



# Watch Your Body Talk

An etiquette brief on nonverbal communication  
by Civility Experts Worldwide

## Introduction

Have you ever met someone in a business or social setting who was well-dressed, well-spoken, and well-versed in the art of the deal, but for whatever reason you were well ....not impressed? Chances are that something about that person's nonverbal communication sent you a negative impression. Learning how nonverbal cues can make or break impressions and trying to avoid sending cues that undermine your confidence and credibility, is essential to presenting yourself in a positive, credible way.

Anyone who wants to ensure that he/she consistently communicates in a way that is clear and that conveys exactly what he/she is trying to say, practices making his/her nonverbal cues match his/her verbal cues.

For an expanded lesson plan including activities and answer keys, please visit the shopping cart at [www.etiquettrainingtoolkits.com](http://www.etiquettrainingtoolkits.com)

## Lesson K1L2: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION (Excerpt)



### THINK ABOUT IT:

Did you know that experts suggest that only 5% of our nonverbal communication is deliberate? This means that at any given time, your posture, how you hold your head, your gestures, tone of voice, and other nonverbal cues could be sending messages you are not even aware of.

Anyone who has ever tried to get a group of busy executives to pay attention, never mind listen, understands that it can be difficult to keep others focused on what you are trying to communicate. So, if mastering nonverbal communication can increase the effective of communication, it makes good sense to learn about it. In addition, modern workplaces are often diverse so understanding how people of different cultures exhibit and interpret body language and other nonverbal cues can be invaluable in communicating with co-workers, clients, and higher-ups.

Having a good understanding of nonverbal communication will enable you to:

- Ensure that your nonverbal communication matches your verbal communication
- Master nonverbal cues that will help you exhibit confidence and competence
- Be more aware of the nonverbal cues sent by others
- Eliminate nonverbal behaviours that send negative messages



### TERMS TO KNOW:

**Nonverbal communication (NVC)** is usually understood as the process of sending and receiving wordless messages. Such messages can be communicated through gesture; body language or posture; facial expression and eye contact; object communication such as clothing, hairstyles or even architecture; symbols and infographics; prosodic features of speech such as intonation and stress and other paralinguistic features of speech such as voice quality, emotion and speaking style

## Nonverbal Communication

Scholars in this field usually use a strict sense of the term "verbal", meaning "of or concerned with words," and do not use "verbal communication" as a synonym for oral or spoken communication. Thus, [sign languages](#) and [writing](#) are generally understood as forms of verbal communication, as both make use of words – although like speech, both may contain paralinguistic elements and often occur alongside nonverbal messages. Nonverbal communication can occur through any [sensory channel](#) – [sight](#), [sound](#), [smell](#), [touch](#) or [taste](#). Nonverbal communication is also distinguished from [unconscious communication](#), which may be verbal or non-verbal. Also, non-verbal communication comes in many forms at the same time. For example, a person's dress, tone of voice, attitude, and movement all contribute to the communication going on in a certain situation. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

What's your nonverbal communication style? Studies show that fifty percent of all communication is nonverbal and of the fifty percent, which is verbal, more than half is quickly forgotten or misunderstood. Are you in control of all your actions? If you are, you are aware of all the signals you send at any given time. There is tremendous power in understanding and interpreting the nonverbal message.

A very important aspect of nonverbal communication is posture and body language. When business professionals send nonverbal signals we instantly develop opinions and judgment calls about their communication style.



### THINK ABOUT IT:

Can you think of some examples of when you observed someone who was not in control of the nonverbal messages he/she was sending?

For example:

- Someone who is constantly fidgeting or can't sit still
- Someone who paces
- Someone who clenches his/her jaw or purses his/her lips
- Someone who shifts his/her body weight

Every day, every one of makes a gesture or moves in a way that causes us to unknowingly send a message. Here are some tips on mastering your nonverbal communication skills will give you a leading edge in the North American business arena:

- Practice your posture. Stand with your feet slightly apart, shoulders back and chin forward. When you're engaged in a conversation, stand still. Don't fidget and keep your hands by your side.

## Nonverbal Communication

- Maintain eye contact. Don't let your eyes wander as your head typically follows. If you're uncomfortable looking directly at the person you're talking to, look at their eyebrows.
- Try to focus on the communication at hand. Think about something positive if you're in a bad mood so that at least your smile will be sincere.
- If you cannot be genuine in your interaction, let the person know it's not a good time to talk or ask them to come back later. The last thing you want to do is give a bad impression to a co-worker or important client.

"To study language by listening only to utterances, say [University of Chicago professor of psychology and linguistics, David] McNeill and those who subscribe to his theories, is to miss as much as **75 percent** of the meaning" (Mahany 1997:E-3).

## COMPONENTS OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

There are several components to nonverbal communication. These components vary depending on circumstances and situations and they impact our conscious and subconscious communication.



### 9 Components of Nonverbal Communication

#### 1 *Object communication*

The most common form of object communication is [clothing](#). The types of clothing that people wear are often used to determine their [personality](#), though this is considered a form of [stereotyping](#). For example, it is common for people to give preference to those they consider attractive. A physically attractive person may be more likely to be hired for a job or to be helped than someone less attractive. A good example of clothing as object communication is the [uniform](#). [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

The reason we make an effort to dress in an appropriate way, that is- to look like a professional or to always look our best and dress to impress, is because people pick up cues about how we feel, how confident we are, how much education we have, how much money we make etc., all on the basis of how we look and what we're wearing.

#### 2 *Haptics*

## Nonverbal Communication

Haptics is the study of touching as nonverbal communication. Touches that can be defined as communication include: Handshakes, holding hands, kissing (cheek, lips, hand), back slap, "high-five", shoulder pat, brushing arm, etc. Each of these give off nonverbal messages as to the touching person's intentions/feelings. They also cause feelings in the receiver, whether positive or negative. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

### **3 Oculesics**

[Oculesics](#) is the study of the role of eyes in nonverbal communication. Studies have found that people use their eyes to indicate their interest. This can be done through eye contact. For example, when a professor is giving a lecture, a student may communicate disinterest by reading a magazine instead of looking at the professor's presentation. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

### **4 Vocalics**

Vocalics is the study of nonverbal cues of the voice. Things such as tone, pitch, accent, and volume can all give off nonverbal cues. It's possible to learn about an individual's personality, mood, and culture with the information given by their voice. [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

### **5 Suprasegmentals**

A [segment](#) in spoken language is an individual [consonant](#), [vowel](#), [tone](#), or [stress](#) that makes up a word.

### **6 Proximity**

Refers to the distance between people when they are interacting. Cultural norms dictate the level of "comfort space" people require. Some cues that indicate that someone is uncomfortable with how close someone else is standing or sitting next to them are:

- Backing away
- Averting their eyes
- Tapping their hands
- Shaking their feet
- Taking deep breaths
- Crossing their arms

**NOTE:** For most North Americans, an arms length is a comfortable distance between people when sitting or standing next to or across from each other.

### **7 Facial Expressions**

## Nonverbal Communication

Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, so sometimes is an expression. Think about how easily you can pick up on a mood or notice a shift in emotion just by observing a frown or a smile, even a raised eyebrow.

### **8 Gestures**

Gestures are individual, situational, and also cultural. Some people, e.g., young people in gangs create gestures as a specific means of communication; other gestures such as military salutes have been around for a very long time and have the same meaning all over the world.

### **9 Posture**

Posture is the single most powerful indicator of confidence. How you sit and stand and move through a room tells a lot about you.

## **NONVERBAL CUES AND THEIR MEANING**

Interpreting the nonverbal cues of others can be complicated. Our interpretations of others' behaviours can reflect what's going on in our own mind and in our own life (e.g., Are we tired, are we stressed or angry, is something in our past experience impacting our perception?)

It is important to always consider the context of behaviour and try to remember that different situations sometimes call for different behaviours. It's good to trust your instincts but keep in mind that sometimes we read situations, or people, incorrectly. Watching for multiple gestures that reinforce a feeling or evaluation of someone is one way to avoid making mistakes. In addition, listening carefully – (because we tend not to), and because many of us only hear what we want to hear – is another.

Studies in Psychology tell us that the effect you have on others depends on what you say from the mouth (7%), the manner in which you say it (38%), and by your body language (55%). In addition, how you sound also imparts a message, so 93% of emotion is also conveyed without saying the actual words.

For most people in business, selling is an important aspect of their business activities. And, understanding nonverbal communication cues is an important component in selling. Strong postures, gestures, manners, expressions, dress, and even business writing, can trigger emotions in customers that could prompt them either to buy or not to buy.

Remember that when you are selling intangible items (e.g., insurance) customers need some physical assurance in terms of positive physical cues, that you are credible and trustworthy.

## Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal cues can send mixed messages; here are some examples:

### Body language



Besides words, we communicate with posture, gestures, and movement. This is body language, and it provides clues to inner feelings. Body language reveals the true feelings beneath spoken words.

#### Mixed messages:

Body language isn't foolproof; it simply signals hints about one's feelings. You can't be sure certain gestures accurately express certain feelings.

### Examples

Examples of how gestures send mixed messages:

#### Rubbing back of head



Rubbing the back of the head may indicate  
~ frustration  
~ suspicion, or  
~ an itchy scalp.

#### Folded arms



Folded arms may indicate  
~ suspicion  
~ defensiveness, or  
~ an effort to get warm.

#### Tilted head



Tilted head may indicate  
~ cooperation  
~ confusion, or  
~ an attempt to flirt.<sup>3</sup>

### Rules



When reading body language follow these rules:

Don't	Do
Rely on body language alone to judge a person's feelings.	Interpret body language in total context, both gestures and words.
Treat gestures as absolutes.	Regard gestures as indicators.
Automatically label one's	Realize one can send

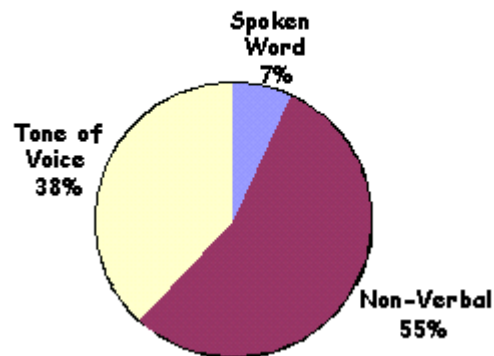
## Nonverbal Communication

mood.	mixed signals.
Judge a person from a single gesture.	Remember, a gesture can have more than one meaning.

Source: <http://cpol.army.mil/library/train/courses/st7000d/8.6.htm>

### NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Below is one of various statistics reflecting the effect body language has on sending a clear, concise message. Another point to consider is how much of the 55% non-verbal is actually purposeful?



Source: Workplace language and Literacy Program by the Commonwealth through the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs 25 October 2001

### **SIGNS THAT YOU HAVE SOMEONE'S ATTENTION:**

- Smiling
- Nodding
- Eyebrows raised
- Saying, "Yes, please go on..."
- Leaning forward
- They are actively listening
- They are so excited to talk to you that they interrupt or finish your sentences

### ***Signs that someone is losing interest:***

- Their eyes are wandering; looking over your shoulder, not making eye contact, looking down or at their watch
- Fidgeting
- Pursed lips or closed mouth smile
- They are whispering or doing something other than listening to you
- Yawning or stretching
- They interrupt you or change the subject



***Signs that someone is uncomfortable or feeling awkward:***

- Pacing
- Rising or shifting away from you
- Leaving the area or room completely
- Fidgeting
- Head lowered, no eye contact
- Shoulders rounded, closed posture
- Blushing
- Profuse sweating
- Trembling
- Complaints of nausea or headache or just not looking as though they feel good
- Talking too much or not at all
- Not eating or drinking or just eating and/or drinking

***Signs that someone does not believe you or is not “buying in”:***

- Repeating themselves, “saying, “Yeah, yeah...” Or “sure, sure, okay...yeah”
- They are saying, “yes” with their mouth but their body language says “no”
- Not asking any questions at all, signaling that they’ve already made up their minds
- Arms crossed

***Signs that someone is not being entirely honest:***

- Changes in the voice's pitch, rate of speech or volume of speech
- Hesitation(s) when speaking
- Decreased or increased eye contact.
- Hands moving to cover the eyes or mouth
- Nervous movements of hands, feet or legs. Twitching of eye
- Saying things that don't make sense or suddenly changing the subject

Women are generally considered to be more adept to body language than men because of their natural built-in instincts.

**If you would like an expanded version of this brief, please visit [www.etiquettetrainingtoolkits.com](http://www.etiquettetrainingtoolkits.com) where you can purchase this and 140+ additional civility and etiquette lessons and other materials.**