

While you're speaking, what's your body saying?

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Like it or not people judge you by the way you look. Your facial expressions, the clothes you wear, how well groomed you are and your body language. And, they're even more important when you're presenting and all eyes of an audience are on you.

More than half of all human communication takes place non-verbally. You are constantly sending out messages. If they're not in tune with your words nobody is going to take you seriously.



Your ability to understand and share feelings with people will significantly impact on your success in both your business and personal life - and your military career, for that matter. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

To become an effective communicator you must understand how your body speaks. You can't stop sending out nonverbal messages, but you can learn to manage and control them.

1. The power of facial expression and eye contact

Your face communicates your attitudes, feelings and emotions more than any other part of your body. The movement of your eyes, mouth, and facial muscles can have a significant impact on your ability to connect with your audience - and they can undermine your every word.

After your voice, your eyes are the most powerful tool for communicating. When presenting, establish eye contact and 'click' from one person to another in your audience, pausing briefly between each set of eyes in the room. This 'click' gives your listeners the feeling you're relating to each one individually.

Your face should be animated, not still like a stone statue from nervousness. Unfreeze your face right from the start. Introduce yourself with a smile. It'll make people relax and smile back - a sign of approval.

2. Your stance speaks volumes

How you stand can tell the audience if you're happy, scared, confident or uncomfortable. A balanced stance with weight even but slightly forward says the speaker is engaged with the audience. A slumped stance says the speaker doesn't care.

If you use gestures, let them flow with your words. Gesturing doesn't only help you look more natural, but it can actually reinforce your verbal message.

Keep in mind that gesturing is different from fidgeting. Avoid holding papers, pens or remote controls when you are speaking. By removing objects from your hands, you'll remove distractions and look more open and confident.

3. Make a good first impression

How you look and what you wear is your packaging. It sends a strong visual message even before you open your mouth. Get it wrong and you could lose your audience before you start.

You can't change your age, height or facial features, but you can enhance your appearance by dressing well. Make sure you use it to your advantage.

You can enhance your authority in any presentation situation by dressing up rather than down. Always dress as well or

slightly better than your audience and make sure you think about how it makes you feel. If you feel confident, that will come across in your presentation.

Actions speak louder than words

Engaging an audience is more than just the words you speak. Showing confidence through your body language is an important skill to develop.

It's important to come across as natural as possible, so while these tips will help, you must make sure you only use what makes you feel comfortable.

- Be yourself - copying other peoples gestures or body language might look awkward if they're not something you would do. To be an effective speaker, you must convey sincerity, warmth and confidence by making your mannerisms and actions affirm what you're saying.
- Develop empathy - it's critical for effective communication. Your ability to understand and share feelings with people will significantly impact on your success in both your business and personal life. Empathy builds trust. Without it you can't be a leader.

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