means "how stupid of me," or "how could I have missed that before?"

The forehead is often the first visible area of the body that sweats when a person is overheated. But signs of perspiration automatically appear when a person is overwrought or worried. For that reason, negotiators pay close attention to their opponent's forehead.

Touching the forehead with the tips of the fingers can have two different meanings depending on the position of the hand. If the hand is straight and the index finger touches the forehead, it is a greeting sign, like a salute. If the first three fingers touch the forehead at the same time, It means the person is in deep thought. When this gesture is accompanied by closed eyes it is the person's attempt to shut out distracting sights.

Rubbing of the forehead or temples is a sign that the person is deep in thought. Then you generally also see the person's thumb will be planted on one side of the forehead and the other fingers will slide back and forth in a linear or circular pattern. From this gesture you can usually infer that the person wants to be left alone to figure something out.

Hands

We submit signals through hand gestures, how we touch things, others, or ourselves. We can interrupt a conversation or send a negative message with hand gestures. We can have a negative impact with too many gestures or improper gestures. We have to be careful of interpreting or using gestures that may be very culture-specific. Still hands movements and gestures send an enormous amount of information in non-verbal communication.

Body language involving hands is extensive. This is because hands are such expressive parts of the body and because hands interact with other parts of the body. Hands contain many more nerve connections (to the brain) than most if not all other body parts. They are extremely expressive and flexible tools, so it is natural for hands to be used a lot in conscious signaling when we use emphasizing gestures, or unconsciously, in a wide range of **unintentional** movements which indicate hidden feelings and thoughts.

A nose or an ear by itself can do little to signal a feeling, but when a hand or finger is also involved, it is probably a signal of some sort.

Hands body language is used for various purposes, notably:

- Emphasis, (pointing, jabbing, and chopping actions)
- Illustration (drawing, shaping, mimicking actions or sizing things in the air - this big/long/wide/etc., phoning actions, etc)
- Specific conscious gestures, common to our culture
- Greeting people and waving goodbye
- Unconscious gestures that include interacting with other objects (pen, paper, jewelry) or parts of the body to indicate feelings such as doubt, deceit, pressure, openness, expectation

Supporting the head with the hand by resting an elbow on the table can indicate that the person is listening and is holding the head still in order to focus. On the other hand, supporting the head with both elbows on the table, can indicate monotony or boredom. A common gesture is pointing, not like an arrow at anyone or anything in particular, but pointing as if we were virtually touching an idea or emotion at a distance with a finger or outstretched hand.

Unconscious pointing is significant. Usually a person unconsciously points in the direction of the person for whom they feel or share an affinity. This is important in meetings or group interactions. Hands in the pockets or a hand on the head can indicate nervousness or deception. Crossed arms can indicate anxiety, vulnerability, or a closed mind, a way to invisibly block or defend against the other person. Similarly, a person can hold an object, such as a pad of paper, as an invisible barrier or blocking gesture. Hands on the hips is usually a sign that a person is exerting dominance.

Body language experts generally agree that hands send more signals than any part of the body except for the face. Studying hands, therefore, yields a lot of information - hence the section below is large. While much of it may be universal or apply mostly to North American behaviour, due to cultural differences, please avoid assuming that these hand gestures apply to all people.

Signal	Part of body	Possible meaning	Detailed explanation
palm(s) up or open	hands	submissive, truthful, honesty, appealing	Said to evolve from when open upward palms showed no weapon was held. A common gesture with various meanings around a main theme of openness. Can also mean "I don't have the answer," or an appeal. In some situations, this can indicate confidence (such as to enable openness), or trust/trustworthiness. An easily faked gesture to convey innocence. Outward open forearms or whole arms are more extreme versions of the signal.
palm(s) up, fingers pointing up	hands	defensive, instruction to stop	Relaxed hands are more likely to be defensive as if offered up in protection; rigid fingers indicate a more authoritative instruction or request to stop whatever behaviour is promoting the reaction.
palm(s) down	hands	authority, strength, dominance	Where the lower arm moves across the body with palm down this is generally defiance or firm disagreement.
palm up and moving up and down as if weighing	hands	striving for or seeking an answer	The hand is empty but figuratively holds a problem or idea as if weighing it. The signal is one of 'weighing' possibilities.
hand(s) on heart (left side of chest)	hands	seeking to be believed	Although easy to fake, the underlying meaning is one of wanting to be believed, whether being truthful or not. Hand on the heart can be proactive, as when a salesman tries to convince a buyer, or reactive, as when claiming innocence or shock. Whatever, the sender of this signal typically feels the need to emphasize their position as if mortally threatened, which is rarely the case.
finger pointing (at a person)	hands	aggression, threat, emphasis	Pointing at a person is very confrontational and dictatorial. Commonly adults do this to young people. Adult to adult it is generally unacceptable and tends to indicate a lack of social awareness or self-control aside from arrogance on the part of the finger pointer. The finger is thought to represent a gun or pointed weapon. Strongly associated with anger, directed at another person. An exception to the generally aggressive meaning of finger-pointing is the finger point and wink, below.
finger point and wink	hands/ eyes	acknowledgement or confirmation	The subtle use of a winked eye with a pointed finger changes the finger point into a different signal, that of acknowledging something, often a contribution or remark made by someone, in which case the finger and wink are directed at the person concerned, and can be a signal of positive appreciation, as if to say, "You got it," or "You understand it, well done".
finger pointing (in the air)	hands	emphasis	Pointing in the air is generally used to add emphasis, by a person feeling in authority or power.

finger wagging (side to side)	hands	warning, refusal	Rather like the waving of a pistol as a threat. "Stop it/do as you are told"
finger wagging (up and down)	hands	admonishment, emphasis	The action is like pressing a button on a keypad several times. Like when a computer or elevator won't work, as if pressing the button lots of times will make any difference.
hand chop	hands	emphasis - especially the last word on a matter	The hand is used like a guillotine, as if to kill the discussion.
clenched fist(s)	hands	resistance, aggression, determination	One or two clenched fists can indicate different feelings - defensive, offensive, positive or negative, depending on context and other signals. Logically a clenched fist prepares the hand (and mind and body) for battle of one sort or another, but in isolation, the signal is impossible to interpret more precisely than a basic feeling of resolve.
finger tips and thumbs touching each other on opposite hands ('steepling')	hands	thoughtfulness, looking for or explaining connections or engagement	Very brainy folk use this gesture since it reflects complex and/or elevated thinking. In this gesture only the fingertips touch – each finger with the corresponding digit of the other hand, pointing upwards like the rafters of a tall church roof. Fingers are spread and may be rigidly straight or relaxed and curved. Alternating the positions (pushing fingers together then relaxing again – like a spider doing press-ups on a mirror) enables the fascinating effect (nothing to do with body language), which after enough repetition can produce a sensation of having a greased sheet of glass between the fingers.
steeped fingers pointing forward	hands	thoughtfulness and barrier	The upwards-pointing version tends to indicate high-minded or connective/complex thinking, however, when this handshape is directed forward it also acts as a defensive or distancing barrier between the thinker and other(s) present.
palms down moving up and down, fingers spread	hands	seeking or asking for calm, loss of control of a group or situation	Seen often in rowdy meetings the gesture is typically a few inches above the tabletop, but also seen standing up. The action is one of suppressing or holding down a rising pressure. Teachers use this gesture when trying to quiet a class.
cracking knuckles	hands	comforting habit, attention-seeking	Usually male. Machismo or habit. Meaning depends on context. No-one knows still exactly how the noise is made, but the notion that the practice leads to arthritis is now generally thought to be nonsense.
interwoven clenched fingers	hands	frustration, negativity, anxiousness	Usually, hands would be on a table or held across the stomach or on the lap.

index finger and thumb touching at tips	hands	satisfaction, 'OK'	Generally seen to be the 'OK' signal, similar to the 'thumbs up'. It may be to oneself quietly, or more pronounced directed to others. There is the sense of this suggesting something being 'just right' as if the finger and thumb are making a fine adjustment with a pinch of spice or a tiny turn of a control knob. The circle formed by the joined finger and thumb resembles the O from OK. The remaining three fingers are spread.
thumb(s) up	hands	positive approval, agreement, all well	In the Western world this 'thumbs up' signal means approved. It is a very positive signal. Two hands is a bigger statement of the same meaning.
thumbs down	hands	disapproval, failure	Logically the opposite of thumbs up. Rightly or wrongly, the thumbs up and down signals are associated with the gladiatorial contests of the ancient Roman arenas in which the presiding dignitary would signal the fate of the losing contestants.
thumb(s) clenched inside fist(s)	hands	self-comforting, frustration, insecurity	As with other signals involving holding or stroking a part of one's own body, this tends to indicate self-comforting. Also thumbs are potent and flexible tools, so disabling them logically reduces a person's readiness for action.
hand held horizontally and rocked from side to side	hands	undecided, in the balance	Signaling that a decision or outcome, normally finely balanced and difficult to predict or control, could go one way or another.
rubbing hands together	hands	anticipation, relish	A signal – often a conscious gesture – of positive expectation and often related to material or financial reward or an enjoyable activity and outcome.
hand(s) clamped over mouth	hands/mouth	suppression, shock	See the mouth/hand clamp entry in mouth section, which is a subject in its own right.
touching nose, while speaking	hands / nose	lying or exaggeration	This is said to hide the reddening of the nose caused by increased blood flow. Can also indicate mild embellishment or fabrication. The children's story about Pinocchio (the wooden puppet boy whose nose grew when he told lies) reflects long-standing associations between the nose and telling lies.
scratching nose, while speaking	hands/nose	lying or exaggeration	Nose-scratching while speaking is a warning sign, unless the person genuinely has an itchy nose. Often exhibited when recounting an event or incident.

pinching or rubbing nose, while listening	hands / nose	thoughtfulness, suppressing comment	In many cases this is unconscious signaling of holding back or delaying a response or opinion. Pinching the nose physically obstructs breathing and speech, especially if the mouth is covered at the same time. Rather like the more obvious hand-clamp over the mouth, people displaying this gesture probably have something to say but are choosing not to say it yet.
picking nose	hands/nose	day-dreaming, inattentive, socially disconnected, stress	Nose picking is actually extremely common among adults but does not aid career development or social acceptance and is therefore normally a private affair. When observed, nose-picking can signify various states of mind, none particularly positive.
pinching bridge of nose	hands / nose	negative evaluation	Usually accompanied with a long single blink.
hands clamped on ears	hands / ears	rejection of or resistance to something	Not surprisingly gestures involving hands covering the ears signify a reluctance to listen and/or to agree with what is being said or to the situation as a whole. The gesture is occasionally seen by a person doing the talking, in which case it tends to indicate that other views and opinions are not wanted or will be ignored.
ear tugging	hands/ears	indecision, self-comforting	People fiddle with their own bodies in various ways when seeking comfort, but ear-pulling or tugging given suitable supporting signs can instead indicate indecision and related pondering.
hands clasping head	hands/head	calamity	Hands clasping head is like a protective helmet against some disaster or problem.
hand stroking chin	hands/chin	thoughtfulness	The stroking of a beard is a similar signal, although rare among women.
hand supporting chin or side of face	hands/chin, face	evaluation, tiredness or boredom	Usually, the forearm is vertical from the supporting elbow on a table. People who display this signal are commonly assessing or evaluating next actions, options or reactions to something or someone. If the resting is heavier and more prolonged, and the gaze is unfocused or averted, then tiredness or boredom is a more likely cause. A lighter resting contact is more likely to be evaluation, as is lightly resting the chin on the knuckles.
chin resting on thumb, index finger pointing up against face	hands/chin	evaluation	This is a more reliable signal of evaluation than the above full-hand support. Normally the supporting elbow will be on a table or surface. The middle finger commonly rests horizontally between chin and lower lip.
neck scratching	hands / neck	doubt, disbelief	Perhaps evolved from a feeling of distrust and instinct to protect the vulnerable neck area. Who knows - whatever, the signal is generally due to doubting or distrusting what is being said.

hand clasping wrist	hands / wrist	frustration	Clasping a wrist, which may be behind the back or in open view, can be a signal of frustration as if holding oneself back.
running hands through hair	hands/hair	flirting, or vexation, exasperation	Take your pick – running hands through the hair is commonly associated with flirting and sometimes it is, although given different supporting signals, running hands through the hair can indicate exasperation or upset.
hand(s) on hip(s)	hands/arms	confidence, readiness, availability	The person is emphasizing their presence and readiness for action. Observable in various situations, notably sport and less pronounced poses in social and work situations. In social and flirting context it is said that the hands are drawing attention to the genital area.
hands in pockets	hands/arms	disinterest, boredom	The obvious signal is one of inaction, and not being ready for action. Those who stand with hands in pockets – in situations where there is an expectation for people to be enthusiastic and ready for action – demonstrate apathy and lack of interest in the situation.
removing spectacles	hands/spectacles	alerting wish to speak	For people who wear reading-only spectacles, this is an example of an announcement or alerting gesture, where a person readies themselves to speak and attracts attention to the fact. Other alerting signals include raising the hand, taking a breath, moving upwards and forwards in their seat.
playing an imaginary violin	hands/arms	mock sympathy or sadness	The 'air violin' has been around a lot longer than the 'air guitar', and is based on the traditional use of violin music as a theme or background for sad scenes in movies and in music generally. The 'air violin' is not typically included in body language guides; it's here as an amusing gesture which demonstrates our conscious practice and recognition of certain signals.
thumb and fingers formed into a tube and rocked side to side or up and down (mainly male)	hands	offensive - mockery, dissatisfaction, expression of inferior quality	A conscious signal, usually one-handed. Insulting gesture if directed at a person, typically male to male, since it mimics masturbation, like calling a person a 'tosser' or a 'wanker' (UK) or a jerk-off (US). This is obviously rude and not used in a respectable setting. The gesture is also used as a response to something regarded as poor quality, which might be a performance or piece of work or a comment on a product of some sort. The allusion is to masturbation being a poor substitute for sex with a woman and that those who masturbate are not 'real men'. Unsurprisingly the gesture is mainly male, directed at other males, especially in tribal-like gatherings. Rare female use of this gesture directed at males can be very effective due to its humiliating value. For obvious reasons the gesture is unlikely to be used by females or males directed at females.

two-fingered V-sign, palm inward (mainly male)	hands/fingers	offensive - derision, contempt	A consciously offensive and aggressive gesture, also called 'flicking the Vs', widely but probably incorrectly thought to derive from the 1415 Battle of Agincourt in the Hundred Years War when the tactically pivotal Welsh longbowmen supposedly derided the beaten French soldiers' and their threats to cut off the bowmen's fingers.
two-fingered V-sign, palm outward	hands fingers	victory, peace	British 2nd World War leader Winston Churchill popularized the victory usage, although apparently, significantly if so, first used the palm inwards version until he was told what it meant to the working classes.
palm(s) up or open	hands	submissive, truthful, honesty, appealing	Said to evolve from when open upward palms showed no weapon was held. A common gesture with various meanings around a main theme of openness. Can also mean "I don't have the answer," or an appeal. In some situations, this can indicate confidence (such as to enable openness), or trust/trustworthiness. An easily faked gesture to convey innocence. Outward open forearms or whole arms are more extreme versions of the signal.

Non-Verbal Signals Given By Handshakes		
handshake - equal and vertical	non-threatening, relaxed	Most handshakes are like this when neither person seeks to control or to yield.
pumping handshake	enthusiasm	A vigorous pumping handshake tends to indicate energy and enthusiasm of the shaker towards the other person, the meeting, situation or project. There is a sense of attempting to transfer energy and enthusiasm, literally, from the vigorous hand-shaker to the other person, hence the behaviour is popular in motivational folk and evangelists.
weak handshake	various	Avoid the common view that all weak handshakes are a sign of a weak or submissive person. It is not. Weak handshakes can be due to various aspects of personality, mood and so on. People who use their hands in their profession, for example, musicians, artists, surgeons can have quite gentle sensitive handshakes. Strong but passive people can have gentle handshakes. Old people can have weak handshakes. A weak handshake might be due to arthritis. Young people unaccustomed to handshaking can have weak handshakes. It's potentially a very misleading signal.
firm handshake	outward confidence	Again, avoid the common view that a firm handshake is the sign of a strong solid person. It is not. Firm handshakes are a sign of outward confidence, which could mask deceit, a weak bullying nature or indicate a strong solid person. Strength of a handshake is not by itself an indicator of positive 'good' mood or personality, and caution is required in reading this signal. It is widely misinterpreted.
handshake with arm clasp	seeking control, paternalism	When a handshake is accompanied by the left hand clasping the other person's right arm this indicates a wish to control or a feeling of care, which can be due to arrogance. To many, this represents an unwanted invasion of personal space, since touching 'permission' is for the handshake only.

Arms

Arms act as defensive barriers when across the body, and conversely indicate feelings of openness and security when in open positions, particularly when combined with open palms. Arms are quite reliable indicators of mood and feeling, especially when interpreted with other body language signals.

This provides a good opportunity to illustrate how signals combine to enable safer analysis.

For example:

- Crossed arms = possibly defensive
- Crossed arms + crossed legs = probably defensive
- Crossed arms + crossed legs + frowning + clenched fists = definitely defensive and probably hostile as well

Non-Verbal Cue	Possible meaning(s)	Detailed explanation
crossed arms (folded arms)	defensiveness, reluctance	Crossed arms represent a protective or separating barrier. This can be due to various causes, ranging from severe animosity or concern to mild boredom or being too tired to be interested and attentive. Crossed arms are a commonly exhibited signal by subordinates feeling threatened by bosses and figures of authority. Note: People also cross arms when they are feeling cold, so be careful not to misread this signal.
crossed arms with clenched fists	hostile defensiveness	Clenched fists reinforce stubbornness, aggression or the lack of empathy indicated by crossed arms.
gripping own upper arms	insecurity	Gripping upper arms, while folded, is effectively self-hugging. Self-hugging is an attempt to reassure unhappy or unsafe feelings.
one arm across body clasping other arm by side (female)	nervousness	It is a 'barrier' protective signal and also self-hugging.
arms held behind body with hands clasped	confidence, authority	As demonstrated by members of the royal family, armed forces officers, teachers, policemen, etc.
handbag held in front of body (female)	nervousness	Another 'barrier' protective signal.
holding papers across chest (mainly male)	nervousness	Another 'barrier' protective signal, especially when the arm is across the chest.
adjusting cuff, watchstrap, tie, etc., using an arm across the body	nervousness	Another 'barrier' protective signal.
arms/hands covering genital region (male)	nervousness	Another 'barrier' protective signal.

holding a drink in front of body with both hands	nervousness	Another 'barrier' protective signal.
seated, holding drink on one side with hand from other side	nervousness	One arm rests on the table across the body, holding a drink (or pen, etc). Another 'barrier' protective signal.
touching or scratching shoulder using arm across body	nervousness	Another 'barrier' protective signal.

Legs and Feet

Our legs are the largest area of the body, so when they move, you would assume it would be easy to notice. Yet, we tend to ignore the importance of studying a person's feet and legs. As general rule, people focus on controlling their facial expressions, upper body gestures, and posture. Legs and feet body language is more difficult to control consciously or fake than some body language of arms, hands and face. Therefore, the feet and legs are revealing important clues about their feelings and moods, more specifically the person's readiness or eagerness to move. It does not matter if a person is standing or sitting. Where the feet point indicates which direction the individual would like to move. In a group conversation, when a person's feet point to the interior of the circle, it means they are engaged or finding connection within the group. When one foot points outward, as if they are poised to pivot, it usually means they are ready to move on. You can tell a lot about group dynamics just by studying the body language of people involved. In one on one situations, when a person's feet point in your direction this can be a good indication he or she views you favorably. If the feet point in another direction, it is more likely they would rather not engage in conversation.

When the ankles are locked together, either while standing or seated, it can communicate nervousness or apprehension.

A shaky leg signals anxiety, irritation, or both.

Aspects to consider when interpreting body language of legs and feet:

- Men and women sit differently, which needs to be considered when reading leg body language. Partly due to clothing and partly due to sexual differences, men naturally exhibit more open leg positions than women, which should be allowed for when interpreting signals. Certain open-leg male positions are not especially significant in men but would be notable in women, especially combined with a short skirt.
- Older women tend to adopt more modest closed leg positions than younger women, due to upbringing, social trends, equality and clothing. Take account of these influences when evaluating signals.
- Also, consider that when people sit for half-an-hour or more they tend to change their leg positions, which can include leg crossing purely for comfort reasons. Allow for this when interpreting signals.
- Leg signals tend to be supported by corresponding arms signals, for example, crossed arms and crossed legs, which aside from comfort reasons generally indicate detachment, disinterest, rejection or insecurity, etc.

Note. Where the terms 'leg-crossing' and 'crossed legs' are used alone, this refers to the legs being crossed at both knees. The 'American' or 'Figure-4' leg cross entails the supporting leg being crossed just above the knee by the ankle or lower calf of the crossing leg. This makes a figure-4 shape, hence the name. The posture is also called the American leg cross because of its supposed popularity in the US compared to the UK, notably among males.

Non-Verbal Cue	Possible meaning(s)	Detailed explanation
leg direction, sitting - general	interest, attentiveness (according to direction)	Generally, a seated person directs their knee or knees towards the point of interest. The converse is true also - legs tend to point away from something or someone which is uninteresting or threatening. The rule applies with crossed legs also, where the upper knee indicates interest or disinterest according to where it points. The more direct and obvious the position, the keener the attraction or repellent feeling.
uncrossed legs, sitting - general	openness	In sitting positions, open uncrossed leg positions generally indicate an open attitude, contrasting with crossed legs, which normally indicate a closed attitude or a degree of caution or uncertainty.
parallel legs together, sitting (mainly female)	properness	This unusual in men, especially if the knees point an angle other than straight ahead. The posture was common in women due to upbringing and clothing and indicates a sense of properness.
crossed legs, sitting - general	caution, disinterest	Crossed legs tend to indicate a degree of caution or disinterest, which can be due to various reasons, ranging from feeling threatened, to mildly insecure.
crossing legs, sitting - specific change	interest or disinterest in direction of upper crossed knee	Generally, the upper crossed leg and knee will point according to the person's interest. If the knee points towards a person then it signifies interest in or enthusiasm for that person – if it points away from a person it signifies disinterest in or a perceived threat from that person. Signs are more indicative when people first sit down and adopt initial positions in relation to others present. Signs become less reliable when people have been sitting for half-an-hour or so, when leg crossing can change more for comfort than body language reasons.
American or figure-4 leg cross	independent, stubborn	The 'American' or 'figure-4' leg cross is a far more confident posture than the conventional 'both knees' leg cross. It exposes the genital region, typically causing the upper body to lean back. The crossed leg is nevertheless a protective barrier so this posture is regarded as more stubborn than the 'both knees' leg cross.
American or figure-4 leg cross with hand clamp	resistant, stubborn	This is a more protective and stubborn version of the plain American leg cross, in which (usually) the opposite hand to the crossing leg clamps and holds the ankle of the crossing leg, effectively producing a locked position, which reflects the mood of the person.
ankle lock, sitting	defensiveness	Knees may be apart (among men predominantly) or together (more natural in women). There is also a suggestion of suppressing negative emotion.

open legs, sitting (mainly male)	arrogance, combative, sexual posturing	This is a confident dominant posture. Happily extreme male open-crotch posing is rarely exhibited in polite or formal situations since the signal is mainly sexual. This is a clear exception to the leg/knee point rule since the pointing is being done by the crotch, whose target might be a single person or a wider audience. Not a gesture popularly used by women, especially in formal situations and not in a skirt. Regardless of gender, this posture is also combative because it requires space and makes the person look bigger. The impression of confidence is increased when arms are also in a wide or open position.
splayed legs, standing	aggression, ready for action	Splayed, that is wide-parted legs create (usually unconsciously) a firm base from which to defend or attack, and also make the body look wider. Hands-on hips support the interpretation.
standing 'at attention'	respectful	Standing upright, legs straight, together and parallel, the body quite upright, shoulders back, arms by sides – this is like the military 'at attention' posture and is often a signal of respect or subservience adopted when addressed by someone in authority.
legs intertwined, sitting (female)	insecurity or sexual posing	Also called 'leg twine', this is a tightly crossed leg, twined or wrapped around the supporting leg. Depending on the circumstances the leg twine can either be a sign of retreat and protection, or a sexual display of leg shapeliness since a tight leg-cross tends to emphasize muscle and tone. Assessing additional body language is crucial for interpreting such signals of potentially very different meanings.
legs crossed, standing (scissor stance)	insecurity or submission or engagement	Typically observed in groups of standing people at parties or other gatherings, defensive signals such as crossed legs and arms among the less confident group members is often reinforced by a physical and audible lack of involvement and connection with more lively sections of the group. Where legs are crossed and arms are not, this can indicate a submissive or committed agreement to stand and engage, so the standing leg cross relays potentially quite different things.
knee buckle, standing	under pressure	Obviously a pronounced knee buckle is effectively a collapse due to severe stress or actually carrying a heavyweight and similarly a less obvious knee bend while standing can indicate the anticipation of an uncomfortable burden or responsibility.
feet or foot direction or pointing	foot direction indicates direction of interest	Like knees, feet tend to point towards the focus of interest - or away from something or someone if it is not of interest. Foot direction or pointing in this context is a subtle aspect of posture - this is not using the foot to point at something – it is merely the direction of the feet when sitting or standing in relation to people close by.

foot forward, standing	directed towards dominant group member	The signal is interesting among groups when it can indicate perceptions of leadership or dominance, i.e., the forward foot points at the leader or strongest member of the group.
shoe-play (female)	relaxation, flirting, sexual	A woman would usually be relaxed to display this signal. In certain situations, dangling a shoe from the foot, and more so slipping the foot in and out of the shoe has sexual overtones.

Proximity and Personal Space (Proxemics)

Proximity is the amount of space people find comfortable between themselves and others. Various factors influence how closely we sit or stand next to someone. Personal space dimensions depend notably on the individual, cultural norms, living background, the situation, the topic discussed, relationships and the unique patterns of the people nearby. However, some general parameters apply to most people, which for North American, are shown below.

If you wish to determine if another person views you favourably, pay attention to how close he or she stands or sits next to you. You can tell a lot about the rapport between two people by observing the proximity between them. It can show empathy, affection, or bonding.

However, besides the closeness of a relationship, close physical space can communicate many different non-verbal messages, including: dominance or aggression. It could mean the conversation requires privacy; the people do not want to disturb others; the room is too noisy and they want to simply hear each other; or they had no choice but to sit next to each other due to a lack of seating. Consider that the distance that is acceptable for a personal relationship or social gatherings may be inappropriate for certain business or even acceptable in some cultures. At greater distances, subtle facial expressions can be lost so you may have to pay closer attention to hand gestures or larger head movements to interpret underlying cues.

There are five distinct space zones, which are the basis of this personal space analysis. The first zone is sometimes shown as a single zone comprising two sub-zones.

Zone	Distance	For	Detailed Explanation
1. Close intimate	0-15cm 0-6in	lovers, and physical touching relationships	Sometimes included with the 2nd zone below, this is a markedly different zone in certain situations, for example, face-to-face contact with close friends rarely encroaches within 6 inches but commonly does with a lover.
2. Intimate	15-45cm 6-18in	physical touching relationships	Usually reserved for intimate relationships and close friendships, but also applies during consenting close activities such as contact sports and crowded places such as parties, bars, concerts, public transport, queues and entertainment and sporting spectator events. Non-consenting intrusion into this space is normally felt to be uncomfortable at best or very threatening and upsetting at worst. Within the intimate zone a person's senses of smell and touch (being touched) become especially exercised.
3. Personal	45-120cm 18in-4ft	family and close friends	Touching is possible in this zone but intimacy is off-limits. Hence touching other than hand-shaking is potentially uncomfortable.
4. Social-consultative	1.2-3.6m 4-12ft	non-touch interaction, social, business	Significantly hand-shaking is only possible within this zone if both people reach out to do it. Touching is not possible unless both people reach to do it.
5. Public	3.6m+ 12ft+	no interaction, ignoring	People establish this zonal space when they seek to avoid interaction with others nearby. When this space is intruded by another person it creates discomfort or an expectation of interaction.

Audible Signals

Body language and the spoken words themselves do not provide all the clues. We use audible signals (apart from the words themselves) which also provide lots of clues about feeling, mood, motive and personality. We use word choice and grammar to convey meaning, but we rely on other sounds and silences that are quite different from the spoken words, to convey additional emphasis or meaning, different, and even underlying significance.

- Pitch (the constant musical note of the voice)
- Pace (speed or rate of talking)
- Volume - from whispering to shouting
- Volume variation (how volume changes in phrases or longer passages of speech)
- Intonation and 'musicality' (how the pitch changes according to what is being said)
- Timbre (quality or sound of the voice, and how this changes)
- Emphasis (of syllables, words or phrases)
- Projection (where the voice is being projected to - for example lots of projection as if talking to a big group, or none as if mumbling)
- Pauses, silences and hesitation
- 'Erm's and 'erh's
- Gasps, tuts, and other intakes and exhalations of breath
- Habits, such as "I think...", "You know...", "Like...",
- Laughing and giggling (which can be interspersed within speech, or separate signals, such as nervous laughter)

And all sorts of other audible/vocal effects, including:

- Accents and dialects
- Accent affectations ('received' or conditioned, false or exaggerated – permanent or temporary. People have a telephone voice, a voice for talking to authority figures, or an intimate voice for talking with friends and loved ones.
- Mispronunciations, malapropisms, misuse of a word, spoonerisms (can be done purposely for humour, sometimes accidental). They are actually very common. Some people can mispronounce words through long glittering careers. There are bound to be things we read or are vaguely familiar with, and thus not able to pronounce correctly.

Spoonerism – letters can be deliberately transposed for humour: no bout adout it (no doubt about it)

Malapropism – the mistaken use of an incorrect word in place of a word with a similar sound

What are you incinerating about me? (what are you insinuating about me);

could of ("could've"); espresso (espresso); deteriate (deteriorate); ecksetra (et cetera) antidote (anecdote)

mis-CHEE-vous (mischievous)

- Drying up, being lost for words, stuttering (as distinct from a stammer)
- Over-talking (feeling the need to fill a silence)
- Interrupting
- Holding back (someone has something to say but isn't saying it)
- Coughs and grunts (some types of coughing suggest something other than a tickly throat)
- Belching and burping
- Whistling
- Tongue clicking, teeth-sucking, blowing raspberries, etc

Mirroring - Matching Body Language Signals

Have you ever noticed someone mimicking your body language or that of someone else in the room? When two people are mirroring each other, it is a sign that they are in sync to one another and there is comfort, trust, and rapport between them. We tend to mirror each other when the conversation is going well and we are feeling a connection.

The Relevance of Matching Body Language Signals

- 'Mirrored' or synchronized body language between two people encourages feelings of trust and rapport because it generates unconscious feelings of affirmation.
- When another person displays similar body language to our own, it makes us react unconsciously to feel, "This person is like me, agrees with the way I am. I like this person; we are similar; he/she likes me too."
- The converse effect applies. When two people's body language signals are different - i.e., not synchronized - they feel less like each other, and the engagement is less comfortable. Each person senses a conflict arising from the mismatching of signals - the two people are not affirming each other - instead, the mismatched signals translate into unconscious feelings of discord, discomfort or even rejection. The unconscious mind thinks, "This person is not like me or he/she is different to me, I am not being affirmed, therefore I feel defensive."

The term synchronized is arguably a more accurate technical term because mirroring implies visual signals only when the principles of matching body language extend to audible signals also – notably speech pace, pitch or tone and so on. Mirroring in this conscious sense is not simply copying or mimicking. Mirroring is effective when movements and gestures are reflected in a similar way so that the effect remains unconscious and subtle. Obvious copying would be regarded as strange or insulting.

We see synchronized behaviours a lot. You see it at networking events, between romantic partners, and during conversations with colleagues. People adopt this desire-to-please behaviour subconsciously, especially when they want another person to like and trust them. People sit at a table, lean on an elbow, sip drinks at the same time. Then they lean back and relax, we do the same. Try it, when you sit across from someone. Change your body posture and see if the other person changes theirs similarly.

We see signs of automatic empathy in mimicry. Take when football fans mimic the motions of their favourite athletes on the field by how they throw their shoulders into a move or flinch when the athlete gets hit. Watch any boxing match and you see the entire crowd mimicking the pain of the punches or ducking to avoid one. Watching a televised Nascar race or a chase scene in a movie, people automatically tense their muscles and lean into the turns. Laughter and yawning can be contagious.

Essentially, people are often surprised to realize that they are mirroring each other. If someone mimics your body language, this is a very good sign that he or she is trying to establish a rapport with you. Sales people and other professional communicators are widely taught to mirror all sorts of more subtle signals, as a means of creating trust and rapport with the other person, and to influence attitudes. However, deliberately trying to mirror another person's behavior without being truly engaged can backfire, because others are likely to notice and see it as an attempt at manipulation.

Body Language of Seat Positioning

The 'science' of where people sit in relation to each other, on what and around what, is fascinating and offers opportunities for improving relationships, communications, cooperation and understanding. Lots of unnecessary friction is created in communications situations due to ignorance and lack of thought about seating positions.

These points are generally for the purpose of a leader or someone aspiring to lead, coach, counsel, etc. They are also pertinent in one-on-one situations like appraisals, interviews and so on.

DONT's – Less Favourable Seating Positions

- Sitting opposite someone creates a feeling of confrontation. For one-to-one meetings, especially with emotional potential (appraisals for example) take care to arrange seating before the meeting to avoid opposite-facing positions. If you cannot arrange the seating give very deliberate thought to seating positions before you sit down and/or before you invite the other person to sit - don't just let it happen because commonly, strangely, people often end up sitting opposite if free to do so.
- Consider the rules about personal space. Do not place chairs so close together that personal space will be invaded. Conversely sitting too far apart will prevent building feelings of trust and private/personal discussion.
- Sitting opposite someone across a table or desk adds a barrier to the confrontational set-up and can create a tension even when the relationship is good and strong. It's easy to forget this and to find yourself sitting opposite someone when there are only two of you at the table.
- Sitting behind a work-desk (the boss behind his/her own desk especially) and having someone (especially a subordinate) sit in a less expensive lower chair across the desk emphasizes the authority of the boss and adds unhelpfully to the barrier and the confrontational set-up. This seating arrangement will increase the defensiveness of anyone already feeling insecure or inferior. This positioning is favoured by certain bosses seeking to reinforce their power, but it is not helpful in most modern work situations and is not a helpful way to increase respectful natural authority anyway.

DO's - Favourable Seating Positions

- Sitting at a diagonal angle of about 45 degrees to another person is a comfortable and cooperative arrangement. This is achieved naturally by both sitting around the same corner of a square table, which also enables papers to be seen together without too much twisting.
- The same angle is appropriate for and easy-chairs around a coffee-table. A table ceases to become a barrier when people are sitting at a diagonal angle, instead, it becomes a common work surface for studying papers, or exploring issues together. The 45-degree rule is approximate. Under most circumstances seating angles are influenced by furniture and available space. An angle somewhere in the range of 30-60 degrees if you want to be technical about it.
- Sitting side by side on a settee is not a good arrangement for working relationships. It threatens personal space, and obstructs communications.
- Low settees and easy-chairs and low coffee tables that cause people to sink and relax back are usually

unhelpful for work meetings. For this reason, much seating in hotel lounges is entirely unsuitable for work meetings. People naturally are more alert and focused on using a higher formal table and chairs.

- Interviews and appraisals can benefit from relaxed or more formal seating depending on the situation. Importantly - make a conscious choice about furniture depending on the tone of the meeting, and how relaxed you want the meeting to be.

In large gatherings of 20-30 people or more, a 'top table' is often appropriate for the leader and guest speakers. While this seems like a throwback to more autocratic times, it is perfectly workable. Larger groups of people are far more likely to expect firm direction/leadership. If not to make decisions, then most certainly to keep order and ensure the smooth running of proceedings. Therefore, seating arrangements for large groups should provide a clear position of control for the chairperson or event leaders.

Other Information on Seating Position

- Round tables are better than square or oblong tables for the group and team meetings. Obviously this works well because no-one is at the head of the table, which promotes a feeling of equality and teamwork. King Arthur - or the creator of the legend (King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table) - opted for a round table for this reason. The term 'round table' has come to symbolize teamwork and fairness. Unfortunately, round tables are not common in offices, which means thinking carefully about the best seating arrangements using square or oblong tables.
- A confident leader will be happy to avoid taking the 'head of the table' position, instead to sit among the team, especially if there are particular reasons for creating a cooperative atmosphere. Conversely it is perfectly normal for a leader to take the 'head of the table' if firmness is required in chairing or mediating, etc. It is usually easier to chair a meeting from the head of the table position.
- Theory suggests that when a group sits around a table the person sitting on the leader's right will generally be the most loyal and aligned to the leader's thinking and wishes. A (likely) mythical origin is said to be that in Roman times a leader would place their most loyal supporter to their right because this was the most advantageous position from which to attempt an assassination by stabbing (given that most people then as now were right-handed). Assassination by stabbing is rare in modern work meetings, so positioning an opponent on your right side (instead of allowing the normal opposite positioning to happen) can be a useful tactic since this indicates confidence and strength.

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At Corro, we believe in the power of people. We are inspired to expand humanity's capacity for wisdom, compassion, and courage.

In our commitment to helping you achieve long-term personal development and use your organizational platform for positive impact, we celebrate the journey of lifelong learning while fostering an all-inclusive community driven environment of meaning, personal connection, and fun.

Corro is not just a Work Space – Our Aim is Helping the Community Thrive through People Success