

- » Seeing how body language speaks
- » Gesturing for a purpose
- » Understanding what your body's saying

Chapter **1**

Exploring the Fundamentals of Body Language

In the big scheme of things, the scientific study of body language is a fairly recent phenomenon, with documented research covering only the last 150 years or so. To understand the thoughts and emotions behind human behavior, psychologists, zoologists, and social anthropologists have conducted detailed investigations into the use and components of body language – part of the larger family known as nonverbal behavior.

When you take the time to focus on physical movements and facial expressions, you can identify and interpret unspoken thoughts, feelings, and intentions that you or someone else may not have realized you or they were communicating. Like it or not, nonverbal behaviors reveal more about a person than you or they may want to expose.

You can detect someone's inner state by carefully observing their physical movements. Are they despondent or in turmoil, or are they feeling cool, calm, and collected? They both consciously and unconsciously reveal their beliefs, plans, and

emotions by licking their lips, baring their teeth, flicking their hair, and other recognizable gestures. In this chapter, you discover how to recognize and interpret nonverbal behaviors that reveal moods, ideas, and intentions. You also quickly dip into some of the research about nonverbal behavior and glance at this silent language's similarities and differences across the globe. As a bonus, you find out how you can use gestures to enhance your relationships and improve your communications.

Discovering How Body Language Conveys Messages

Before speaking in words, sentences, and paragraphs, people relied on their bodies and the occasional grunt to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Except for the evolution of spoken language, not much has changed.

The spoken word is a relatively new form of communication. Its purpose is to persuade, influence, and convey information including facts and data. On the other hand, body language has been around since the dawn of the dinosaur. You don't have to be taught how to persuade and influence others through the use of physical movements, gestures, and facial expressions. You're born that way.

According to frequently quoted research conducted by Professor Emeritus Albert Mehrabian at the University of California, Los Angeles, 55 percent of the message in face-to-face communication is relayed through body language and 38 percent through vocal signals *when the message contains emotional content*. Experience any of the following examples of body language to appreciate the saying, "Actions speak louder than words":

- » Someone raising their fist to you
- » A warm embrace
- » A finger wagging in your face
- » A child's pout
- » A parent's frown
- » An exuberant smile
- » Your hand placed over your heart

Creating an impression within moments

You can create any impression you want within moments through your facial expressions, movements, and gestures. Actors, celebrities, and people famous for being famous recognize the impact of a well-timed smile, a swing of the shoulder, a swagger in the step, or the wiggle of a hip. Politicians, police, newscasters, service personnel, and industry leaders are schooled in creating an impression within moments. While some people recognize the value of creating a positive impression, not everyone does.



ANECDOTE

Judy and Edith work for the same company. Judy creates an impression of an attractive, fun, smart, and caring person. Her eyes twinkle, she's interested in others, and her movements are open and free. Edith creates a different impression. She shuffles, slouches, and seldom smiles. She fidgets when she speaks and struggles to look people in the eye. While she is good at her job, the impression she creates is dull, listless, and dismal. Edith doesn't recognize the importance of creating a positive physical impression, which is one of the reasons she remains unseen in the back office while Judy takes clients out to dinner.

An astute observer doesn't have to ask how you're feeling. All they have to do is to take in your posture, facial expressions, gestures, breathing rate, and pace of movement to identify your internal state. Signs that indicate positive feelings include

- » Upright posture
- » Free and open gestures
- » Eye contact
- » Smiling

Some signs of negative feelings include

- » Slouching
- » Tense and closed gestures
- » Little eye contact
- » Frowning



TIP

Within less than 20 seconds of seeing you, a person can tell how you feel by your facial expressions and body movements. Depending on the impression you want to create, you can adopt the appropriate behaviors.

EARLY OBSERVATIONS ABOUT BODY LANGUAGE

Before the 20th century, only a few forays were made into identifying and analyzing 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 19th century, directors and teachers of drama and pantomime were instructing their actors and students on 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 behavior.

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

Humans share similar expressions and gestures with their primate cousins.



Kertu/Adobe Stock

Transmitting messages unconsciously

In addition to your gestures and facial expressions conveying intended messages, your body often sends out signals without your control or knowledge. For example, dilated or contracted pupils or the unconscious movements of your hands and feet indicate an inner emotion you might prefer to conceal.



WARNING

While body language speaks volumes, be careful when ascribing feelings and attitudes based solely on what you see. Body language can be ambiguous, and individual signals can be misidentified if they're taken out of context. Look for clusters of gestures and expressions involving several body parts. Also observe breathing patterns to gauge someone's internal state. For more about how your breathing patterns influence how you behave, look at *Communication Skills For Dummies* by Elizabeth Kuhnke (Wiley).



TECHNICAL
STUFF

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

As referred to earlier in this section, research demonstrates that when people are discussing feelings and emotions in a face-to-face setting and incongruity exists between the spoken words and how they're delivered, people believe what they observe – such as your body language and vocal quality – more than what you say. In other words, your nonverbal behaviors are directly tied to your feelings, regardless of whether you're cognizant of the connection.

Substituting gestures for the spoken word

Sometimes a gesture is more effective in conveying a message than any words you can imagine. Signals expressing love and support, pleasure and pain, fear and surprise, and 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. Whether you frown, smile, or sneer, your message is plain.

You can gesture to convey your meaning when words aren't enough or the word mustn't be spoken out loud (see Figure 1-1). For example

- » Placing your index finger in front of your mouth while at the same time pursing your lips is a common signal for invoking silence

- » Bending your elbow and raising your hand with your fingers upright and your palm facing forward means “Stop!”
- » Winking at another person hints that you two share a little secret

FIGURE 1-1: Hands over the eyes, ears, and mouth signal that you should not see, hear, or say anything evil.



Minerva Studio/Adobe Stock



ANECDOTE

Nick and Holly were involved in a tough business negotiation. 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 sign told Nick 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 your words alone. If you're describing a round object, you may hold your hands in front of you 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 a 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. The point is that gesturing is a practical way to convey visual information.



TIP

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



WARNING

Too many gestures can overwhelm your listener. In some cultures, large and frequent gestures are frowned upon while in other cultures, gesturing is part of life. For more about gesturing in foreign lands, turn to Chapter 15.



ANECDOTE

Lotsie is an intrepid explorer who frequently speaks to students and other serious travelers about her adventures. As she describes her climb to Mount Everest base camp, she acts out those moments when the air is so thin that she struggles to breathe or 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. Through her use of gestures, posture, and facial expressions, her audiences experience her pain and determination.

Physically supporting the spoken word

Gesturing adds emphasis to your voice, clarifies your meaning, and gives impact, to your message. Whether you're sending signals of interest – such as wide-opened eyes, a tilt of the head, and a smile – or signs of disgust – curling your upper lip, wrinkling your nose, and turning away – your body movements reflect your feelings and help your listener understand your meaning.



ANECDOTE

Maria and her husband, Eric, had a bit of a spat in the car on their way to see her parents. As they walked toward the front door, Eric reached out to hold Maria's hand. Maria growled under her breath, "Don't touch me!" and swatted her husband's hand away. Watching from the living room window, Maria's father turned to his wife, saying, "Uh-oh. Seems there's trouble in Paradise." Although he hadn't heard the words spoken, the supporting action told him all he needed to know.

People in positions of power, like parents and politicians, rely on specific signals to reinforce their messages. A favorite of the well-schooled politician standing at the podium is a precise, controlled chopping gesture because the action conveys strength and conviction. A fed-up father might use a similar gesture when he's telling his son – for the umpteenth time – to tidy his room.



TIP

When you're making a formal presentation or in everyday life, include illustrative gestures to help your listener remember the points you're making such as the thumbs up / thumbs down gesture shown in Figure 1-2.

FIGURE 1-2:
The thumbs up/
down gesture
supports your
verbal message
of something
being good
or bad.



James Steidl/Adobe Stock



TRY THIS

If you are called upon to present at an event, establish the points you intend to cover by listing them separately on your fingers during your introduction. You may hold the fingers on one hand up in front of you or touch them individually with a finger from your other hand as you list your topics. 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 simple technique helps both you and your listener follow your details and stay on track.



TIP

Many British and American people begin counting with their index fingers. Many Europeans begin counting with their thumbs. See Chapter 15 for more on cultural differences in body language.

Instagramers, TikTokers, and all who take their public persona seriously emphasize their messages through considered movements, gestures, and facial expressions. By carefully timing, focusing, and controlling their actions, they court their followers through well-devised facial expressions and poses intended to enhance their brands and increase their influence. Some pout, frown, or produce wide-toothed grins, matching their body language to their messages. Their poses become their signature gestures. (Signature gestures are discussed later in this chapter.)



TIP

When you're giving bad news and want to soften the blow, adapt your body language to demonstrate rapport. Move close to the person you're comforting and tilt your body toward them. You may even touch them on the hand or arm or place your arm around their shoulder if they don't object. You can learn more about the benefits of building rapport later in this chapter.



WARNING

Never— as in *never* — touch someone without their permission. Even if every inch of your body wants to put a comforting arm around their shoulder or a supportive pat on their back, confirm that the other person's good with that. What you might interpret as an innocent gesture, someone else might take as invasive.

Revealing feelings, attitudes, and beliefs

You don't have to tell people how you feel for them to know. Look at someone deep in thought. As they lean forward, look downward, wrinkle their forehead in contemplation while resting their chin on their hand, they could be the model for Rodin's sculpture, *The Thinker*.

You can spot a frustrated person by their stomping feet, clenched fists, forward-thrusting lips and jaw, and forehead frown. If someone feels deep joy or sorrow, don't be surprised if you see them place their hand over their heart.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

The more intense the feeling, the more intense the body language.



ANECDOTE

Rosie is a first-time grandmother. The love and pride she feels for her grandson is apparent when she speaks of him. The muscles around her outer eyes pull up, her pupils enlarge, her lips lift at the corners, and she holds her hands over her heart. Similarly, when Rosie speaks of her late father, she often places her right hand over her heart, unconsciously signaling her love for him.

Your movements and expressions tell your tale whether you're anxious, excited, happy, or sad. Here are some examples:

- » When people feel threatened, insecure, or in need of some relief, they tend to touch their bodies as a means of self-comfort. Gestures such as stroking their foreheads, crossing their arms, licking their lips, or rubbing their fingers around their mouth, chest, or abdomen provide reassurance and protection.
- » People in a state of elation inhale deeply and gesture outward with expanded arms. Pictures of winning sportspeople frequently show them with their arms extended, heads thrown back, and 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 hands clasped behind their necks. This hand position is comforting, and the head facing downward shows the individual's despair. In Chapter 3, you can learn more about this gesture, called cradling.
- » People who are despondent or down and depressed reveal their feelings by the slouch in their step, 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.



WARNING

Sometimes, people suffering from depression don't show obvious symptoms. They may be functioning with a smile, while internally, they are screaming out in pain. You can find out more about depression and the signs to look for in *Depression For Dummies* by Charles H. Elliott (Wiley).

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 to be an interesting thought and retired to my office to consider the implications of my own postures and gestures. As I sat at my desk reflecting on what he said, I noticed that I was leaning back in my chair with my head tilted upward, 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 this question: "Do falling trees in the forest make a noise if no one's around to hear?"



REMEMBER

Not every bent head signals depression. Sometimes, it just means you're reflecting, thinking, or absorbing information. For example, when you think hard, you may rest your head in your hand or on your fingertips (unless you're pacing the room as you consider your options). In this case, you still might rest your chin on your thumb as you stroke your cheeks and lips with your index finger.

Examining Key Types of Gestures

Humans can create a wide variety of gestures and expressions using everything from the tops of their heads to the tips of their 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 indicating that you're not budging.

Signature gestures

Signature gestures are acts you perform and by which you are identified. You provide clues about your personality through these gestures. They set you apart from others and draw their attention to you. Examples of signature gestures include

- The sign of the cross
- The peace sign (See Figure 1-3)
- Thumbs-up/thumbs-down
- Air quotes
- Sticking out your tongue

- Patting your eyebrows
- Winking
- Pointing to your eyes



FIGURE 1-3:
With her peace sign fingers, tilted head, stuck-out tongue, and the wink of an eye, this little girl has created her signature gesture.

Coetzee/peopleimages.com/Adobe Stock

The following are some real-world examples of signature gestures:

- » 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 celebrity photo pose, she replaced that now ubiquitous gesture with a double-handed Hang Ten pose, also described as Cowabunga Hands. Extend your thumb and little finger on each hand while folding your middle fingers into your palms, and bingo – you look like a rock star.
- » You could also tap into your inner Miley Cyrus and adopt her once-upon-a-time go-to signature pose, the Querk, in which you turn your head, look at your audience, bend over, stick out your tongue, and jut out your bottom.
- » After a big win on the court, Andy Murray, former British number-one tennis player, points both index fingers skyward and makes a little head nod as if he's communicating with someone above.

- »» When the Seattle Mariners' former closing pitcher Fernando Rodney would save a game, he'd point 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, most vividly remembered signature gesture was her lowered head with 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.
- »» Former German chancellor Angela Merkel adopted a posture synonymous with strong leadership and a safe pair of hands. The pose is referred to as "The Triangle of Power," or as they say in Germany, the "Merkel-Raute." See Chapter 15 for more cultural quirks.



TRY THIS

To adopt The Triangle of Power Pose, put your hands in front of your waist, fingertips touching and thumbs pointed upward while your fingers point outward horizontally. Experiment with different amounts of pressure applied to your fingers. Feel your inner power rise.



WARNING

While gestures tend to be universal, performed, and interpreted the same way across the globe, some gestures are specific to their culture, and you can cause offense if you're unaware of what does and doesn't work where. See Chapter 15 for more about body language in different environments.

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 include

- »» Folded arms
- »» Compressed lips
- »» A hand or finger in front of the mouth
- »» Crossed legs

CELEBRATING VICTORY WITH A LIGHTNING BOLT

Way back in 2008 when the Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt took home the gold at the Beijing Olympics, he adopted a pose that's become synonymous with the star athlete and brand spokesperson. The gesture Bolt calls "To Di World" is now colloquially called "bolting." To adopt this pose, spread your feet, lean backward, cock your right arm while you extend your left one forward, and point both index fingers toward the sky. Although then-International Olympic Committee boss Jacques Rogge branded it as "disrespectful and showboating," Bolt continues to celebrate his victories with this gesture and incorporated the pose into his Puma sponsorship campaign and a commercial promoting tourism in his homeland.

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.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

Women posing on the red carpet frequently adopt the scissor stance, an example of a gesture that holds them in place with no sign of impatience. As they cross one leg in front of the other, they render themselves immobile and make themselves look smaller by taking up less space than if their legs were wide apart. They thrust their breasts and bottom outward, place a saucy hand on their hips, and – ta-dah! – they become a sexual fantasy for a brief moment in time.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

People who claim their space and move with purpose, whatever pose they adopt, are perceived as more dominant than those who are constrained and hesitant in their gestures and movements.



ANECDOTE

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



TIP

You can create your signature gesture if you want to be easily identified and remembered. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's signature gesture is the lifted eyebrow, Elizabeth Olsen's is the nose scrunch, and you can always count on seeing Leonardo de Caprio raising his arm while holding a glass.

Micro-gestures

So small that they often require highly specialized 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 reveal a lot about how you're feeling and what you're thinking.

A list of the more common micro-gestures includes

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



ANECDOTE

Erik, one of my clients, is the newly appointed CEO of a global corporation. In his position, he's used to being the center 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 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

Displacement gestures are gestures that serve to shift some energy. People feeling stressed might run their fingers through their hair, shake their fingers, or bounce their legs.

When you experience conflicting emotions, you may engage in self-directed gestures that release nervous energy and provide temporary comfort. Drumming fingers, flicking feet, and fetching yourself a glass of water when you're not even thirsty are the behaviors of someone who's looking to refocus or vent some pent-up energy. Called *displacement gestures* or 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



ANECDOTE

Betty knew the time had come to stop smoking when she had three cigarettes on the go in a four-room apartment. She was working in New York, living on her own, making barely enough to pay her monthly bills, and wondering what life challenges were coming next. She was frustrated and anxious. One morning while she was making coffee in the kitchen, she lit a cigarette. When the phone rang, she answered it in the living room, leaving the cigarette burning in the kitchen. While speaking on the phone to her soon-to-be ex-husband, she lit another cigarette, which, after a drag or two, she stubbed out in the ashtray on her desk. She went to the bathroom to get ready for work. She also lit a cigarette there, occasionally puffing on it as she applied her makeup. In under ten minutes, she had lit three cigarettes, none of which she was interested in smoking and all of which were props for displacing nervous anxiety. Rather than verbalizing her feelings, she let her actions do the talking. FYI – Betty no longer smokes.



REMEMBER

Words convey facts and figures. Body language reveals feelings and emotions. If someone's feeling anxious, they may fiddle with their keys, twist the ring on their finger, or pull at their clothes to manage their discomfort.



PEOPLE
WATCHING

If you see someone rubbing their stomach, stroking their sternum, or running their fingers over their neck, chances are that they're feeling some kind of pressure and are unconsciously doing what they can to calm and comfort themselves.

Universal gestures

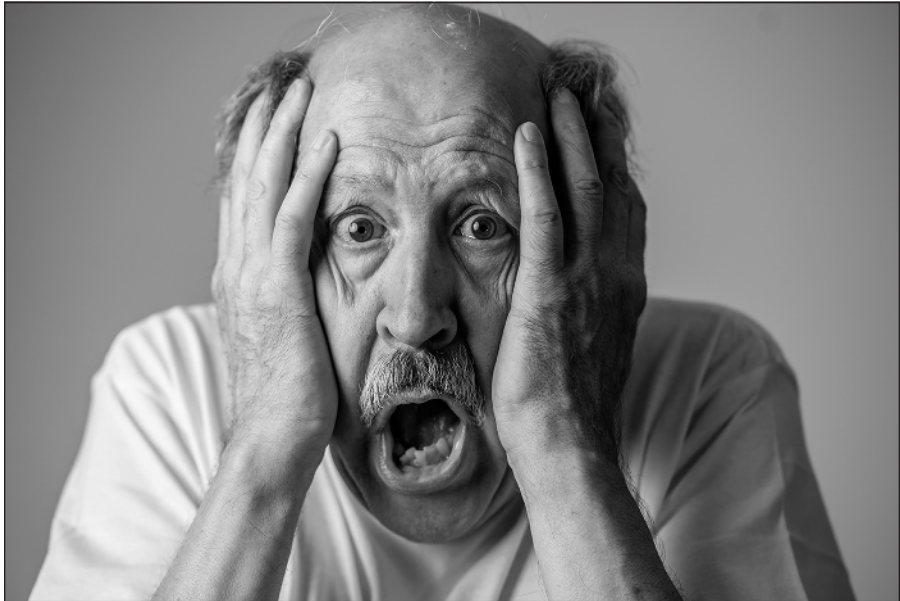
Universal gestures, such as blushing when embarrassed, smiling when happy, and wide-eyed expressions of fear and surprise, mean the same thing around the world (see Figure 1-4). These gestures stem from human biological makeup, which is why you can easily recognize the signs. See Chapter 15 for more about gestures in different cultures.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Paul Ekman's seminal research on facial expressions around the globe identified the same seven universal facial expressions, regardless of culture, race, or tradition: anger, disgust, fear, surprise, happiness, sadness, and contempt.

FIGURE 1-4: Universal signs of shock and fear include wide-opened eyes and mouth, furrowed forehead, and hands clutching the head.



SB Arts Media/Adobe Stock

Smiling

From the sands of the Middle East to the shores of Montecito, humans are born with the ability to express happiness with a smile. Early in an infant's development, their facial muscles can form the upward turn of the lips and the crinkling around the outer edges of the eyes to create a recognizable, heart-melting grin.

Sure, each person has their own unique way of smiling. Tom Cruise and Julia Roberts are easily spotted by their wide and toothy grins, while Keira Knightley opts for the locked-jaw smile. Jack Nicholson's smile contains a promise of naughtiness that makes some people blush. The point remains that anyone with working facial muscles conveys a smile of happiness by lifting the corners of their lips in pleasure while the muscles around their eyes crinkle. (See Chapter 4 for more about different types of smiles.)



In Western cultures, people frequently smile as a sign of recognition and acknowledgment, regardless of whether they know you, whereas the Chinese don't. The Japanese smile when they're confused, angry, or embarrassed. In Russia, 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 they're feeling deeply about something.



TIP

To help prevent blushing, take several slow, deep breaths, focusing on your diaphragm expanding and contracting as you inhale and exhale. Concentrated abdominal breathing helps steady your nerves and lower your blood pressure. See *Voice and Speaking Skills For Dummies* by Judy Apps (Wiley) for more about how breathing can reduce nervous energy.

Crying

Crying is a universal sign of upset. One of a healthy baby's first actions is to let out a walloping wail when they first enter this world. You can understand their distress, having been ejected from the comfort and safety of their mother's womb and now having to fend on their own. Their mouths tighten and pull down, forcing their trembling lower lips forward. Their foreheads furrow, and their eyes squeeze shut as they howl. No one had to teach them how to cry; the reaction is instinctive.



TIP

If you feel tears well up in your eyes and you want to stop them from flowing down your face, fix your gaze on the point where the ceiling and wall meet. You can also press your tongue firmly against the roof of your mouth as you remind yourself that what's troubling you will be over in a few moments. However, if 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 stop it. In Chapter 19, you can pick up some tips on developing your awareness.

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 upward as you raise your eyebrows.

The shrug can indicate

- » Indifference
- » Disdain
- » Lack of knowledge
- » Embarrassment

Before interpreting a shrug's meaning, note all the movements, gestures, and facial expressions.

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, U.S. presidential hopefuls 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. 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.



ANECDOTE

Anne, a French woman, heads up her organization's public relations department. Chad, one of her internal clients, makes Anne's life difficult as he frequently fails to prepare his presentations, responds late to her requests for information, and often argues with her directives. When I asked Anne how she finds working with Chad, she closes her eyes, purses her lips, raises her shoulders, holds her palms upward, and utters the dismissive "puh" sound as a quick blast of air escapes from her mouth. "I don't think much of him," was her message.

Getting the Most Out of Body Language

People in powerful positions reflect their sense of self through their nonverbal behaviors. They stand tall, chests open and shoulders back and down. When they move, they do so with purpose. Their gestures are contained and controlled. In addition, 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, and if they stand too far away, they can come across as distant and intimidating.



REMEMBER

Your posture, movements, and facial expressions convey much of your message. Being in command of your body language enables you to act confidently, knowing that your message is received as intended.

PUTIN'S BIG TABLE

Russia's President Vladimir Putin has been known to host one-on-one meetings with foreign leaders and dignitaries seated at a mammoth white oval table, roughly 5 meters long and supported by three thick pillars. A single bouquet of flowers might be placed at the center of the table. Observers speculate that the table is a way for Putin to demonstrate the power to intimidate his adversaries. Because of the distance between Putin and his guests, the reason behind Putin's big table may be as simple as his desire to stay healthy by distancing himself from those who could be carrying viruses and other illnesses. The Russian leader is notoriously paranoid about germs.

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 their coffee breath, or they stand far from you, making them appear uninterested and disengaged. Others know just how close to come. They recognize and respect the different parameters people place around themselves, and you feel at ease in their company.

To help you develop your spatial awareness, think of yourself as having a personal, individual space bubble in which you stand, sit, and move. 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 expand the space. People who grew up in the country and now live in crowded cities frequently complain about the lack of space, while people raised in metropolitan areas adapt to confined conditions more readily.

PROXEMICS

Edward T. Hall, a mid-20th-century American anthropologist, pioneered the study of proxemics, namely how people use and relate to the space around them for communication purposes. His findings reveal the different amounts of personal space people need depending on their social situation. The late American psychologist Robert Sommer coined the term "personal space" in 1969. He defined it as the "comfortable separation zone" people like to have around them.

Chapter 12 looks at how circumstances determine your comfort zones and how best to position yourself in relation to others whether standing, sitting, or lying down.

Anticipating movements

Figuring out what someone will do before they do it gives you an insight into what's coming next.

American anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell pioneered *kinesics*, more simply known as the study of body movement and verbal communication. Birdwhistell analyzed people's actions, gestures, and facial expressions using slow-motion replays of films of people engaged in conversations.

Consider these examples:

- »» The forward movement a person makes preparing to rise from a seated position indicates that it's time for you to move, too.
- »» Recognizing when a person is about to strike out in anger gives you enough time to duck.
- »» Seeing that someone wants to speak enables you to give them a chance to be heard.
- »» Noticing that your partner is leaning toward you with pursed lips offers you the chance to pucker up or pull away, depending on your mood.

Anticipating a movement can bring you great happiness, such as when you spot a hug coming your way. This ability can also save your life and protect you from harm. By recognizing specific gestures, you determine your response before the other person has completed their action. To develop your ability to anticipate movements and gestures, turn to Chapter 19.



ANECDOTE

Denisha and her younger brother, Alain, were arguing. Alain is known for his quick and violent temper while Denisha is usually measured in her approach to conflict. As tensions rose, both adults' bodies and facial muscles tightened in response to the hostility. When Alain's anger erupted, he clenched his right fist, pulled back his arm, rose from his chair, and leaned across the table separating the two siblings. At the same time, having anticipated his action, Denisha quickly held up her right hand, fingers tightly stuck together, palm facing forward, and thrust her arm into the space separating the pair. They both looked at one another with steely-eyed fury and clenched jaws. Alain, realizing he had gone too far, broke eye contact. The muscles in his face and body slackened as he slowly unclenched his fist, dropped his arm by his side, and uttered a vulgarity under his breath. Although Denisha also lowered her arm, she kept her eyes on her brother as he turned away and left the room. Had Denisha not anticipated Alain's movements, she might have ended up with a nasty bruise. Or worse.

Creating rapport through reflecting gestures

Rapport, which can be defined as a close and harmonious relationship in which people understand and respect one another's feelings, ideas, and moods, is the gateway to effective communication, assuring that your communications are effective and lead to results that satisfy both parties' needs. See Figure 1-5.



FIGURE 1-5: Signs of rapport between these two men include eye contact, smiling, touching, and similar body positions.

imtmphoto/Adobe Stock

You can create rapport in different ways including touch, word choice, and eye contact. You can also create rapport by reflecting another person's movements. By mirroring and matching someone's gestures and expressions, you're demonstrating you know what it feels, sounds, and looks like to be in their shoes.



WARNING

Not everyone wants to be touched. If you reach out your hand to touch another person, see how they respond. If their bodies tighten and they pull away, back off.

If connecting with others and behaving respectfully is important to you, mirroring and matching their behavior helps you achieve that goal. For more information about the benefit of mirroring and matching others' actions, check out Chapter 14. If you want to know even more about this process, pick up a copy of *Neuro Linguistic Programming For Dummies* by Romilla Ready and Kate Burton (Wiley).



TIP

A fine line exists between reflecting another person's gestures through mirroring, matching, and mimicking them. People know when they're being mimicked. They recognize your insincerity and question your motives.

Becoming who you want to be

The look on your face; the tone in your voice; how you move, gesture, and dress; and the way you stand, sit, and walk all play their part in creating your image. By developing an arsenal of postures, positions, gestures, and expressions, you can adjust your behavior according to the circumstances in which you find yourself. Positive body language – through which you establish eye contact and move with purpose – comes across as strong, engaged, and vibrant. Negative body language – where you avoid others and shuffle along with no clear purpose – communicates weakness, dullness, and a lack of engagement.



REMEMBER

The look on your face and your body's movements impact on your mood and attitude and determine how you're perceived and the results you achieve.

ACTING AS IF

In creating a character, actors frequently employ a technique called "acting as if." That is, they behave as if they were the character they're portraying. Sound simple? It's not. Actors draw on the character's invisible inner life, including their past, present, hopes, dreams, and aspirations. They consider the character's beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. In addition, actors rely on their bodies and voices to convey what they have discovered about their character's internal life and how that information informs the actor's choice of posture, gestures, breathing patterns, facial expressions, and movement speed.

They ask themselves:

- **How would the character walk, sit, and stand?** Would they move like a gazelle, lumber along like a sleepy bear, or stagger like someone who's had one drink too many? Is their posture upright and erect or slouched and limp?
- **What gestures would convey a particular mood or emotion?** Slow, deliberate, and carefully timed gestures create an impression of gravitas and control. Quick, spontaneous, and unfocused gestures indicate an unsure or frustrated person.

The actor creates a new person by adopting the body language reflecting the character's invisible life. The same can be true for you. Through your choices of behaviors, you

can create an image of the person you want to be. As Cary Grant said, “I pretended to be someone I wanted to be until, finally, I became that person.”

- **Make sure that your gestures reinforce the impression you want to make:** For example, if you want to be perceived as calm and in control, don’t run down the hallway flapping your hands at the first sign of trouble. Instead, claim your space, move with authority, and hold your head high. However, if you want to play victim, duck your head, avoid eye contact, and slouch your shoulders.
- **Modify your gestures to suit the situation:** When you’re hanging out with friends, your body language will likely be free, loose, and relaxed. When meeting a client or your partner’s parents for the first time, your body language might be more contained and formal. Follow the lead of the person with whom you’re engaging and reflect what you observe to create rapport.

Reading the signs and responding appropriately

Recognizing, interpreting, and responding to other people’s body language is vital for effective communication. Observing how people move and gesture lets you glimpse their thoughts, emotions, and intentions. You can identify, for example, how someone is feeling by how they stand. You can see what kind of mood a person is in by the speed of their gestures. You can spot someone’s attitude by the look on their face. By having an insight into someone’s thoughts and emotions, you’re forewarned and forearmed for whatever may happen next. This book contains specific examples of facial expressions, poses, gestures, and other body movements that reveal a person’s inner state.



ANECDOTE

Holly unexpectedly popped in for an afternoon gossip with her colleague Tony. Because he had a tight deadline, Tony had no time for conversation. When he saw Holly, he looked up, smiled, and nodded. 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. From Tony’s body language, Holly sensed that now was not a convenient time for them to speak, and she quickly left.

Appreciating Cultural Differences

Even if you’re the kind of person who embraces diverse cultures and who finds differences exciting, don’t be surprised if, when traveling or living outside your home territory, you find yourself confused, scared, or even turned off by unfamiliar displays of body language.

Because people in one culture act differently from people in another doesn't suggest that one is right and the other wrong. When it comes to cultural differences, it's important to respect, value, and stay curious. Valuing behaviors that are different from yours can be hard. You may have been taught to blow your nose in a tissue. Someone else may have been told that ejecting phlegm onto the pavement is acceptable. To each his own. That being said, in today's health-conscious world, spitting on the street may not be the most hygienic choice.

Expand how you navigate the world to create respectful, positive relationships between different cultures and nationalities. If you remember nothing else from this paragraph, remember that respect for customs and norms is paramount in multicultural encounters. That doesn't mean having to agree with all the behaviors you see in your travels. Instead, accept that differences exist and decide how best to respond.

Chapter 15 looks at different cultures and how behavior and body language influence communication between nations.



TIP

People of every culture, nationality, and socioeconomic background have gestures, facial expressions, and ways of moving that are particular to them. An acceptable gesture in one environment may land you in jail in another. Before visiting or moving to another country, do your homework and find out what is and isn't appropriate.