

Power of Gestures and Postures in Body Language

Perhaps the most fundamental form of visual communication – indeed of all communication – is body language. This is a language which we have all learnt to speak and understand and yet it is. As body language is an important part of public speaking, your body language includes your posture, movement, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and voice. The way we carry ourselves, the gestures we use and our postures communicate much more than we realize.

Here are the most common gesture and posture mistakes that should be taken care of:

GESTURES

Not using gestures at all. If you keep your hands locked at your sides, you will look nervous and your presentation will lack the visual element to accompany and enhance your words.

Fidgeting with your hands. Be aware of what your hands are doing, such as “washing” each other, grasping each other tightly, fiddling with your watch or jewelry, etc. One of the common mistakes can be rolling and unrolling shirt sleeves while presenting. If you must hold something, such as your notes or the PowerPoint remote, be conscious of how you are holding it.

Holding your hands behind your back. This gesture usually resembles that of a child reciting a poem at a school assembly. When not gesturing, your hands should be in the “neutral position,” hanging loosely at your sides.

Folding your arms across your chest. Even if you are only doing this because you feel cold, this gesture will most likely be interpreted as your closing yourself off from the audience.

Moving without purpose. Most of the time you should stand confidently in one place rather than pacing back and forth or walking aimlessly. If you do need to move, it should have a purpose. For example, walk confidently to the front of the room before you begin speaking and walk with purpose to the flipchart or to the computer.

Shifting from your weight from one foot to the other. Many people do this unconsciously and sometimes because their feet hurt. Instead, stand with your feet firmly planted on the floor, with your weight equally distributed on both feet.

POSTURE

Standing too stiffly. Yes, you should stand up straight but it should be natural, not like you are frozen at attention. Keep your shoulders back and hold your head up so you can make eye contact. This posture conveys confidence and helps you breathe more fully.

Slouching and keeping your head down. Not only does it prevent you from looking at the audience, but it also conveys nervousness and makes it harder for the audience to hear you.

How to Improve Body Language

Some of us do not naturally possess the personality or body language that is required for making a good impression on others. Body language is the biggest way that others perceive you. Overall, you should appear relaxed, confident and engaging in order to attract the positive attention you want. Try some of these out today!

Smile

Most people do not realize that their “neutral” face is boring, which is an obvious turn-off. You do not need to be beaming from ear to ear 24/7; however, it is a good idea to remind yourself to smile a bit.

Uncross your arms

Having your arms crossed signals that you want to be left alone or that you are upset. Uncrossing your arms will signal to others (and yourself) that you are at ease in the situation.

Talk more with your hands

The right gestures add immeasurably to your words. Think about how you talk and act when you’re not “on.”

Then act the same way when you’re in professional situations. You’ll feel more confident, think more clearly, naturally punctuate certain words and phrases, and fall into a much better rhythm.

Relax your shoulders

There is a balance with the shoulders: shoulders too high will make you appear nervous, but slumped shoulders give off a sad or self-conscious vibe. Try to work somewhere in the middle, your shoulders falling to a natural and comfortable height.

Straighten your entire spine—including your neck

Unless you are looking at someone who is shorter than you, your entire spine should be straight. Try to remind yourself to keep your “chin up” and your neck will straighten out in a positively confident manner.

Think before you speak

Eye contact is important, but it's hard to maintain eye contact when you have to think. Most of us start talking and look up or down or away and then swing back when we've gathered our thoughts.

Here's a better way. If you have to look away to think, do it before you answer. Take a pause, look thoughtful, glance away, and then return to making eye contact when you start speaking. Then your words are even more powerful because your eyes support them.

Claim your space

Those with a small frame naturally take up less space and appear timid. A way to counter this is to imagine that you are claiming your space on the floor. Stand with feet apart; not together.

Do not stare at the floor

Unless you are checking out the new carpeting or someone's sparkly shoes, your eyes should be close to others' eye level.

Take a deep breath

This is one good way to calm your nerves and make your whole person more relaxed.

Do not touch your neck or face

This is a signal to others that you are protecting yourself or are nervous.

Nod when someone is talking to you

This is a positive form of body language that will let others know you are listening and engaged in the conversation.

Lower your voice

Studies show that people with deeper voices are taken more seriously.

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