

Body Language

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About the Tutorial

Body Language a broad term used to describe the study of postures, signals, intonation of voice, hand-eye coordination and use of space in understanding the intentions of a person as compared to what his spoken words are.

Audience

This tutorial is for designed primarily for the young professionals who have started their careers and are interested to understand what proper body language is and how it helps in presenting a clear message to the listeners.

Prerequisites

Before proceeding with this tutorial, you are expected to have a calm mindset and be open to exploring the suggestions mentioned here.

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1. BODY LANGUAGE – INTRODUCTION

A teacher walks in a classroom full of noisy children. He walks up to the table and looks around the class. He turns his back to the board and starts writing a question on the topic he had taught in the class the day before. There is dead silence now. The students who were chatting and conversing till now are sitting bolt-straight now, clearly nervous, some retaining their smiles, and some scanning the floor. They had comprehended by now that an answer is expected of them any moment.

The teacher looks around the class and fixes his sight on one boy. A longer stare prompts the boy to stand up but the teacher looks away just at the last moment and now looks at a girl. The girl starts answering the question but the teacher once again looks away. The girl stops the answer halfway.



The teacher looks at another guy sitting beside the window. He stands up and starts giving the answer when half-way through the sentence, the teacher suddenly looks up at him. The boy's voice immediately tapers down and ultimately stops in doubt. The teacher then droops his shoulders and sighs. Insulted by the gesture, some students immediately raise their hands to opt to tell the answers.

How do you think that the teacher managed to get so many responses and all those different reactions **without uttering a single word**?

This is the power of Body Language – Whether the teacher knows it or unknowingly, he has practiced this non-verbal method of communication.

2. DEFINING BODY LANGUAGE

Body Language is a non-verbal communication where messages are sent through postures, eye-contacts, movements, usage of space and change in the intonation of voice etc. instead of using words and speech to communicate.

The study of Body Language is also called "Kinesics" derived from the Greek word "Kinesis" meaning "motion".



Body Language operates on all three states of human consciousness, i.e. conscious state, subconscious state and unconscious state.

Many interviewers have mentioned an aural sense of connection with some candidates which were independent of their looks of the and the words they spoke. Many patients give high points to their psychiatrists due to their ability to read the unspoken part of a sentence, and be able to go- "I get what you are saying..."

Body Language encompasses many studies like facial expressions, analyzing the need for personal space, mirroring your body movement with others, seating positions and other signs.

3. BODY LANGUAGE – SIGNIFICANCE

We communicate constantly, even if we are not speaking. We communicate a lot of what we need to say through non-verbal methods. However, many tend to get confused in trying to understand the difference between body language and sign language. Let us discuss how body language is different from sign languages.

Sign Language is a recognized and standardized language that involves using signs and signals to communicate with people with special needs. **Body Language**, on the other hand, depends more on your individual levels of understanding and interpreting hidden meanings behind certain observations in a person's behavior.

Experts have concluded that when in a conversation, individuals or a group of people, about 70% of the communication is held through gestures, expressions and signaling, and words only contribute to 30% of the communication.

This piece of information interestingly translates into, what is more honest and reliable information, which can be collected about a person and his thoughts just by observing him in silence, as compared to having verbal communication with him.



Someone, who has mastered the skills of decoding the message, which body language conveys will have a clear advantage of understanding the intentions and emotions that are involved in any person's response. Needless to say, such an ability will carry enormous value in someone's career.

Knowing what is the appropriate point to expand upon and which topic to discuss at any given time, by observing the mood and body language of the other person would

undoubtedly give you an edge over the others in your presentation skills. It will also help you in connecting with your listeners on a sub-conscious level.

Many successful orators rely on their skills of decoding the body language of their audience to change the flow of their conversation or bring subtle alterations to their style of delivery so that the crowd can get in the spirit of debate.

4. THE NIXON VS. KENNEDY DEBATE

This famous incident emphasizes how powerful body language can be when properly implemented:

It was the morning of 26th September, 1960 when presidential candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon sat down for the first of their round of debates to be held during their individual campaigns while running for Presidency.

Kennedy was a relatively unknown face that time, whereas Richard M. Nixon was a seasoned campaigner with the clear advantage of being a two-time Vice-President. In comparison, Kennedy was just an inexperienced senator from Massachusetts. Kennedy was clearly the underdog in this debate and expectations were high on Nixon winning the debate comfortably.

The debate was getting aired on radio and television simultaneously. When Nixon arrived for the debate, he looked shallow and underweight due to his being recently hospitalized earlier that month, to treat the infection that had developed in his knee when he had slammed his car's door on it.

But when compared to the pale, sickly and weak-looking Nixon, Kennedy was a picture of calm and assurance. His bronzed tan skin was glowing in comparison to Nixon's sweaty, balmy face, especially because Nixon had denied to wear make-up before the interview began.



Source: Associated Press, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

When he stood up to address the studio audience, he made good references and put many noteworthy points in front of the people. Those who were listening to the entire debate on radio were confident that Nixon would win, but the studio audience could notice that he constantly kept wiping his forehead and had a blank, weak expression on his face. It was clear that the operation was hurting him still.

As compared to him, Kennedy wore an assured look throughout the evening. He wore perfect makeup and was impeccably dressed. He was smiling a confident smile and modulated his voice beautifully. Not only did he explain things in a precise way, but he also spoke directly into the camera as if talking out to every viewer who was watching this debate on television.

So it hardly comes as a surprise that when it came to the TV-watching audience, those who watched the debate got a straight picture that Kennedy was the clear winner. The listeners were much lesser in numbers as compared to the 70-million odd television viewers so the word spread fast and wild about Nixon's implied loss to Kennedy.

This image of confident Kennedy supposedly bashing the underprepared and seemingly dodgy Nixon on prime-time, was built up intensely and ultimately resulted in Nixon losing the elections to Kennedy. Although to be fair, Nixon did make a terrific comeback and performed excellently- and looked much better- in the subsequent elections, but the impression had been made and the public had given the verdict.

This was a watershed moment for politicians and people all over the world and this brought the focus squarely on the importance of public figures paying importance to their appearances and mannerisms. Image consultants started being hired to present a perfect picture to the public.

5. BODY LANGUAGE IN THE BUSINESS WORLD

Many people believe that Body Language is only for those who are in the show business, and things like studying Body Language is not necessary, if you keep delivering on your targets. However, the days of only sitting behind the desk and delivering output have long come and gone. In today's world, companies need their employees to be dynamic and resilient.

Companies need employees who don't say "NO" for an answer and always strive to present a positive image about themselves and the companies they represent. Understanding people is the first step in improving relations, and studying Body Language gives an honest insight into the responses, feelings and thoughts of a person with whom you are having a conversation with.



The way people cross their hands, shrug their shoulders, move their eyes, change their tone is almost never a conscious action, and that's why many people are "caught lying" when their words don't match their body language.

Imagine yourself in a training room where you are supposed to be trained on "Self-confidence" and you spot your trainer walking into the room with a thick book in hand and yawning all the while. He comes in and says- "We will discuss Self-confidence today, and I assure you that it's going to be fun". I am sure a thought would immediately cross your mind that says= "**I don't think so**".

In other words, you can see that our actions speak volumes about how we are and what we feel even if our words do not. That's why the saying "Actions speak louder than words" holds good significantly, in our lives. Understanding the messages that our actions might

be giving to the viewers will help us in identifying those areas that might be hindering our success.

It will also help us to know our personal tricks, i.e. what actions we do when we are irritated or tired or getting aggressive in our points. If we study these actions, we could vary them so that we don't present a negative image of ourselves.

For example, you subconsciously point your finger at the person you are talking to when you want to stress out a point. However, it could be so that the other person finds it threatening or offensive. Now, even if your intentions are honest, you might still find yourself getting misinterpreted.

Look at the picture below. If you study just the expression, you will notice that it's a picture of a pleasant young man, who looks bright and enthusiastic, someone you might like to have a conversation with. But when you combine that with the out-stretched fingers, and that too in the pointing gesture, it automatically adds an air of overconfidence and arrogance to it.



Now, can you bring yourself to believe that this person is saying the truth when he says- **"I like to learn as much as possible. I believe in team-spirit and respect other's opinions."**?

The solution to this problem is in observing yourself in front of a mirror and try to act out your responses in different situations. The idea is to not be obvious. Remember that, Body Language operates on a subconscious level. Keep the role-play on, but keep recording your expressions and body movements. Take special note of the eyebrows, hands, palms, shoulders and head.

Now ask a friend to copy your movements and when he enacts the situation again, just analyze them. You will be surprised to see how aggressive and wrong the messages your body sends are, especially when employed with words.

This needs to be a continuous exercise as studying Body Language is only the first step. The more important one is to improve it and even more importantly, how to make the new, improved Body Language a part of your life. This needs constant practice and observation.

It might sound impossible at first but it is the habit of actors and politicians to practice and smoothen their body language in such a smooth and polished manner that they immediately know how to tackle their emotions when, a controversial question is asked, out of the blue.

This expert handling of their feelings, such that their face or body do not betray their emotions i.e. their body language following their words is what gives them an air of authority, and makes them a picture of assured confidence and calmness.

6. NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION QUIZ

The following activity is designed to take a feedback from you so that you can have a record of the pre-conceived notions these actions bring with them for you. You might be familiar with many of them, however certain actions might require you to imagine someone that way. Attempt to answer the questions without giving a second thought to the answers once you have answered it.

S.I.	Non-verbal Actions	Interpretations
1	Smiling	
2	Smiling with raised eyebrows	
3	Rolling eyes with smiling	
4	Rolling eyes without smiling	
5	Shrugging shoulders while answering a question.	
6	Shrugging shoulders while asking a question.	
7	Stretching your arms sideways while speaking	
8	Looking down while saying something	
9	Hand held up with palm facing you	
10	Hands with palm facing down while explaining	
11	Waving to someone	
12	Tapping someone on the shoulders	
13	Holding someone's hand	
14	Standing close to someone	
15	Winking at a friend	
16	Crossing arms while taking feedback	
17	Shaking hands without a firm grip.	
18	Yawning while listening to someone	
19	Drumming table with fingers, waiting for lunch.	
20	Placing hand over mouth on hearing something	
21	Swinging feet and tapping feet to music.	
22	Crossing legs while in a meeting	
23	Nodding the head up and down while listening.	
24	Turning the head side to side while listening.	
25	Whistling while walking alone	
26	Clapping on listening to something	
27	Scratching your head when asked a question	
28	Showing an outstretched palm to a speeding car	
29	Wagging one foot while keeping it on a knee	
30	Raising hand inside a classroom	
31	Looking elsewhere when someone talks to you	
32	Keeping hands in your pocket while talking	
33	Rubbing the neck when asked about something	
34	Cracking fingers while at work	
35	Looking around waiting in the reception area	

7. WHAT BODY LANGUAGE COMMUNICATES

Body Language needs an acute understanding of responses of the body with respect to the questions asked. You need to be quite observant while listening to people's answers to understand what they really mean. However, the tricky part is, not to show that you are observing their hand movements or the way they stand when they are talking to you, or else you will give them a misconception of being uninterested in the conversation and absent-minded.

Body Language is accentuated in the following observations.

Distance

The distance people feel necessary to maintain between them and the other person tells us about their cultural or social background.

It's generally observed that people living in the metros are much more adept at handling distances as compared to those living in the country-side, who feel uncomfortable with someone standing at a certain distance near them, as they have a bigger "personal space bubble".



Posture

Much information about a person can be obtained from the way he positions his body while addressing people. It is a known ploy with the lawyers to put the tip of the fingers together in a pyramid structure to imply knowledge.

They also put their fists on their hips to give an air of superiority. All these are well-known ways of sending subconscious messages to the Judge and the Jury about his being in total control of what he speaks.



Expression

If you were to observe the way someone's eyes operate while answering specific questions, you will notice a pattern emerging. Some people feel uncomfortable with a few questions and tend to look downwards. Questions they don't know the answers to, are often met with eyes tending to roll upwards.

Although, to be honest - this is dependent on culture. Americans like to maintain eye-contact while speaking to people as that gives them a sense of honesty and confidence. If you try the same trick with the Italians, they will either think you are challenging them or flirting with them - both big "No! No!" points in a business scenario!

Touch

A lot of people tend to cross their arms when they are distressed. It is basically a self-hug to reassure themselves that everything will be all right and things will be better after sometime. It is also a kind of self-consolatory and self-motivating action.

Nervous people tend to hold on to the arms of the chairs when they are asked to answer certain behavioral questions. These all can be observed and information gained.



Breathing

Your rate of breathing while responding to a question also speaks volumes about how much you were affected by the question.

Actors, politicians and lawyers have mastered the art of presenting the “stone-face”, which is a blank, expressionless face, when questions related to their personal lives are asked.

Slouching

Those who slouch while sitting in their chairs present a very lethargic and uninterested picture to the person observing them. Slouching is either seen as a sign of boredom or arrogance.

Legs in ‘4’

You get this posture by extending both your legs out and then crossing one leg over the other. Many consider this to be a power posture and is used by people who like to show that they are in control.

8. HEAD POSITIONS

Most of the clues that you would get about a person's thought and acceptance would be from observing the way he uses his head, palms, finger, legs and eyes. Let's understand the general meanings of the movements that are associated with these parts of the body and the message they pass.

While the basic movements associated with the head like nodding and shaking the head could be fairly straightforward in their meaning, movements like tilting the head could give mixed signals to a lot of observers. Let's discuss them one by one.

Nodding Head	Nodding generally means being in agreement to what is spoken. A gentler nod means appreciation and interest, however, nodding rapidly may signal impatience and the need to hurry things up.
Head Held Firm	A person listening with his head up is listening to your explanation without having any agenda or vested interests. In other words, he is listening with an open mind and without prejudice. The judges typically adopt this head position to imply a sense of fair trial.
Head Held Down	A heads-down listening to someone gives the exact opposite impression to the speaker. It gives the impression that the listener has already made up his mind to his share of the story and is just keeping quiet to avoid conflict.
Tilting Head Down	Head tilted to a side signals trust. It means the person likes what you are saying to him and believes your words. However, someone tilting his head while resting it on his hand will give an exactly opposite idea.
Head Held High	Holding the head high while talking gives you an air of superiority in the eyes of the people you are addressing. Throughout the history of sports, you will find aggressive captains talking to their team this way.
Chin Pointing Up	Holding the chin up signifies arrogance and defying orders. Children who think they are being wrongly blamed for starting a fight often defy orders and words of their parents with a stiff.
Head Leaning Forward	Head leaning forward is a positive sign of interest. It is a primitive instinct of leaning forward towards the speaker to listen and show interest.

Head Tilted Down	While tilting the head to one side signifies interest, tilting the head down means distrust, or at the very least, doubt. It means the person is taking time to rethink what you said and judge its veracity.
Shaking of Head	A head shaking from one side to the other signifies a 'no'. It is also a primitive instinct of a baby denying the intake of any more milk from his mother, by moving his head away from the source.

9. GESTURES AND WORDS

Scientists claim that the human brain processes gestures from the same place of the brain from where it processes words. This means there is an innate link between our gestures and the words we speak, and any dis-coordination between both will be noticed immediately.



Pointing with Finger	People getting pointed at will be intimidated with this gesture. It is normally used to show dominance and authority.
Wagging Finger Side To Side	This gesture is used to deny an action or negate a statement. It's used as the substitute to the head wagging from side to side.
Wagging Finger Up To Down	This motions people to sit down, and if used while presenting points, this gesture helps in underlining important parts of the speech.
Pointing Thumb Upwards	Pointing thumbs upward means appreciating some task that is well-done and meets your standards of approval.

Pointing Thumb Downwards	Pointing thumbs downward, on the other hand, signifies disappointment in the effort. It also means 'no' in taking opinions on something.
Index Finger Touching Thumb	This is the 'Okay' sign and signifies that everything is fine and meets your requirement. This was made famous by the US president, Martin Van Buren during his presidential campaign.

10. BODY LANGUAGE – OPEN AND CLOSED

Personalities are often described in terms of their tendency to be open or closed. It means that while some people appear to be interactive even from a distance, the same cannot be said of a few whose body language appears to be secretive, close, and silent.

Open Body Language

People with open personalities are expressive, interactive, and hands-on. They also are, at times, aggressive and argumentative. They tend to make extensive use of hands while speaking.

Uncrossed Legs

This is a relaxed person who wants to have a conversation. However, a person with uncrossed legs and leaning forward to put his elbows on his thighs could be worried about something.

Uncrossed Arms

Open arms may point at a frankness of opinion and presents an open and honest image. Politicians normally use their arms to wave at people and raise them with open palms to sign trust and faith.

Closed Body Language

People with closed personalities are the ones with hidden motives. They tend to cross their arms, cross their legs, keep hands close to their body while speaking, and a one-tone voice.

Crossing of Arms

This stance gives the impression that you have already taken your decision and you are going to defend it no matter what. It's hostile and discourages discussion.

Crossing of Legs When Seated

Putting one leg over the other leg's knee is both a defensive and an aggressive message. It tells the person talking to you to not waste time explaining his points.

Arms in Front of Body

It is normally a sign of nervousness and can be seen in people who are either aspirants in an interview or first-time employees on their first day.

Crossing of Legs in Standing

It could either mean a relaxed frame of mind or an interest to have a conversation on a topic. People crossing legs while standing like to share their knowledge on a particular subject.



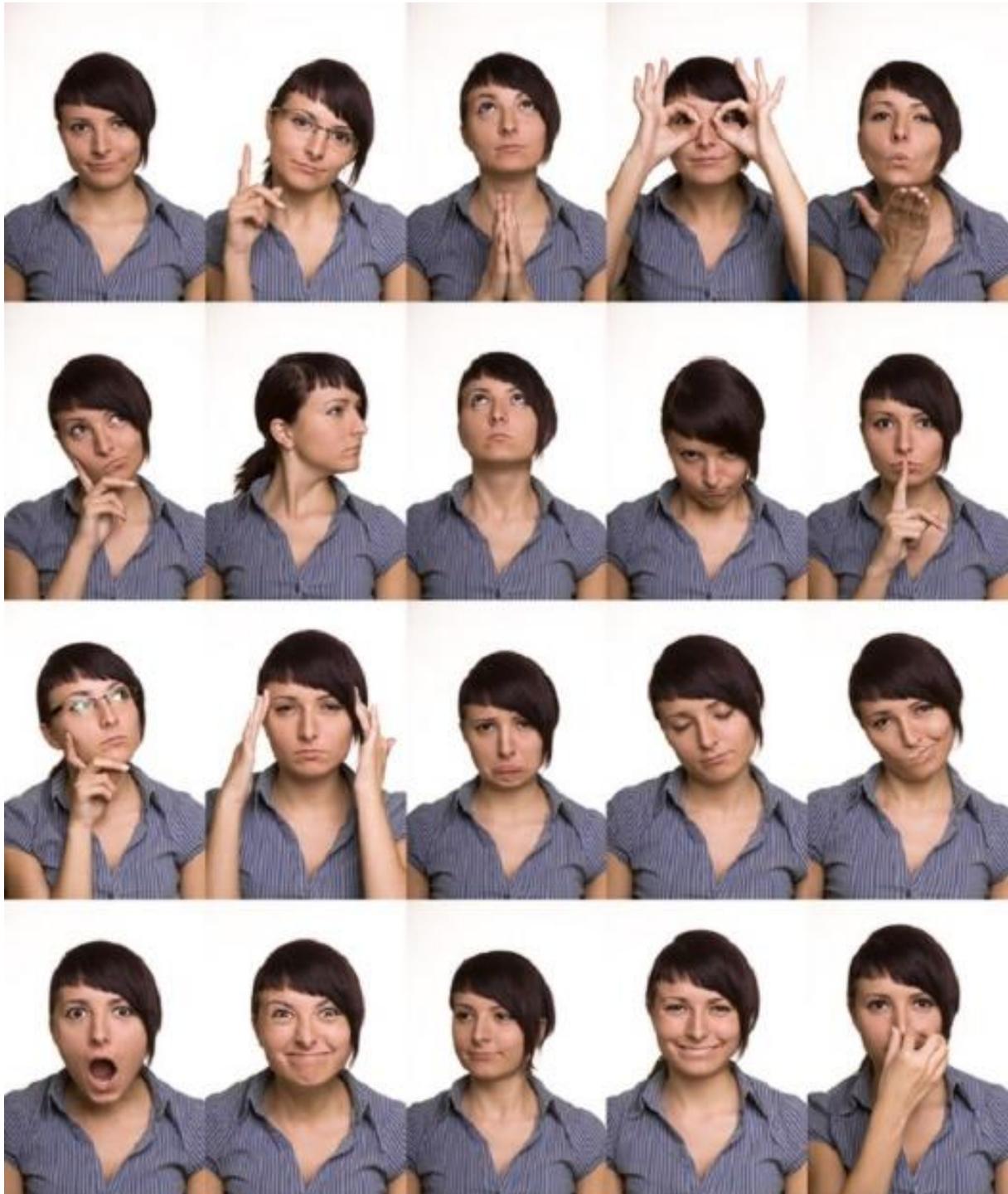
11. EYE MOVEMENTS

Eyes are considered to be the mirrors to a man's mind. While combined with other gestures, eyes can give much information about the thoughts running inside a person's mind.

Looking to Left	Looking to the left and down while talking signifies that the speaker is either recollecting facts. Looking at left and straight means the speaker is having a self-conversation before re-engaging in a debate or conversation.
Glancing	While looking at sideways, it means you are either hearing certain sounds or you are interested in imagining a story. Many children have this look in their eyes when they are asked to write on an imaginary situation.
Looking to Right	Looking to the right and down while speaking signifies self-doubt, whereas looking right and straight/up signifies lying. Looking to the right activates imagination and left activates memory.
Eye-contact	When speaking, this could mean the person is being honest in his speech. When someone maintains eye-contact with you when he is listening to what you are saying, it means he is interested in the conversation.
Eyes Widening	Eyes widening may signal wonder and surprise too. It can also be the reaction when you hear a joke at a time you least expected it.
Eyes Rolling	Rolling eyes are a sign of disbelief. People who don't trust what you are saying tend to use this expression. It could also mean frustration.
Eyes Blinking	Frequent blinking of eyelids means either you are participating in something that is too exciting or in something that is outright boring.
Eyes Winking	Winking eyes suggest mischief and is normally used in between friends to pull off a joke on a seemingly unaware person.
Rubbing Eyes	People rubbing eyes are either tired, sleepy or are in disbelief of what you are saying to them. It also signals frustration and irritation.

12. EXPRESSIONS AND BODY LANGUAGE

Guess the expressions of the lady. What do the expressions mean to you?



13. BODY LANGUAGE – PITFALLS

Although Body Language teaches us many things about the other person, there are certain areas where applying the teachings of Body Language could be tricky. Let's discuss these cases.

Many factors constitute body language, and that is the reason body language is never accurate when studied for only one part of the human body. Studying someone's use of space without paying attention to the way he looks, talks and walks won't present an accurate idea about the kind of person he is. Studying only someone's eyes movement, won't give you a complete picture, if you don't see the way he is using his legs, arms, fingers etc.

That's why experts say that, body language is like a jigsaw puzzle where you have to quantity different inputs from different sources to get the complete picture. These grouping of body language basics to get a complete information is called "understanding clusters". Individually, these factors will give you a false or incorrect assessment of a person.

Improper Posture

One of the most telling factors of poor body language is improper posture. A person slouching in a chair and not sitting upright while working at his desk will give you a very unprofessional impression on first sight, however, if you judge that person on this factor alone, there is a chance you might come to know later that his slouching is a product of improper skeletal growth, medical problems, arthritis etc.



People assume a closed body language when they are cold too, which is not a rare sight at all, especially in the times of central air-conditioned workplaces. That won't lend you an accurate understanding of a person's body language at all.

Varying Personal Space

Invading personal space is generally seen as a form of hostility or a desire to become intimate. However, not everyone will be so welcoming to either engage in hostility or appreciate your intentions of intimacy.

Having said that, it's important to know that the idea of personal space varied from person to person and depends upon cultural backgrounds and also on places you are raised in. For example, people from the country, generally, are uncomfortable with someone coming close to them as they are used to vast stretches of personal space.



Sales persons visiting farmers for farming equipment are told to holler a "Hi!" from a distance, as opposed to coming close the farmers and shaking their hands, as farmers are used to large personal spaces.

Certain cultures like Brazil, Italy and Argentina are quite comfortable with small personal spaces and stand very close while speaking. That can be easily mistaken as either flirtatious or hostile nature by someone from a metro city.

Sudden Movements

Many nervous people tend to have sudden movements while either speaking or performing an action. They might fumble while taking off their jacket or might nervously work their hands around a door-knob, and might occasionally spill food.

That being said, it doesn't always mean that people making sudden movements are nervous people. Stressful people, ill people and people who have come after a long drive in the winter are also prone to making sudden movements, purely out of muscle reaction. These cases of isolated body language could cause a false study of Body Language.

14. CONCLUSION

So friends, we hope you had an enjoyable and informative read about body language basics and how to use them in business. Remember, the trick is to study body language in clusters, and not in isolation. Just watching the tilted movement of head, but ignoring the sarcastic tone could give a false sense of honest conversation.

But most importantly, you have to understand that as you are studying others' body language, others will be constantly scrutinizing yours too. So try and find out time from your daily schedule and work on your body language, so that you stop giving threatening or hostile messages through your gestures and signals, when you actually mean no harm!

Best of Luck!