

The Beginners Guide To
BODY LANGUAGE

Body language

*Most men and nearly half of all women
don't know what they look like from top to down.*

Introduction

Our verbal communication conveys information to others. The non-verbal communication viz. facial expressions and gestures called as body language reveals our emotions and thoughts. While you communicate verbally, your body also communicates through various signals. What you say could be entirely different from what your body expresses. It is scientifically proved that the body language expresses one's true intentions. Overall women are good body language readers than men and they don't believe in what they hear when one's body language differ with the expression of words. Hence you need to know more about body language to make sure that the intended message reaches the other person exactly or to read the body language of others perfectly.

Importance of body language

Understanding the secrets of body language will help you to:

1. identify positive impressions on others
2. negotiate business/transactions successfully
3. improve relationships with others
4. find if someone is lying
5. use it to your advantage
6. effectively handle things
7. get cooperation from others
8. persuade others to fall-in your line of thinking
9. create a pleasant situation for discussion
10. attract others and gain confidence

This article will help you to understand some basic body language, emotions and tips for your success in the personal or business workplace.

Elements of body language

1. Eye contact
2. Facial expressions
3. Head movements
4. Gestures
5. Postures

1. Eye contact

Eye contact helps to exchange of ideas, emotion and information. You can use your eye contact for the following purposes:

1. invite attention
2. make possible to interact
3. offer immediate feedback
4. show interest
5. expose states of mind

Eye contact is vital to grab the attention of the audience and helps to interact. You can get instant feedback through your eye contact. The eyes reflect different states of mind viz. happiness, sadness, anger, love, excitement, arrogance etc.

Too much eye contact shall show dominance or superiority, lack of respect, threat to or humiliation to the other party. Too little eye contact shall show less attention, dishonesty, insincerity or shyness. Eye contact is a powerful device to get the listener's attention and concentration.

2. Facial expressions

Facial expression is considered to be best next to eye contact. It conveys various states of mind and attitude viz. pleasure, sadness, interest, boredom, frustration, anger, aggression, fear etc. A good understanding of facial expressions shall be helpful for a quality communication.

3. Head movements

Head movements facilitate both talking and listening. Head movements are used to express the attitude and support oral

communication. Sometimes it can even replace oral communication.

1. **Heads up:** It shall be considered as positive and neutral act. Tilting the head slightly backward shall indicate aggression.
2. **Heads down:** It indicates a negative or suspicious state of mind. A slightly lowered head may indicate humility in many cultures. A completely lowered head position shall show signs of submission or depression.
3. **Tilted head:** It is a sign of interest. Tilting forward shall indicate attraction and involvement. Tilting the head with nodding shall indicate active listening.

Head gestures: Nodding the head conveys the meaning of 'yes', shaking the head to expresses 'no' and rubbing the forehead indicates 'confusion, forgetfulness, anger or frustration'.

4. Gestures

A series of moving body parts form as gestures. The face, head, legs and other body parts convey important messages during an interaction. Paul Ekman and Wallen Freisen two famous researchers on kinesics, did a study on body movements and gestures, classified various gestures into five categories as follows:

1. **Emblems:** It is a substitute for words. e.g. thumps up means 'appreciation'.
2. **Illustrators:** It accompanies your speech. e.g. pointing the index finger to emphasis the matter further.
3. **Regulators:** It signals a change in speech or listening. e.g. the speaker in a meeting pauses for a while before delivering an important point.

4. **Adaptors:** It includes movements that reflect a person's emotional state. e.g. rubbing the hands indicates eagerness normally.
5. **Affect displays:** It is a movement clearly expressing emotion. e.g. fistened hands indicate aggression.

5. Postures

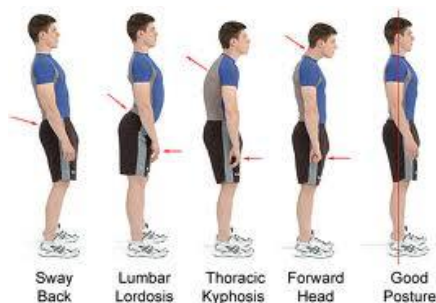
Posture refers as to how an individual sits, stands or lies down. Postures may be open or closed. An open posture indicates confidence. In an open posture, the individual frees his arms, opens palms and slightly leaning forward his body. The one who is not confident in the interaction shall confine to closed posture viz. crossed legs and arms.

Common postures

Erect body postures at sitting and standing indicates confidence or dominating.

1. Standing or sitting in sagging posture means depression or lack of confidence.
2. Standing or sitting with hands folded on the chest signifies submissiveness.
3. Leaning forward in a seated conversation signals a negative or hostile attitude.
4. In a seated conversation, a slight sideways indicates friendliness.

Good posture



Top ten positive body languages

1. Eye contact
2. Standing firm
3. Hand shakes
4. Leaning forward
5. Rubbing palms
6. Open hand gestures
7. Thumbs up gestures
8. Chin up
9. Palms up
10. Magic of smiling

1. Eye contact



Focused eye contact displays confidence and honesty. It also helps you to understand what the other person really says.

2. Standing firm



Standing firm and distributing your body weight evenly helps you to maintain proper balance and prevents you from falling down. With this posture people will perceive that you're a confident and capable personality.

3. Hand shakes



Handshake is a sign of trust and welcome. Handshakes are used to say hello or goodbye or to seal an agreement. It must be warm, friendly and positive.

4. Leaning forward



Leaning forward to three to five degrees shall convey your interest and enthusiasm. It helps to enhance concentration.

5. Rubbing palms



Positive Approach



Rubbing palms is used to indicate positive expectation. Sales persons use this gesture to describe products or services to prospective buyers.

6. Open hand gestures



Wide opening hands gesture is used to measure the size of an issue being debated or referred to.

7. Thumbs up gestures



This means 'good' to Westerners, 'one' to Italians, 'five' to Japanese and 'up yours' to the Greeks. You can also say 'You did a good job'.

8. Chin-up



Keeping your chin up will make you look intelligent, confident, acceptable, pleasant and beautiful.

9. Palms up

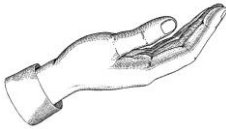


Figure 85 Open body and open attitude

Palms up gesture indicates openness and friendliness

10. Magic of smiling



Smiling in conversation with others shows that you're welcoming, relaxed and interested in their discussion with you.

Top ten avoidable body languages

1. Nail biting
2. Resting hands behind head or hips
3. Faking VS real smile
4. Mouth covering gestures
5. Crossing arms on chest
6. Displaying sluggish posture
7. Shrugging your shoulders
8. Keeping hands in your pockets
9. Looking away
10. Personal space

1. Nail biting



It is a reflection of extreme nervousness or inability to handle stressful situations.

2. Resting hands behind head or hips



Sitting back with your hands clasped behind your head communicates arrogance or superiority. Hands on hips look authoritative.

3. Faking VS real smile

a. Fake smile

No eye wrinkles
+
Cheeks not
pulled upward
+
No smoothness
and little symmetry
+
Too long or too short
=
FAKE SMILE !



b. Real smile



Fake smiles pull back only the mouth whereas the real smiles pullback both the mouth and eyes. When liars lie, their left side of the smile is usually more pronounced than the right. Tight lipped smile will show that the secret will not be shared with.

4. Mouth covering gestures



When one tells a lie, the brain instructs the hand to cover the mouth. However at the last moment the hand is pulled away and results in nose gesture. The liar will avoid eye contact, may scratch their nose or behind their ears or gestures and expressions don't match or keep arms and hands stiff. The person could be less confident in his approach.

5. Crossing arms on chest



Folded arms across chest gesture shows negative attitude of a person who is reluctant to share information with someone or something they don't like. The arm barrier says 'no'. This gesture is normally practiced to defend any issue.

6. Displaying sluggish posture



Sluggish posture lacks confidence and enthusiasm. It shows that you're not interested in what is going on and not paying attention

7. Shrugging your shoulders



You use this expression to show that you don't know or understand what the other person is saying. You can say 'How is it possible?'

8. Keeping hands in your pockets



Keeping hands in your pockets will give different signals. You may look less confident when you lean slightly back or you're bored or you hide something.

9. Looking away



Looking away for long periods indicates that you are not interested in the other person. One looks away when frustrated.

10. Personal space



Don't stand or sit too close to others. When you breach personal space of others they become uncomfortable. Maintain space depending upon how well you know the person taking in to account of cultural expectations.

Conclusion

According to Prof. Albert Mehrabian, a pioneer researcher in the 1950s found that 55% of a message contains non-verbal language and whereas 7% is verbal and 38% is vocal which includes tone of voice, inflection and other sounds. In the light of this study it is important to pay attention as to what your body language tells others and what you infer from the body language of others.

The different body language secrets illustrated in this article will provide you with tips you can use in job interviews, to boost your career, enhance your social life, learning as to how to read body language and what you should or should not do when it comes to body language.

Versatile Business School, Chennai is pleased to bring this article for the benefit of the reader and for future guidance.

References

Allan and Barbara Pease, The definitive Book of Body language, Pease International, Australia, 2004.

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