

Chapter 1

Defining Body Language

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding out how body language speaks
 - ▶ Gesturing for a purpose
 - ▶ Understanding what you're communicating
-

In the big scheme of things, the scientific study of body language is a fairly recent phenomenon, with documented research covering only the last 80 years or so. In order to better understand the thoughts and emotions behind human behaviour, psychologists, zoologists and social anthropologists have conducted detailed investigations into the use and components of body language – part of the larger family known as non-verbal behaviour.

When you take the time to focus on your own and others' physical movements and expressions, you can spot and interpret unspoken thoughts, feelings and intentions that reveal more about a person than that individual may want you to know. You can even identify some people by a particular gesture or expression such as pursed lips, swaying hips, fiddling fingers or an arched brow.

By observing people's body language you can detect their inner state. Are they despondent, in turmoil or feeling cool, calm and collected? Through a twitch of the mouth, flare of a nostril or change of posture, people unconsciously reveal their thoughts, intentions and feelings. In this chapter, you begin discovering how to interpret non-verbal language and you explore the gestures and actions that reveal attitudes, thoughts and intentions. You also have a quick dip into some of the research into this silent language and glance at the similarities and differences within non-verbal behaviour across the globe. In addition, you find out how you can use gestures to enhance your relationships and improve your communications.

Discovering How Body Language Conveys Messages

When cave-dwellers discovered how to decipher grunts and to create words to convey their messages, their lives became a lot more complex. Before verbal communication, they relied on their bodies to communicate. Their simple brains informed their faces, torsos and limbs. They instinctively knew that fear, surprise, love, hunger and annoyance were different attitudes requiring different movements and facial expressions. Emotions were less complex then, and so were gestures.

Speech is a relatively new introduction to the communication process and is used to persuade and influence others and to convey information, including facts and data. Body language, on the other hand, has been around forever. Without relying on the spoken word for confirmation, the body's movements also persuade and influence others by conveying feelings, thoughts and intentions. Like it or not, your body speaks through signs and signals.

According to research conducted by Professor Albert Mehrabian at the University of California, Los Angeles, 55 per cent of the message in face-to-face communication is relayed through body language when the message contains emotional content. You only have to experience any of the following gestures or expressions to know how true is the adage, 'Actions speak louder than words':

- ✓ Someone raising her fist to you
- ✓ A warm embrace
- ✓ A finger wagging in your face
- ✓ A child's pout
- ✓ A lover's frown
- ✓ A parent's look of worry
- ✓ An exuberant smile
- ✓ Your hand placed over your heart

Figure 1-1 shows two different gestures – one conveying a positive message and the other a negative one.



Figure 1-1:
His
gesture is
aggressive
while hers is
protective.

Creating an impression within moments

You can tell within the first seven seconds of meeting someone how she feels about herself by the expression on her face and the way she moves her body. Whether she knows it or not, she's transmitting messages through her gestures and actions.

You walk into a room of strangers and, from their stance, movements and expressions, you receive messages about their feelings, moods, thoughts and intentions. Look at the teenage girl standing in the corner. From her slouching shoulders, her lowered head and the way her hands fidget over her stomach, you can tell that this is not a happy camper.

Another young woman in this room of strangers is standing amongst a group of contemporaries. Her eyes twinkle, she throws back her head as she laughs, her hands and arms move with ease and openness and her weight is evenly distributed between her feet, which are placed beneath her, hip width apart. This woman is projecting an image of self-confidence and joie de vivre that draws people to her.

Early observations about body language

Before the twentieth century, only a few forays were made into identifying and analysing movement and gesture. The first known work exclusively addressing body language is John Bulwer's *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand*, published in 1644. By the nineteenth century, directors and teachers of drama and pantomime were instructing their actors and students how to convey emotion and attitude through movement and gesture.

In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872), Charles Darwin explores the connection between humans, apes and

monkeys. These species use similar facial expressions, inherited from a common ancestor, to express specific emotions. Out of Darwin's work grew an interest in *ethology* – the study of animal behaviour.

In the late 1960s, Desmond Morris created a sensation when his interpretations of human behaviour, based on ethological research, were published in *The Naked Ape* and *Manwatching*. Further publications and media presentations continue to reveal how much our non-verbal behaviour is based on our animal nature.

Like it or not, how you position your head, shoulders, torso, arms, hands, legs and feet, and how your eyes, mouth, fingers and toes move, tell an observer more about your state of being than any words you can say.

Transmitting messages unconsciously

In addition to your ability to consciously choose precise gestures and actions to convey a particular message, your body sends out signals without your awareness. Dilated or contracted pupils and the unconscious movements of your hands and feet indicate an inner emotion that you may wish to conceal. For example, if you notice that the pupils of someone's eyes are dilated, and you know that she's not under the influence of drugs, you'd be correct in assuming that whatever she's looking at is giving her pleasure. If the pupils are contracted, the opposite is true.



While body language speaks volumes, be careful when ascribing feelings and attitudes based solely on non-verbal behaviour. Individual signals can be easily overlooked or misidentified if they're taken out of their social context. Look for clusters of gestures and expressions that involve several parts of the body. Also observe breathing patterns to gauge someone's internal state. For more about how your breathing patterns influence the way you behave, have a look at *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley). At times, you may want to conceal your thoughts and feelings, so you behave in a way that you believe hides your true emotions. And then, wouldn't you

know it, out pops a giveaway gesture, barely perceptible to the untrained eye, sending a signal that all's not what it appears. Don't kid yourself that no one notices. Just because these micro-gestures and -expressions are fleeting doesn't mean that they don't send powerful messages.



In the 1970s, Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen developed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) to measure, describe and interpret facial behaviours. This instrument is designed to gauge even the slightest facial muscle contractions and determine what category or categories each facial action fits into. It detects what the naked eye can't and is used by the police, film animators and researchers of human behaviour.

According to research conducted by Professor Mehrabian, when people are discussing feelings and emotions in a face-to-face setting and an incongruity exists between the words themselves and the way you deliver them, 7 per cent of the message received is conveyed through your words, 38 per cent is revealed through your vocal quality and a whopping 55 per cent of your message is expressed through your gestures, expression and posture. Mehrabian's premise is that your non-verbal behaviours are directly tied to your feelings, whether you're conscious of the connection or not. Although sceptics contest Mehrabian's figures, the point remains that body language and vocal quality significantly contribute to the meaning of the message.



Gunther is the CFO of a global corporation and is a charming, successful and popular man. In addition, he is used to getting what he wants, when he wants it. You know the time has come to step lively when Gunther points his index finger in your direction, raises his chin, lifts his eyebrows and barks out a rapid-fire command, even if he has a smile on his face. For more about how smiling informs communication, flip to Chapter 6.

Substituting gestures for the spoken word

Sometimes a gesture is more effective in conveying a message than any words you can say. Signals expressing love and support, pleasure and pain, fear, loathing and disappointment are clear to decipher and require few, if any, words for clarification. Approval, complicity or insults are commonly communicated without a sound passing between lips. When you frown, smile or sneer you don't need words to clarify your meaning.

When words aren't enough or the word mustn't be spoken out loud, you can gesture to convey your meaning. For example:

- ✔ Putting your index finger in front of your mouth while at the same time pursing your lips is a common signal for silence.

- ✔ Putting your hand up sharply with your fingers held tightly together and your palm facing forward means 'Stop!'
- ✔ Winking at another person hints at a little secret between the two of you.
- ✔ Putting up your middle finger is an obscene gesture conveying contempt.

Figures 1-2 and 1-3 illustrate these behaviours.

Figure 1-2:
She's sending a clear message without saying a word.



Figure 1-3:
Wide eyes, open mouths and hands to head and face gestures tell you that these people have witnessed something shocking.





Nick and Holly were involved in a tough business negotiation. At one point during the meeting, Nick started to give away too much information. Holly calmly placed her index finger over her lips while resting her chin on her thumb. This was a sign to Nick for him to listen more and talk less.

Gesturing to illustrate what you're saying

When you describe an object, you frequently use gestures to illustrate what the object is like. Your listener finds it easier to understand what you're saying when your body creates a picture of the object rather than relying on words alone. If you're describing a round object, for example a ball, you may hold your hands in front of yourself with your fingers arched upward and your thumbs pointing down. When describing a square building, you may draw vertical and horizontal lines with a flat hand, cutting through the space like a knife. If you're telling someone about a turbulent ride on a boat or plane, your arms and hands may beat up and down in rhythmic fashion. You may hold your arms out wide when describing a large object and hold your fingers close together when you're illustrating a small point (see Figure 1-4). The point is that gesturing is a practical way to convey visual information.



Figure 1-4:
Her tight, contained gesture is describing something small.



Because some people are more comfortable processing information through the visual channel, illustrate your messages through gestures. This helps create a clear picture and adds energy to your voice. If you want to help a blind person experience what you're describing, hold her hands in the appropriate position.



Lotsie is a dedicated traveller and frequently speaks to students about her adventures. As she describes her climb up Mount Kilimanjaro she acts out those moments when the air is so thin that she's hardly able to breathe and when she struggles to put one foot in front of the other. She mimes leaning on her walking stick, bending over with the weight of her equipment, gasping for air and pausing between shuffled steps as she puts one foot in front of the other. Her listeners share her pain and determination through her gestures, posture and facial expressions.

Physically supporting the spoken word

Appropriate gestures add emphasis to your voice, clarify your meaning and give impact to your message. Whether you're sending out signals of interest or signs of disgust, when your body movements reflect your emotions you help your listener understand how you're feeling.

In addition to reinforcing your message, specific hand signals reflect your desire to communicate clearly. Watch well-schooled politicians standing at the podium. See how their hands move in a precise, controlled manner (see Figure 1-5) – no wasted gestures, just those specific ones that tell the tale they want you to believe.



When you're making a formal presentation, use illustrative gestures to help your audience remember the points you're making.



During the introduction to your presentation, as you establish the points to be covered, list them separately on your fingers. You may hold your fingers up in front of you, or touch them individually on one hand with a finger from your other hand as you say the point. When talking about point one in your presentation, point to the first finger, or gesture to it; when you reach point two, point or gesture to your second finger, and so on. This technique helps both you and your listener focus on the subject and stay on track.

Note: Many British and American people begin counting with their index finger. Many Europeans begin counting with their thumb. See Chapter 15 for more on cultural differences in body language.



Figure 1-5:
This precise chopping gesture demonstrates firmness and conviction.

Experienced lawyers, celebrities and anyone else who takes their public persona seriously strive to emphasise their messages through considered movements, gestures and facial expressions. By carefully timing, focusing and controlling their actions, they court the people they want by using open, welcoming gestures and dismiss others with a flick of the wrist.



When you're giving bad news and want to soften the blow, adapt your body language to reflect empathy. Move close to the person you're comforting and tilt your body towards hers (see Figure 1-6). You may even touch her on the hand or arm or place your arm around her shoulder if she doesn't object.

Revealing feelings, attitudes and beliefs

You don't have to tell people how you're feeling for them to know. Look at someone deep in thought. As she leans forward, looks downward, wrinkling her forehead in contemplation and rests her chin on her hand, she's replicating Rodin's sculpture, *The Thinker*. Equally so, a child throwing a tantrum with stomping feet, clenched fists and a screwed up face is letting you know that she's not happy. The body says it all.



Figure 1-6: The woman on the right is expressing her care and concern for the other woman who appears depressed.

Think of your body as if it were a movie screen. The information you project derives from your inner life of thoughts, feelings and intentions. Your physical body is the vehicle onto which the information is displayed. Whether you're anxious, excited, happy or sad, your movements and expressions tell your tale. Here are some examples:

- ✔ People who feel threatened or unsure of themselves touch their bodies as a means of self-comfort or self-restraint. Gestures such as rubbing their foreheads, crossing their arms and holding or rubbing their fingers in front of their mouths provide comfort and protection (see Figure 1-7).
- ✔ People who perform specific gestures reserved for religious rituals reveal their beliefs and values. Upon entering a Catholic church, the congregation dip their fingers into holy water and cross themselves. Before entering the home of many Jewish people, you may touch the mezuzah by the front door. Muslims bow in prayer facing east. By performing these gestures, people are demonstrating their respect for the culture, its traditions and values. See Chapter 15 for more about cultural differences and body language.



Figure 1-7:
Both men
are holding
back and
seeking
comfort.

- ✔ People in a state of elation often breathe in deeply and gesture outwards with expanded arms. Pictures of winning sportspeople frequently show them in the open position with their arms extended, their heads thrown back and their mouths and eyes opened in ecstasy.
- ✔ Footballers who miss the penalty kick and city traders who get their numbers wrong often walk dejectedly, with their heads down and their hands clasped behind their necks. This hand position is a comforting gesture and the head facing downwards shows the individual's despair.
- ✔ People who are despondent, or feeling down and depressed, reveal their feelings by the slouch in their step, their drooping heads, limp lips and downward-cast eyes. Positive people, on the other hand, reveal their feelings with an upright stance, a bounce in their step, lifted lips and eyes that twinkle with liveliness and engagement.
- ✔ Not every bent head signals depression. Sometimes it just means that you're reflecting, thinking or absorbing information. If you're thinking hard for example, your head most likely rests in your hand or on your fingertips unless you're pacing the room as you consider your options, in which case you still might rest your chin on your thumb as you stroke your cheeks and lips with your index finger. You can find out more about body language and mental states in *Persuasion & Influence For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke and *Neuro-Linguistic Programming For Dummies* by Romilla Ready and Kate Burton (both Wiley).





Kate's mother is 94 and lives in a nursing home. Often, when Kate visits her, the elderly woman doesn't recognise her. While Kate is used to this situation, she still feels sad as she considers the passage of time and family relationships. When she speaks of her mother her voice is low, her eyes are downcast and her shoulders slightly slumped. Kate's own daughter, Rosie, recently had a baby girl, Kate's first grandchild. As Kate speaks of little Sienna, her eyes sparkle, her voice lifts and her chest expands with happiness. Kate's different postures and facial expressions project the differences in her feelings.

Holding your hands over or near your heart, as shown in Figure 1-8, is an expression of how much something means to you. You often see this gesture when people give and receive compliments.



Figure 1-8:
The hands over the heart, the tilted head and the open smile indicate happiness and appreciation.

Noticing your own body language

My husband suggested that people may only demonstrate body language when someone else is around to see and respond to it. I found that an interesting thought and retired to my office to consider the implications on my own postures and gestures. As I sat at my desk reflecting on what he said, I noticed I was leaning back

in my chair with my head tilted upwards, one arm folded over my body supporting the elbow of my other arm. My chin was resting lightly on my thumb as my index finger gently stroked my cheek. I couldn't help but think of the question: 'Do falling trees in the forest make a noise if no one's around to hear it?'

Examining Key Types of Gesture

Humans are blessed with the ability to create a wide variety of gestures and expressions from the top of the head to the tips of the toes. Gestures can show intention, such as leaning forward just before rising out of a chair, and no intention, such as crossing arms and legs. Certain gestures, frequently referred to as signature gestures, are acts you perform and by which you are identified. Others are displacement gestures: you perform them for no reason other than to shift some energy. Local customs call for specific gestures and other gestures are universal, performed and interpreted the same way across the globe.

Unintentional gestures

Unintentional gestures are types of body language that inhibit your ability to act. They hold you back from speaking and make it hard for your body to budge. As opposed to intentional gestures – those movements you specifically choose to support your spoken message – unintentional gestures usually surface without conscious thought.

Examples of unintentional gestures are:

- ✓ Folded arms
- ✓ Lips pressed together
- ✓ A hand or finger in front of the mouth
- ✓ Crossed legs

When your arms are folded you can't strike out. When your lips are sealed your thoughts remain silent. When your legs are crossed you can't run away. These gestures prevent you from moving and speaking, which may not be such a bad thing. Standing or sitting with your legs crossed is no position to take if you want to get somewhere quickly. The scissor stance is a prime example of a gesture that keeps you in your place. One leg is crossed over the other, rendering you immobile (see Figure 1-9). When someone adopts this position, you know she's staying put.



Because the scissor stance contains no sign of impatience, the gesture can come across as submissive. You take up less space as you make yourself smaller. Men seldom adopt this stance while women frequently do. Physiological reasons make the pose more or less comfortable for the two genders. People who move freely, not locking themselves into awkward physical positions, are considered to be more dominant than those who are constrained and hesitant in their movements.



Figure 1-9:
Crossed
arms and
legs, fingers
cupping the
mouth and
chin, and a
side-ways
look tell
you she's
holding
something
back.

Signature gestures

A signature gesture is one that you become known by, a common gesture that you perform in a particular way. Some examples are:

- ✓ Twirling your hair around your finger
- ✓ Pointing your finger
- ✓ Sticking your tongue out
- ✓ Patting your eyebrows
- ✓ Stroking your throat
- ✓ Winking

You provide clues about your personality through your signature gestures. They set you apart from others and draw their attention to you.

Red carpet sweetheart Shailene Woodley understands the value of having a gesture to add to her brand. One of the originators of the sassy hand on the hip photo pose, she has replaced that ubiquitous gesture with a double-handed Hang Ten pose, also described as Cowabunga Hands by *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Extend your thumbs and little fingers on each hand while folding your middle fingers into your palms, and bingo – you look like a rock star. You could also adopt Miley Cyrus’s go-to signature pose by quirking, commonly known as sticking out your tongue. Watch Andy Murray after a big win on the court. The British number one tennis player points both index fingers skyward and makes a little head nod as if he were communicating with someone above. Sticking with the tennis champions, Rafael Nadal is recognised by his signature gesture of tugging at the back of his shorts just before serving. When the Seattle Mariners’ closing pitcher Fernando Rodney saves a game, he points to the sky as if shooting an arrow in a movement similar to Usain Bolt’s ‘To Di World’ gesture (see the nearby sidebar for details).

The late Diana, Princess of Wales’s most vividly remembered signature gesture was her lowered head and eyes looking upward from beneath her lashes and brows. This look was so closely identified with the princess that it’s become known as the Shy Di look.



Frequently referred to as the Power Pose, in which you put your hands in front of your stomach, thumbs pointing upwards and fingertips touching, with your thumbs and index fingers forming a rough diamond shape, this action is one of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s most recognised poses. Known in Germany as the Merkel-Raute (The Triangle of Power), this posture is synonymous with Merkel’s reputation for strong leadership and a safe pair of hands. The gesture has been used by Merkel’s party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), for publicity purposes and the emoticon <> referencing the gesture is used in its internet communications.

Celebrating victory with a lightning bolt

After Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt picked up gold at the Beijing Olympics in 2008 he adopted a pose that's become synonymous with the star athlete. The gesture, which Bolt calls 'To Di World', is now referred to colloquially as 'bolting'. To adopt this pose, you spread your feet, lean backwards, cock your right arm while you extend your left one forward and point both index fingers towards the sky. Although then-International Olympic Committee boss Jacques

Rogge branded it 'disrespectful' and 'showboating', Bolt continues to celebrate his victories with this gesture. During his visit to Jamaica in March 2012, Prince Harry received world media attention when he and Bolt adopted the pose together on a Jamaican running track. Bolt has incorporated the pose into his Puma sponsorship campaign as well as in a commercial promoting tourism in his homeland.



Toby is a quiet, task-orientated, focused man. His boss, Annie, is highly energetic with a mind that skips and leaps from one project to the next. Frequently, Annie asks Toby to do one task, only to interrupt his concentration by asking him to do something else, often unrelated. When Toby pats his eyebrows with the tips of his fingers, Annie recognises his signature gesture of impatience and frustration and quickly backs off, letting him get on with what he has to do.



If you want to be easily identified and remembered, you can create your own signature gesture. Consider Victoria Beckham's sexily defiant pout and Mo Farah's 'Mobot'.

Fake gestures

Fake gestures are designed to camouflage, conceal and fool. They pretend to be something when they're actually something else. You're able to tell a fake gesture from a real one because some of the genuine gesture's parts are missing.

Some gestures that are commonly faked are:

- ✓ Smiling
- ✓ Frowning
- ✓ Sighing
- ✓ Crying
- ✓ Holding your body as if in pain



Anna is a highly motivated, recently qualified lawyer in a large London firm. She knows that, in part, her success depends on her ability to get on well with clients and colleagues. One day, her supervising partner invited her to attend a client meeting and to put together the remaining briefs that a previous trainee had begun and hadn't had time to finish. Anna, already overloaded with work, stayed at the office until well past midnight. In spite of little sleep and over an hour's commute that morning, she arrived, shortly before the meeting's 8 a.m. start looking smart and ready to go. At one point during the session, the client remarked that some information seemed to be missing. The partner shot Anna a glance of annoyance before covering up his feelings with the hearty remark, 'Well, she's new on the job. We'll let her get away with it just this once.' To cover her fury and shame, Anna put on what she calls her 'smiley face', a big toothy grin and offered to find the missing materials. Anna's teeth were clenched, and her eyes didn't crinkle, which they would have were her smile sincere. She was tired, hurt and humiliated and anyone paying attention would have seen that her grin was fake.



To avoid being fooled by a fake gesture, observe all the signals.

Micro-gestures

Teeny weeny, so small that they sometimes take highly specialised equipment to see them, micro-gestures flicker and flash across your face faster than a speeding bullet. Unfortunately, you're at the mercy of your micro-expressions as you don't choose them and they tell an observer a lot about your internal state at that moment.

Although you may choose to smile, pout or frown, you may not want a micro-gesture of fear, loathing, love or disgust to flicker across your face. The good news is, if you're a careful observer you can figure out how someone's feeling from their micro-expressions. The bad news is, an adept observer can spot your emotions through the same channel.

A list of the more common micro-gestures includes:

- ✓ Movement around the mouth
- ✓ Tension at the eyes
- ✓ Flaring of the nostrils



Erik, one of my clients, is the newly appointed CEO of a global corporation. In his position, he's used to being the centre of attention. Erik recently entered a room where I was speaking with one of his colleagues whom I'd not met before. Erik winked and smiled as he asked if we were talking about him.

Although he robustly said, ‘Good. I’m glad’ when I told him that we weren’t, I noticed a momentary flicker of surprise cross his face. (Turn to Chapter 5 for more about spotting when someone’s surprised.)

Displacement gestures

When you experience conflicting emotions, you may engage in self-directed gestures that release nervous energy and provide a temporary feeling of comfort. Drumming fingers, flicking feet, fetching a glass of water when you’re not even thirsty – these are the types of behaviour of someone who’s looking to refocus or vent some pent up energy. Called displacement activities, they’re a conduit for excess energy that’s looking for somewhere to go.

Some examples of displacement gestures are:

- ✓ Fiddling with objects
- ✓ Tugging at your earlobe
- ✓ Straightening your clothes
- ✓ Stroking your chin
- ✓ Running your fingers through your hair
- ✓ Eating
- ✓ Smoking

Some smokers light up a cigarette, take a puff or two and then put it out or leave it in the ashtray barely smoked. These people may not actually want the cigarette, but need a gesture to take their mind off something else.



I knew the time had come to stop smoking when I had three cigarettes on the go in a four-room apartment. I was working in New York, living on my own, making barely enough to pay my monthly bills and wondering what life challenges were coming next. I was frustrated and feeling anxious. One morning, while I was in the kitchen making coffee, I lit up a cigarette. When the phone rang, I answered it in the living room, leaving the cigarette burning in the kitchen. While speaking on the phone to my soon-to-be ex-husband, I lit another cigarette, which, after a drag or two, I stubbed out in the ashtray on my desk. I went to the bathroom to get ready for work. Here, too, I lit a cigarette, which I occasionally puffed on as I applied my make-up. In the course of less than ten minutes I had lit three cigarettes, none of which I was interested in smoking and all of which were props for displacing nervous anxiety. Rather than verbalising my feelings, I let my gestures do the talking.



Words convey information. Gestures reveal emotions. If someone's feeling anxious, she may fiddle with her keys, twist the ring on her finger or pull at her clothes to manage her discomfort.



If you see someone being scrutinised, look to see what her hands are doing. If she's gently rubbing her stomach, stroking her sternum or running her fingers up and down her throat, you may assume that she's feeling the pressure and is doing her best to calm and comfort herself without calling attention to it.

Universal gestures

Universal gestures, such as blushing, smiling and the wide-eyed expression of fear, mean the same thing around the world. These gestures stem from human biological make-up, which is why you can easily recognise the signs. See Chapter 15 for more about gestures in different cultures.

Smiling

From the sands of the Middle East to the shores of Malibu, humans are born with the ability to smile. From the earliest days in a baby's life, her facial muscles can form the upward turn of the lips and the crinkling around the outer edges of the eyes to create a recognisable grin.

Sure, each person may have her own unique way of smiling. Julia Roberts is easily recognisable by her toothy wide smile. Keira Knightley prefers the slightly pouty smile. Jennifer Lawrence's smile is so engaging that some of her fans call it addictive. The point remains that anyone with working facial muscles who's conveying a genuine smile lifts her lips in pleasure while the outer muscles around her eyes crinkle.



In Western cultures people smile as a sign of recognition and acknowledgement, whether they know you or not. In China, don't feel left out if no one smiles at you as you walk through their towns. The Japanese smile when they're confused, angry or embarrassed. In the former USSR you're perceived as suspicious if you smile at strangers in public. See Chapter 15 for more about smiling in different cultures.

Blushing

Blushing, caused by blood flowing to your chest and face, is a universal response when feeling passionate or embarrassed. No matter where your passport takes you, when you see someone blush you know she's consumed with embarrassment.



To control the blushing take several slow, deep breaths from your diaphragm to steady your nerves and control the blood flow. For more about how breathing can help control nervous energy, see *Persuasion & Influence For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke and *Voice and Speaking Skills For Dummies* by Judy Apps (both Wiley).



Tom and Louise have been dating exclusively for nine months. While they're enjoying one another's company and may some day make a serious commitment, they're in no hurry to formalise their relationship. When Louise's father asked Tom what his intentions were, both Tom and Louise blushed, embarrassed at having been put on the spot.

Crying

Crying is a universal sign of sadness. One of a healthy baby's first actions is to let out a walloping great cry when she first enters this world, having been torn from the comfort and safety of her mother's womb. No one had to teach her how to cry; she was born with the innate ability to express her unhappiness.



If you feel tears well up in your eyes and you want to stop them from flowing down your face, fix your gaze at the point where the ceiling and wall meet. Performing this action focuses your attention onto a meaningless and unrelated subject and frees your mind of upsetting thoughts. Another way to prevent your tears from flowing is to press your tongue firmly against the roof of your mouth as you remind yourself that in a few moments what's troubling you will be over. If, however, you feel the salt of your tears about to splash down your face, you could acknowledge what's happening and move on. Sometimes accepting what's about to occur is enough to make it stop.

Shrugging

Shrugging is a gesture that people use when they need to protect or distance themselves from something they'd rather avoid. In the full shrug your head dips into your rising shoulders, the sides of your mouth turn down and your palms turn upwards as you raise your eyebrows.

The shrug can indicate:

- ✓ Indifference
- ✓ Disdain
- ✓ Lack of knowledge
- ✓ Embarrassment

To know which attitude is being expressed, you have to identify what the other body parts are doing at the same time.

Television versus radio

In the early 1960s, little was known about body language. Yet John F. Kennedy intuitively knew how to use it. Prior to their first televised debate in 1960, JFK and Richard Nixon posed for a media photo call. Kennedy placed himself to the right of Nixon and shook Nixon's hand. The resulting photograph showed Kennedy applying the upper-hand position, causing Nixon to appear diminished in stature. This was one of Kennedy's favourite gestures. The

Nixon–Kennedy election debate that followed this photo call was a further testimonial to the power of body language. Most of the Americans who only heard the debate on the radio believed that Nixon out-performed Kennedy. However, the majority of those who saw the debate on television believed Kennedy was the victor. The media savvy Kennedy knew how to use his body to manipulate public perception and did it with grace, charm and ease.



Anne, a French woman, heads up her organisation's public relations department. Chad, one of her internal clients, makes Anne's life difficult as he frequently fails to prepare for the presentations Anne writes for him, is late in responding to her requests for information, and often argues with her directives. When I asked Anne how she finds working with Chad, she closed her eyes, pursed her lips, raised her shoulders holding her palms upwards and uttered the dismissive 'puh' sound as a quick blast of air escaped from her mouth. 'I don't think much of him' was her message.

Getting the Most Out of Body Language

People in powerful positions know how to use their bodies to greatest effect. They stand tall, chests open, shoulders back and down, and, when they move, they do so with purpose. They choose their gestures with care to reflect their sense of who they are and how they want to be perceived.

Powerful people know where to position themselves in relation to others. They know that if they stand too close they're perceived as overwhelming or threatening, while if they stand too far away they come across as distant. They know that the gestures they use and how they use them have a powerful impact.



A major part of your message is conveyed through your posture, movements and facial expressions. Being aware of the impact of your body language enables you to act confidently, knowing that your message is received in the way you intend.

Becoming spatially aware

Understanding how to position yourself in relation to other people is a skill that some people just don't seem to have. Someone is either up so close and personal that you can smell her coffee breath or she stands just slightly too far away, making her appear uninterested and disengaged. Others know just how close to come. They understand and respect the different parameters people place around themselves, and being with them is comfortable.

Think of yourself as having a personal, individual space bubble that you stand, sit and move in. This invisible space expands and contracts depending on circumstances. For example, when you're with people you like, you tend to close the gap between yourselves. When you're with people you don't know well or whose company you don't enjoy, you may find that you're more comfortable when you expand the space. People who grew up in the country and now live in crowded cities frequently complain about lack of space while people who were raised in metropolitan areas adapt to confined conditions more readily.



The study of *proxemics* – how people use and relate to the space around them for purposes of communication – was pioneered by Edward T. Hall, an American anthropologist, in the 1960s. His findings reveal the different amounts of personal space that people feel they need depending on their social situation. Robert Sommer, an American psychologist, coined the term 'personal space' in 1969. He defined it as the 'comfortable separation zone' people like to have around them.

Chapter 12 takes a look at how circumstances determine at what distance you're most comfortable, and how best to position yourself in relation to another person, whether standing, sitting or lying down.

Anticipating movements

If you're able to anticipate another person's movements you can predict what they're going to do next, giving you the upper hand by eliminating the element of surprise.

The American anthropologist, Ray Birdwhistell, pioneered *kinesics* – the study of body movement and verbal communication. Replaying in slow motion films of people in conversation, Birdwhistell was able to analyse people's actions, gestures and facial expressions.

Consider these examples:

- ✔ Spotting the subtle gestures a person makes in preparation for rising from a seated position let's you know that it's time to move on.
- ✔ Recognising when a person is about to strike out in anger gives you enough time to protect yourself.
- ✔ Seeing that someone wants to speak enables you to give them the chance to be heard.
- ✔ Noticing that your partner is leaning towards you with pursed lips offers you the chance to pucker up or pull away, depending on your mood.



Anticipating a movement can save your life, keep you from harm and even bring you great happiness. By predicting gestures, you gain the upper hand in figuring out your response before the other person has completed her action.

Creating rapport through reflecting gestures

In order to establish rapport – a state of understanding feelings and communicating well – you accept and connect with other people, treating one another with respect. Rapport assures that your communications are effective and lead to results that satisfy both parties' needs.

Training the brain

If you ever wonder what makes footballer Cristiano Ronaldo so good at intercepting the ball, consider his ability to read body language. Research conducted by Dr Daniel Bishop at Brunel University shows that highly skilled footballers activate more areas of their brain when seeing the opponent coming their way than do less-experienced players. Brain scans show that they have developed a checking system that inhibits their urge to react instinctively, making them less likely to be misled

by deceptive movements. The mirror neuron system (MNS) of an experienced player is more developed than that of a rookie. The MNS helps predict opponents' actions, ensuring that they won't be caught off guard or out of position. Bishop's premise is that players can be trained to anticipate their opponents' moves and by focusing on a consistent centre point, such as the chest, a player can take away the opponents' element of surprise.

You can create rapport in many ways, including touch, word choice and eye contact. You can also create rapport by reflecting another person's movements. By mirroring and matching the other person's gestures and behaviours, you're demonstrating that you know what it feels, sounds and looks like to be in her shoes. If connecting with others and behaving respectfully is important to you, mirroring and matching their behaviour helps you achieve that goal. For more information about the benefit of mirroring and matching others' actions, check out Chapter 14.



A fine line exists between reflecting another person's gestures and mimicking her. People who are being mimicked quickly figure out what you're doing, recognise your insincerity and question your motives.

Becoming who you want to be

How you present yourself, how you move and gesture, how you stand, sit and walk all play their part in creating the image you present and determining people's perceptions of you. By developing an arsenal of postures, positions, gestures and expressions, you can project a plethora of attitudes. Positive body language – through which you establish eye contact and move with purpose – comes across as strong, engaged and vibrant. Negative body language – whereby you avoid looking at another person and fold into yourself – communicates weakness, dullness and a disconnect between yourself and others. How you move your head, face, torso and limbs determines how you're perceived and the results you achieve.



Actors know how to create a character from both within – the character's history, present life, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts and feelings – and without – her physical attributes, including how she looks and behaves. They draw upon the technique of acting 'as if', that is, behaving as if they were the character. Working from the outside in, actors consider how their character sounds, moves and gestures. They ask themselves:

- ✓ How would the character walk, sit and stand? Would she move like a gazelle, lumber along like a sleepy bear or stagger in a zigzag pattern like someone who's had one drink too many? Is her posture upright and erect or slouched and limp?
- ✓ What gestures would convey a particular mood or emotion? Slow, deliberate and carefully timed gestures create a different impression from those that are quick, spontaneous and unfocused.

By adopting the appropriate behaviours, the actor creates an attitude, emotion or feeling that the audience recognises and understands. The same is true for the layperson. By acting in a particular manner you can create an

image and become that character. As Cary Grant said, 'I pretended to be someone I wanted to be until finally I became that person.'



The way you act makes an impression. How you're perceived – dumb or sultry, champion of the people or chairman of the board – is up to you. The key is to adopt the appropriate behaviours. To do that, keep these points in mind:

- ✓ **Make sure that your gestures reinforce the impression you want to make:** For example, the higher up the command chain, the more contained the gesture (which is why you never see the chief executive running down the hall).
- ✓ **You can modify your gestures to suit the situation:** When you're hanging out with friends your body language is loose and relaxed. When meeting a client or your partner's parents for the first time, your body language is more contained and formal. Follow the lead of the other person and reflect what you're observing to create rapport.



Pick an attitude that you want to project. Determine the appropriate gestures and expressions. If you struggle to come up with ideas of your own, model the gestures of someone you think successfully conveys the image you want to portray.



When I experienced my first tax audit, I felt quite nervous. Tom, my financial director, and Ron, my accountant, are in charge of the business's finances and when they say how much I owe and where I'm to sign, I do as I'm told. Tom arrived at the office wearing a suit and tie for the meeting with the tax inspector. Our office is normally quite informal and Tom's change of clothes and serious demeanour told me that we were to leave out the jokes. I dressed in a suit like Tom and also adjusted my behaviour to mirror his, which was thoughtful, serious and open. We wanted to demonstrate that, in addition to the business having a strong creative base, its financial backbone is firmly in place.

Reading the signs and responding appropriately

Recognising, interpreting and responding to other people's body language is a stepping stone to effective communication. By observing how people move and gesture, you get a glimpse into their thoughts, emotions, and intentions. You can tell, for example, how someone is feeling by the way she stands. You can see what kind of mood a person is in by the speed of her gestures. You can spot someone's attitude by the tilt of her head. By having an insight into

someone's thoughts and emotions, you're forewarned and forearmed for whatever may happen next.

Say that you're with a friend. You notice her sitting with her head hanging down, her eyes looking moist and her arms wrapped around her body. Her body language is indicating that she's depressed and might benefit from a little tender loving care. You gently put your hand on her arm and she begins to perk up because you responded to her signals.

Perhaps you're at a party and notice that some of the guests who have had more than their fair share of drink are beginning to go from jovial to rowdy. The lads pushing and shoving one another signals that this could be the time for you to leave. By reading body language effectively, you can tell when to stay and when to go.



Holly unexpectedly popped round to have a chat with her colleague, Tony. Tony was rushing to complete a project and had little time to stop for a gossip. As they're friends, Tony looked up at Holly and smiled and nodded when he saw her. He also stayed seated at his desk and didn't maintain eye contact. He kept his fingers on his keyboard, looked back at his computer screen and resumed typing. Holly sensed from Tony's body language that now was not a convenient time for them to speak, and she quickly left.

Appreciating Cultural Differences

How much more exciting, interesting and stimulating it is to live in a world with difference and diversity, rather than one in which everything's the same. Even though you appreciate the differences between cultures and nationalities, you may sometimes find yourself confused, scared or even repelled by displays of body language that are very different from what you're used to.

Because people in one culture act differently to people in another doesn't suggest that one is right and the other wrong. When it comes to cultural differences, the operative verbs are 'to respect' and 'to value'. Valuing behaviours that vary so much from those that you grew up with, and were taught to believe in, can be hard. To create respectful, positive relationships between different cultures and nationalities, you need to expand the way you think and work. If you remember nothing else from this paragraph, remember that in multicultural encounters, respect for others' ways of being is paramount. That doesn't mean having to agree with all the behaviours you see in your travels. Instead, accept that differences do exist, and then decide how best to respond.

Chapter 15 looks at different cultures and how behaviour and body language impact upon communication between nations.



People of different nationalities and cultures use their bodies differently. An acceptable gesture in one country may land you in jail in another. Before visiting or moving to another country, do your homework and find out what's suitable and what's not.

